

## *Preface*

Hardly had the ink dried on Pope Francis's first encyclical, *Laudato Si*, "On Care for Our Common Home"<sup>1</sup>—in some cases even before it dried—than the Bishop of Rome was attacked from various quarters. His attackers included some who said that he should stick to spirituality. Catholic pundits on the right said that the pope should concentrate on "morality," by which they seemed to mean abortion and homosexuality, while others strongly argued that economic issues lay beyond the competence of the Magisterium to teach about faith and morals. His opponents claimed that the pope should confine his ministry to the gospel, by which they meant a bowdlerized gospel, sanitized by the removal of its many references to the use and misuse of wealth.

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has repeatedly spoken about the common good and the current state of the economy. In a pathfinding apostolic exhortation that set the tone for his pontificate, *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The Joy of the Gospel,"<sup>2</sup> Francis wrote, "Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programs, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The encyclical was dated Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2015, and was officially published on June 18, 2015. An earlier encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, dated June 29, 2013, was a joint effort by the recently elected Francis and his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

<sup>2</sup> The apostolic exhortation was dated November 24, 2013, the solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

<sup>3</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* 204.

Francis returned to this theme in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*. “We should be particularly indignant at the enormous inequalities in our midst, whereby we continue to tolerate some considering themselves more worthy than others,” he wrote. “We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions.”<sup>4</sup>

Before making this plea, Francis echoed the hope of Bartholomew I, the Patriarch of Constantinople, that we be freed from fear, greed, and compulsion and that greed give way to generosity.<sup>5</sup> Among other things, the Bishop of Rome warned that whereas humans have a basic right to water, we are now in a situation where the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a source of conflict,<sup>6</sup> and he lamented that productive land is concentrated in the hands of a few owners.<sup>7</sup> Francis observed that the foreign debt of poor countries has become a way of controlling them.<sup>8</sup> “In the current global system,” he wrote, “priority tends to be given to speculation and to financial gain.”<sup>9</sup>

Speaking to the Congress of the United States on September 24, 2015, Francis raised a number of related issues. He told the legislators: “Legislative activity is always based on care of the people. . . . Politics . . . cannot be a slave to the economy and finance. Politics is, instead, an expression of our compelling need to live as one in order to build as one the greatest common good.” Reiterating what he had said in his apostolic exhortation,<sup>10</sup> Francis stated that business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving the world, but he also asked a troubling question. “Why,” he asked, “are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply

<sup>4</sup> *Laudato Si* 90.

<sup>5</sup> *Laudato Si* 9. Francis referred to Bartholomew’s *Lecture* at the Monastery of Utstein, Norway, on June 23, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> *Laudato Si* 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Laudato Si* 134.

<sup>8</sup> *Laudato Si* 52.

<sup>9</sup> *Laudato Si* 56.

<sup>10</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* 203.

for money, money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood.”<sup>11</sup> In his address to Congress, Francis’s words were carefully chosen. He wanted to challenge and not condemn. Nonetheless, his carefully chosen words were to a large extent woven around the themes of the common good and the right use of wealth.

Voicing concern for the common good and a just use of wealth, the pope has generated a fair amount of opposition in certain circles, even—and perhaps especially—within the church of which he is officially the head. He should go back to preaching the gospel, some say. The problem is that the condemnation of greed is an integral part of the gospel. Three passages in the New Testament speak about homosexuality, but nineteen speak about greed, not to mention those that speak about the love of money, the lure of wealth, or the mammon of iniquity. Many of these passages reflect the teaching of Jesus himself.

