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# The Nature of Paul's Stewardship

## with Special Reference to I and II Corinthians

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by Cullen I. K. Story

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*Dr. Story, who is Assistant Professor of New Testament in Princeton Theological Seminary, looks at what Paul calls his "stewardship" as an important aspect of his apostolic authority and ministry, and lays bare some principles of permanent and universal validity.*

SHAKESPEARE is thought to have written a curious play titled, *Timon of Athens*. In it, the writer has drawn the portrait of a steward by the name of Flavius. Flavius is faithful in his service to Timon through thick and thin, both when his master is high-minded and noble and when, in revulsion, he degenerates into a sordid misanthrope. No human being escapes Timon's scathing censure—no one except Flavius. As he confronts his steward's dogged loyalty, Timon is finally forced to confess, "I do proclaim one honest man and he's a steward."<sup>1</sup> Stewardship—a concern in a Shakespearean drama—is an important concern in the New Testament. Unlike the stewardship of Flavius, however, the New Testament steward serves a faithful and true Master who elicits a steadfastness and loyalty from his servants like unto his own toward God (cf. John 13: 3). The stewardship is his; he entrusts his own chosen stewards with it.

Nowhere in the New Testament does this "trust" or "stewardship" appear in clearer light than in the life and ministry of Paul. In this conviction the following essay is set forth. It falls into two parts: Part I—a study of the terms in the Pauline letters that specify Paul's stewardship, and Part II—an interpretation of Paul's stewardship based upon his correspondence with the Church of Corinth. I have intentionally avoided the term "Pauline authority" for at least two reasons: (1) The popular use and understanding of terms such as "authority" and "law and order"—if applied to a so-called "Pauline authority"—would seriously misinterpret the man from Tarsus; and (2) The term *exousia*, often translated "authority," plays only a minor role in Paul's writings.

(1) *oikonomia* and *oikonomos*. The terms refer respectively to the administration of a household and to the administrator. Thus, Obadiah serves as steward (*oikonomos*) of Ahab's household (1 Kings

<sup>1</sup> Likewise in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, the steward Afanasy Pavlovitch serves faithfully under the cruel treatment of Zossima, though, in this case, the steward's loyalty is the spark that kindles his master's thoroughgoing conversion and subsequent life as a monk.

18: 3), Eliakim of Hezekiah's (Isa. 36: 3),<sup>2</sup> while Erastus is steward of the "household" of Corinth, i.e. city treasurer (Rom. 16: 23). Paul, however, is not a steward of men, not even of human mysteries (cf. Diognetus 7: 1) but of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4: 1-2). Thus his stewardship originates not from himself but from the gospel of God's grace (Eph. 3: 2) with which he has been entrusted (1 Cor. 9: 17). Nevertheless, Paul senses that "stewardship" is not a trust unique to him but that it is also given to other office bearers in the church (Tit. 1: 7, cf. 1 Peter 4: 10 and Ign. to Polycarp 6: 1). The terms *oikonomia* and *oikonomos* are not uncommon in the papyri. It is suggested, however, by O. Michel (*TDNT*, V, 151) that the parabolic material in the synoptic tradition (cf. e.g. Luke 12: 42 and 16: 1-13) is what forms the basis of the Pauline conception of the steward and his stewardship.

(2) *apostellō* "to send forth", *apostolē* "apostleship", *apostolos* "apostle." Among these related words, we discover the strategic term that describes Paul's commission. Paul rarely uses the verb, only once in a significant way (1 Cor. 1: 17—"Christ sent me"). "Apostleship" occurs only three times in his letters—he claims to have received it (Rom. 1: 5) for work among the Gentiles (Gal. 2: 8) and to find it attested by the churches which he founded (1 Cor. 9: 2). The third term of the trio, however, is especially important.<sup>3</sup>

Primarily, Paul uses the term *apostolos* of himself. His apostleship implies, in the first place, the commission given to him by Christ to preach to the vast Gentile world. He knew well his unworthiness to claim the title for he had persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15: 9). But he was called by Christ (Gal. 1: 15, cf. "called an apostle" in Rom. 1: 1 and 1 Cor. 1: 1) no less than the original twelve (cf. Mark 1: 20). The main prerequisite for apostleship, i.e. that one