Greed and the proper use of wealth are, however, not at the top of the list of most preachers’ favorite topics. Some would go so far as to say that greed is not seriously sinful. John Howard Yoder once lamented that Christian ethical teaching has largely ignored Jesus.<sup>12</sup> This is glaringly the case where the use of wealth is concerned, a situation that Pope Francis is trying to redress. Francis’s voice is not alone, but it may be the loudest on the current world stage. For the greater part of the past century the debate about justice and equity in global economic affairs has been an issue in ecumenical circles.<sup>13</sup> Patriarch Bartholomew has urged people, especially those who espouse orthodoxy, to turn from greed to generosity. The Archbishop of Canterbury is known for his advocacy of greater social justice and the idea that economic growth is not automatically beneficial to all. And he once remarked that if you were to meet Francis, you would be automatically forced to reexamine your attitudes toward poverty.<sup>14</sup>

Francis has made the biblical call for economic justice a touchstone, perhaps the touchstone, of his pontificate. His place on the

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, “U.S. Visit: Speech to Congress,” *Origins* 48 (2015): 314–18.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972): 15–19.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Michael Taylor, *Christ and Capital: A Family Debate* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *The Tablet* (October 31, 2015): 28.

world stage allows his voice to be echoed before all. When he appeared before the General Assembly of the United Nations during its seventieth anniversary celebrations, he spoke with forthrightness as he said to the world's leaders on September 24, 2015: "A selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged. . . . Economic and social exclusion is a complete denial of human fraternity and a grave offense against human rights and the environment. . . . This dramatic reality . . . has led me . . . to take stock of my grave responsibility in this regard and to speak out. . . . The baneful consequences of an irresponsible mismanagement of the global economy, guided only by ambition for wealth and power, must serve as a summons to a forthright reflection on man."<sup>15</sup>

The Bishop of Rome believes that his mandate to preach the gospel requires him to speak out about economic justice. Speaking fraternally to the bishops of the United States, as one bishop to others, the Bishop of Rome said, "We all know what it is that the Lord asks of us."<sup>16</sup> What the Lord asks of us is principally spelled out in the memories of the Lord's teaching contained in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Each and every one of those books has something to say about wealth. These teachings of the New Testament should inform the Christian conscience with regard to a just use of economic resources. My study intends to enable its readers, especially those readers who are pastors with a mandate to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to peruse the pertinent texts of the New Testament with greater insight.

In recent years several short and sometimes challenging books have been written on the New Testament teaching on the use of wealth. Among them I would especially mention Sondra Ely Wheeler's *Wealth as Peril and Obligation*,<sup>17</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson's *Sharing*

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, "U.S. Visit: Speech at U.N.," *Origins* 48 (2015): 327–31.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, "U.S. Visit: Meeting with U.S. Bishops," *Origins* 48 (2015): 319–22, 320.

<sup>17</sup> Sondra Ely Wheeler, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).



## Chapter 2

### *Paul's Letters*

It is appropriate that we begin our textual study with an examination of Paul's letters not only because they are the oldest of the New Testament documents but also because they are occasional compositions. They were written to flesh-and-blood communities who were concerned not only with their faith but also with how their faith impacted their lives. Were they to overlook some aspect of their lives that ought to be seen through the lens of their faith, Paul was sure to enlighten them. One aspect of life, then and now, is the use of one's money. Hence, we should expect that the apostle Paul has something to say about wealth, wages, and the wealthy. We are not to be disappointed with this expectation. Paul addresses the topic in one way or another in each of his extant letters.

#### **First Corinthians**

"Practically all of the known Corinthians connected with the Church of Corinth," writes Caragounis in one of his cameo reflections on the house church in Corinth, "are shown to be persons of independent means."<sup>1</sup> Such a reflection indicates that it might be well to begin with the Corinthian correspondence in this study of wealth, wages, and the wealthy. Not only is this material some of our oldest

<sup>1</sup> Caragounis, "House Church," 409–10; cf. Theissen, *Social Setting*, 95. In his various writings, E. A. Judge has identified at least forty persons at Corinth who belonged to what he describes as the "cultivated social elite." See, among his other publications, "The Early Christians as a Scholastic Community," *JRH* 1 (1960–61): 4–15, 125–37, 128–30.

Christian documentation, but it is also quite extensive. Together, the two letters to the Corinthians comprise twenty-seven chapters, a quantity of material approximately equal to the Gospel of Matthew and exceeded in size only by Luke's two-part work, his gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Moreover, the Corinthian correspondence is clearly the most hands-on body of material in the New Testament. It deals with real-life issues, including how believers deal with their wealth.

### *1 Corinthians 1:26*

In the first chapter of this correspondence Paul provides his readers with a social analysis of the community. "Consider your own call," he writes, "not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth."<sup>2</sup> Celsus, the second-century critic of Christianity, apparently capitalized on these words, to show his disdain for the upstart group of believers: "By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable, and stupid, and only slaves, women, and little children."<sup>3</sup> Celsus certainly exaggerated, but he was only the first in a long line of commentators to assert that early Christianity drew its adherents from the lower classes. Adolf Deissmann was perhaps the most notable commentator to argue along these lines during the historical-critical era of New Testament scholarship.<sup>4</sup>

Paul's thrice-repeated "not many" (*ou polloi*) clearly implies that in his estimation there were at least some members of the church at Corinth who were wise, powerful, and/or of noble birth.<sup>5</sup> The latter

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 1:26.

<sup>3</sup> From "True Doctrine" (*Alēthēs logos*), as summarized by Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.44, 59, 64. Cf. M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berge, and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 391–92.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927), 8.

<sup>5</sup> See, among classic commentators of the historical-critical era, Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, KEK 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), xvi; and Ernest-Bernard Allo, *Saint Paul: Première Épître aux Corinthiens*, 2nd ed., *EBib* (Paris: Gabalda, 1956), 20.

two categories suggest that there were some at Corinth who were relatively affluent, but Paul does not explicitly say anything about the wealthy<sup>6</sup> in his brief reflection on the social status of the members of the community. This would be all the more surprising if, as Gail O'Day has suggested, Jeremiah 9:23 lies behind Paul's social "analysis."<sup>7</sup> The prophet spoke of the wise, the mighty, and the wealthy. So too does the Greek version of 1 Samuel 2:10.

That there are three elements in Paul's description of the social makeup of the community of believers is not surprising in view of his predilection for groups of three. His concern, however, is not in providing his readers with a breakdown of the community of believers. His readers lived in the city and in the community of believers. They would have had experiential knowledge of the social makeup of the city and that part of it that constituted the church of God in Corinth. In the first rhetorical demonstration of the letter—1 Corinthians 1:18–4:21—Paul argues about wisdom. The triad found in 1 Corinthians 1:26 is part of the argument. The emphasis is on wisdom, not power or the circumstances of one's birth.

Despite Paul's omission of the wealthy, there is little reason to doubt, especially in the light of our reflections on Prisca and Aquila, Chloe, Gaius, Crispus, and Erastus, that "the social level of the Corinthian Christians apparently varied from quite poor to rather well-off . . . a fair cross-section of their city."<sup>8</sup> What did Paul have to say to those on the upper half of this spectrum?

### *1 Corinthians 16:1-4*

As Paul, apostle to the Corinthians,<sup>9</sup> is about to complete his letter, he takes up one final topic, the collection for the saints (*peri de tēs*

<sup>6</sup> Sanger opines that the powerful (*dynatoi*) are, in fact, the rich whose wealth enabled them to exercise power in the community. Cf. Dieter Sanger, "Die *dynatoi* in 1 Kor 1,26," *ZNW* 76 (1985): 285–91.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gail R. O'Day, "Jeremiah 9:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-31: A Study in Intertextuality," *JBL* 109 (1990): 259–67. Cf. 1 Sam 2:10 [LXX].

<sup>8</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 9:2.

*logeias tēs eis tous hagiois*). From time to time throughout the letter Paul uses a classic formula, “now concerning” (*peri de*),<sup>10</sup> to introduce topics on which he had something to say to the Corinthians.<sup>11</sup> For the most part these topics were problematic issues about which Paul had been informed, but this seems not to have been the case in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4. Rather, Paul uses the formula to introduce a topic that was dear to his heart. So he addresses those in the community who have been described as having “disposable income or assets”<sup>12</sup> in these words:

Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions that I gave to the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.<sup>13</sup>

The Greek phrase that the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translates as “whatever extra you earn,” *ho ti ean euodōtai*, is difficult to translate with any precision, let alone with a translation that adequately takes into account the differences between the economies of the first and twenty-first centuries. The 2011 Common English Bible chose “whatever you can afford from what you earn” to translate the problematic and metaphorical phrase. Earlier, the Revised Standard Version had translated the phrase “as he may prosper.”<sup>14</sup> In my commentary on this letter, I rendered the expression as “whatever he or she has gained.”<sup>15</sup> BDAG 323 opts for “as much as he gains,” while the Revised English Bible interprets the Greek as “whatever he can afford.”

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Margaret M. Mitchell, “Concerning *peri de* in 1 Corinthians,” *NovT* 31 (1989): 221–56.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 7:1; 8:1, 4; 12:1; 16:12.

<sup>12</sup> Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor 16:1–4.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Horst Balz, “*euodoō*,” *EDNT* 2: 81.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SP 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 585, 589.

The verb *euodooimai*, from which *euodōtai* is derived, appears just four times in the New Testament, including one other time in Paul's writings.<sup>16</sup> The verb is related to the noun *hodos*, which means "way" or "road." The prefix *eu* means "good" or "well." So the verb literally means "follow a good path." Used metaphorically, *euodooimai* means "get along well" or "prosper." Applied to finances, the metaphor means "profit." Paul was a master of metaphor and often used metaphors to speak about financial matters.<sup>17</sup>

Paul seems to be implying that the contributions of the members of the community should be in keeping with their relative prosperity.<sup>18</sup> The great patristic commentator on Paul's letters, John Chrysostom, wrote:

Notice his gentleness even here. He does not say "such and such an amount" but as he may prosper, showing that the resources are from God. Furthermore, by not ordering them to collect it all at one time, he makes the contribution easy. Since it is collected little by little, the offering and the expenditure are imperceptible.<sup>19</sup>

Paul refers to the collection in several of his letters, particularly Romans 15:25-29 and 2 Corinthians 8-9, in addition to 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.<sup>20</sup> In 1 Corinthians 16:1 Paul mentions that he had given appropriate instructions on the collection to the churches of Galatia, but he does not refer to them in his letter to the Galatians,<sup>21</sup> which dealt with a different urgent matter. Given Paul's multiple mentions

<sup>16</sup> Rom 1:10; 1 Cor 16:2; 3 John 2 [2x]. All four New Testament uses are metaphorical.

<sup>17</sup> See Raymond F. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), esp. 248-50.

<sup>18</sup> "In keeping with your income" is the fairly accurate NIV interpretation of Paul's metaphor offered by Ciampa and Rosner. Cf. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 843-44; see also Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 814, who, however, considers "in keeping with your income" too modern.

<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 43* (PG 61:368), in *1 Corinthians: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*, trans. Judith L. Kovacs, *The Church's Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 283.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 16:15.

<sup>21</sup> Note, however, Gal 2:10.

of the collection both orally and in writing, we can be sure that he considered the collection to be an integral part of his ministry. Keith Nickle's study of the collection<sup>22</sup> highlights its many purposes, including care for the poor, expression of gratitude to the mother church,<sup>23</sup> and unity between Gentile and Jewish believers.<sup>24</sup>

The present study does not warrant a full analysis of the collection, Paul's *logeia*, but a few exegetical observations are in order. First of all, Paul's appeal on behalf of the poor has its roots in his biblical tradition.<sup>25</sup> Many passages could be cited; different interpreters cite different Scriptures. The Greek term *logeia* was commonly used for the collection of taxes, but it could also be used for the collection of voluntary offerings, as it is in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.<sup>26</sup> Referencing the first day of the week (*kata mian sabbatou*), Paul implicitly invites his addressees to think of the Lord's resurrection, but he does not actually suggest that they are to make a contribution during a liturgical gathering.

Paul's exhortation is addressed to "each of you" (*hekastos hymōn*). This suggests that contributions to the collection should come from each member of the community, not simply from those who had some surplus of wealth. That each one was to set apart some in keeping with his or her income on "the first day of the week" (*kata mian sabbatou*) most likely had an economic as well as a religious purpose. Whether the members of the community were among the more affluent businesspeople or were artisans or slaves, the economy

<sup>22</sup> Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul's Strategy*, SBT 48 (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1966); cf. Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> It is to be noted that Paul does not mention Jerusalem until verse 3. What he puts before the community for their consideration is a collection "for the saints" (*eis tous hagious*). While "the saints" (*hoi hagioi*) eventually came to be used as a designation for all believers (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1; etc.), the terminology seems to have first been used in reference to believers in Jerusalem, "Judeo-Christians" who constituted an eschatological remnant of God's holy people, Israel.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., albeit with an exaggerated political bias, Sze-kar Wan, "Collection for the Saints as an Anti-colonial Act," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation; Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 191-215.

<sup>25</sup> Deut 15:7-8 would be one such passage among many.

<sup>26</sup> The twice-used term appears only here in the New Testament.

of the time would have meant that their income fluctuated; it varied from week to week. Setting aside something every week not only makes the collection easier, as Chrysostom suggests, but also ensures that what is set aside is proportionate to one's weekly earnings. Chrysostom rightly observes that there was no specific amount assigned or assessed; the system was not one of taxation.

Finally, Paul has something to say about the delivery of the collection to Jerusalem. He intends that it be carried by a group of people approved by the Corinthians themselves. Paul would write letters of introduction and credence on their behalf, but he did not propose that he should be the one to take the collection to Jerusalem. Nonetheless, he confesses his willingness to go with the group, if the Corinthians should so desire. Having the Corinthians send a delegation to transport the monetary collection had at least two purposes. First of all, it was a kind of insurance intended to ensure the security of the delivery. A single traveler carrying a large sum of money was likely to be a victim of robbery. A group of travelers journeying together lessened that danger considerably. Second, Paul wanted to distance himself from the delivery lest he be accused of dipping into the till for his own purposes. Second Corinthians suggests that such an accusation was later made by somebody or somebodies in the Corinthian community.

### *1 Corinthians 6:1-9a*

Paul's short exhortation with regard to the collection for the saints in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 tells something about what believers should do with their assets. There are, however, two passages in the epistle that warn against the rich taking advantage of their situation to the disadvantage of the less well-off in the community, namely, 1 Corinthians 6:1-9a and 1 Corinthians 11:17-22. In the first of these, Paul criticizes—and strongly<sup>27</sup>—those who take their fellow believers to a secular court, “before the unrighteous,” in Paul's words.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Thiselton (*First Epistle*, 423) observes, “The very first word, *tolma*, indemnifies another anomaly which causes Paul to experience a further sense of outrage and disappointment.”

<sup>28</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 6:1, *epi tōn adikōn*. Having surveyed various translations of the phrase, Thiselton opts for “where there is questionable justice” and comments,

Archaeological evidence suggests that *duoviri*,<sup>29</sup> chosen from among the city's leading citizens and serving a one-year term, were the highest magistrates in the metropolitan area. Normally, civil cases began in their courts. Aediles heard cases pertaining to business conducted at one or the other marketplace, an agora. The most important cases were heard by the Roman governor himself, as Caesar Augustus had decreed.<sup>30</sup>

The actual administration of justice must, however, be seen within the social situation of the times. The Roman patronage system was an important part of the social fabric. Powerful patrons were able to tip the scales of justice toward themselves, often by means of an appropriate bribe. Civil lawsuits were generally initiated by people of equal and upper social status, generally against those who were less well-off. One exception to the general rule that the plaintiffs were better off than those accused was the plethora of inheritance disputes among siblings that ended up in a court of law. These lawsuits may have provided Paul with the family language that he uses in trying to dissuade his readers from appealing to a court of law to settle their disputes.<sup>31</sup> Typically, the poor had virtually no standing in the eyes of the courts.

Seneca the Elder (54 BCE–39 CE), the scion of a wealthy equestrian, treated the judicial system of the era in one of his two extant writings, the *Controversiae*. A brilliant rhetorician, Seneca enabled his readers to understand the judicial system by offering them a series of short vignettes. In one of them, a rich man is portrayed as taunting a poor man with these words: "Why don't you accuse me, why don't you take me to court?" To which the poor man could only answer, "Am I a poor man, to accuse a rich man?" The purpose of Seneca's

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"It is safe to conclude that the use of *Roman provincial courts for minor cases* and the certainty of a result of *questionable justice* are virtually *synonymous*" (*First Epistle*, 418, 424; his emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> Literally, "two men."

<sup>30</sup> See Collins, *First Corinthians*, 226.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Michael Peppard, "Brother against Brother: *Controversiae* about Inheritance Disputes and 1 Corinthians 6:1-11," *JBL* 133 (2014): 179–92. Cf. Luke 12:13-15.

story<sup>32</sup> was to show that a powerful and rich man had nothing to fear from the court.

Would, moreover, a poor man even have been able to take a rich man to court? The satirist and courtier Petronius (ca. 27 CE–66 CE) tells a story about Ascyrtos who feared going to court because he was without influence. Moreover, he would have had no money with which to bribe the magistrate.<sup>33</sup> Along with patronage, bribery was simply part of the system.<sup>34</sup> Without sufficient wherewithal, the poor were not able to participate.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, biblical law demanded the protection of the poor in court.<sup>36</sup> Later Jewish rabbinic tradition was, however, well aware of the bias of the judicial system toward the rich. For example, a rabbinic commentary on the book of Leviticus says, “The usual experience is: two men go before a judge, one of them poor and the other rich; towards whom does the judge turn his face? Is it not toward the rich man?”<sup>37</sup>

Some decades after Paul and writing for a Christian community with a different ethnic constitution from that of the church at Corinth in the mid-50s, the evangelist Matthew urged believers to settle disputes among themselves, one on one. Only as a last resort should the matter be brought to the attention of the entire community.<sup>38</sup> In 1 Corinthians 6:1-9a Paul seems to be of a similar mind. Christians should solve their disputes among themselves. An appeal to a secular court of law is already an acknowledgment of moral failure; it’s a defeat for you,<sup>39</sup> says Paul. He speaks to them in this way “to their shame.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Controversiae* 10.1.2.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Satyricon* 14.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. P. Oxyrhynchus 2745, 7–8.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*, JNTS<sup>Sup</sup> 75 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 123–41.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Exod 23:6-8.

<sup>37</sup> *Lev. Rab.* 3:2.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Matt 18:15-17.

<sup>39</sup> The Greek of 1 Cor 6:7, *ētēma hymin*, appears elsewhere in the New Testament only in Rom 11:12.

<sup>40</sup> *Pros entropēn*, 1 Cor 6:5. Paul uses the phrase only one other time, namely, in 1 Cor 15:34, when he castigates those who deny the resurrection of the dead.

Paul's language is unusually strong. Believers are a family; they are siblings to one another.<sup>41</sup> Recourse to secular courts shows that something is seriously amiss in the Christian community, even if the disputed matter is rather trivial.<sup>42</sup> Even nonbelievers such as Cicero<sup>43</sup> and Plutarch<sup>44</sup> realized that going to court was not an adequate way of dealing with a troublesome member of the family.

Having argued that believers should resolve their differences among themselves<sup>45</sup> and that it is radically out of order for them to have to resort to secular courts of law, Paul's style leads him to confront those who dared to do such a thing: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud and believers at that. Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?"<sup>46</sup> The three rhetorical questions are three among the nine that Paul uses in the diatribe of 1 Corinthians 6:1-9a. The first two echo sentiments found among some of the Stoic philosophers,<sup>47</sup> but some authors see in them a reflection of the model of Christ, the innocent one who suffered injustice—at least by human standards, *kata sarka*—on the cross.<sup>48</sup>

Paul reserves his harshest words for those who have used their wealth and power to the detriment of the poorer and less powerful members of the community. He turns the tables on them as he writes, "You yourselves wrong and defraud and believers at that. Do you

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Paul's use of the phrase in 1 Cor 6:5 points to the seriousness of the matter for one who claims to be a member of the believing church.

<sup>41</sup> Note the use of *adelphos*, "brother," in verses 5 and 6 (and 8). The NRSV's use of "unbeliever" as a translation removes the kinship dimension of Paul's argument.

<sup>42</sup> I have rendered the *critērion elachistōn* as "minor cases" (Collins, *First Corinthians*, 224, 232); the REB opts for "trifling cases." Some commentators suggest a comparison with contemporary small-claims courts.

<sup>43</sup> Pertinent quotation cited by Winter.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Plutarch, "Brotherly Love" (*Moralia* 481E-482C).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Exod 18:13-27; Deut 1:9-17; 16:18-20.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Cor 6:7b-9a.

<sup>47</sup> Thus, for example, Mussonius Rufus, "He said that he himself would never prosecute anyone for personal injury nor recommend it to anyone else who claimed to be a philosopher" ("Will the Philosopher Prosecute Anyone for Personal Injury?" 10.15, cited in Boring, *Hellenistic Commentary*, 399).

<sup>48</sup> Thus, Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 436-37; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 235.

not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?"<sup>49</sup> Attentive to the concrete social situation in which these kinds of lawsuits took place as well as the various nuances of Paul's choice of verb, Thiselton translates the *adikeite*, the NRSV's "wrong" at the beginning of verse 8, as "deprive of justice."<sup>50</sup> When the wealthy bring those less well-off to court, they effectively deprive them of justice; they defraud the members of their own fictional family.

What is in store for the wealthy folk who do such a thing? Describing them as wrongdoers, Paul uses the final salvo in his arsenal of rhetorical questions to ask, "Do you not know that wrongdoers [*adikioi*<sup>51</sup>] will not inherit the kingdom of God?" To make the point even more forcefully, Paul punctuates this rhetorical question with the third of the three catalogues of vices<sup>52</sup> in 1 Corinthians: "Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God."<sup>53</sup>

The apostle's insertion of "the greedy" into this list of evildoers is telling. In the paired catalogue of vices in the previous chapter, 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, Paul had twice mentioned the greedy.<sup>54</sup> Aelius Aristedes, a popular mid-second-century CE Greek orator, would later say that greed is one of the three most disgraceful things. Greed (*pleonexia*) is not simply a desire to have more than what one already has; it is a desire to have more than what one has a right to have,

<sup>49</sup> 1 Cor 6:9a. In similar fashion he will later turn the tables on Jewish Christians who were so ready to accuse Gentiles of all sorts of wrongful conduct. Cf. Rom 2:1.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 437–38. Limbeck observes, "Since to do wrong usually means to damage the one wronged, *adikeō* can take on, specifically in legal and commercial language, the sense of doing damage." Cf. Meinrad Limbeck, "*adikeō*, ktl.," *EDNT* 1:31–33, at 31.

<sup>51</sup> Note the semantic relationship with *adikeō*. "There are good grounds for translating *adikoi* as unjust," writes Thiselton (*First Epistle*, 438; his emphasis).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 5:10-11; Raymond F. Collins, "Conduct to Be Avoided," chapter 6 in *Sexual Ethics and the New Testament: Behavior and Belief*, Companions to the New Testament (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 73–99.

<sup>53</sup> 1 Cor 6:9b-10.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Eph 5:5 and Col 3:5 where the authors actually identify greed and idolatry.

particularly what belongs to others.<sup>55</sup> For his part, from among the many vices<sup>56</sup> that he could have chosen for his lists of vices, Paul chose “the greedy”<sup>57</sup> in addition to idolaters (*eidōlōlōtrai*)<sup>58</sup> as the two kinds of evildoers whose conduct he wanted to underscore with his three lists. Believers, Paul said, echoing his previous and now-lost earlier correspondence, should have nothing to do with them, the greedy and idolaters.

The rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 is masterful. Paul had addressed a sexual matter in the previous chapter, a man's adultery with his own father's wife, and will devote the following chapter to things sexual.<sup>59</sup> It is commonplace for people to disparage the sexual mores of those with whom they disagree. So in 1 Corinthians 6:10 Paul develops a list of those who commit a variety of sexual misdeeds—everyone in the community would have been on board with this!—but the point of his catalogue of vices is the inserted “thieves, the greedy, and robbers,” fitting epithets for the wealthy members of the community who have the effrontery to take the less well-off members of the community to a secular court. That may have been their way of life in the past; such conduct has no place in the life of a believer.

### *1 Corinthians 11:17-22*

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 Paul addresses another serious matter—one perhaps more serious than the matter of lawsuits before civil courts of law because it strikes at the heart of the celebration of the Eucharist. With regard to the lawsuits, Paul had said that he

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Jennifer Houston McNeel, *Paul as Infant and Nursing Mother: Metaphor, Rhetoric, and Identity in 1 Thessalonians 2:5-8*, ECL 12 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 49.

<sup>56</sup> All told, 110 different names of vices appear in the catalogues of vices in the New Testament. Philo has one passage in which he lists some 146 vices. Cf. Philo, *Sacrifices* 32.

<sup>57</sup> The nominal form of this vice, *pleonektēs*, appears in all three verses, 1 Cor 5:10, 11; and 6:10.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 10:14.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 178-79.

had spoken to the shame of the Corinthians.<sup>60</sup> Now he describes the situation in words bracketed by the simple and forceful phrase, “I do not commend you” (*ouk epainō*).<sup>61</sup> This rejoinder is all the more significant insofar as Paul uses it after he had written to commend the Corinthians for their fidelity to him and their holding on to the traditions that he had handed down.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Paul emphasizes the importance of his “I do not commend you” by asking, “Should I commend you?” He wants his addressees to understand that what they are doing is in no way commendable.

What is the matter of such serious concern? Paul gives a description of the situation, as he sees it:

Now in the following instructions, I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes together to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you.<sup>63</sup>

Paul’s language is strong. The string of rhetorical questions points to his personal investment in the matter. These unanswered questions invite the Corinthians to come to personal decisions about the situation. As Paul tries to correct their practices, which he considers to be out of sync with what the Lord’s Supper was meant to recall, he uses

<sup>60</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 6:5.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Cor 11:22. The literary inclusion ring construction sets the tone for the whole passage.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 11:2.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Cor 11:17-22.

the harshest of language. Not only does Paul describe the situation as one that he could not commend, he also says that the Corinthians come together for the worse, not for the better; they are not eating the Lord's Supper; they are showing contempt for the church of God; and they are humiliating those who have nothing. Then, after he has recalled the tradition of the Lord's Supper, the apostle says that they are eating and drinking judgment against themselves.<sup>64</sup> What is the situation that deserves such harsh condemnation?

What is at stake is the Lord's Supper<sup>65</sup> itself. We do not know just who it was that reported the situation to Paul, but we know that someone had told him about it.<sup>66</sup> The members of the Corinthian community were coming together presumably, but not necessarily, in someone's home, perhaps that of Gaius, who was host to the whole church.<sup>67</sup> Paul focuses on their coming together; three times he uses the verb "come together" (*synerchomai*).<sup>68</sup> The Corinthian believers gathered for a meal, as did various associations in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>69</sup> Typically, these religious, trade, and funeral associations gathered for a kind of potluck meal, an *eranos*, to which each participant made a contribution.

Obviously, not everyone who participated in the meal was able to bring the same amount and/or quality of food. Echoing Socrates, the historian Xenophon described what an *eranos* should be like:

<sup>64</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 11:29.

<sup>65</sup> Within the New Testament the expression "the Lord's Supper" (*kyriakon deipnon*) appears only once, namely, in 1 Cor 11:20.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. "I hear" (*akouō*) in verse 18; in 1 Cor 1:11 Paul says that he has received an oral report (*edēlōthē*) about quarrels (*erides*) in the community from Chloe's people. In response, Paul almost commands that there be "no divisions among you" (*mē ē en hymin schismata*). Paul speaks of the divisions (*schismata*) in the community in 1 Cor 11:18. It is, however, impossible to state with any certainty that it was Chloe's people who told Paul about the abuse of the Lord's Supper.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Rom 16:23.

<sup>68</sup> Verses 17, 18, 20.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Panayotis Coutsoumpos, *Paul and the Lord's Supper: A Socio-Historical Investigation*, Studies in Biblical Literature 84 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).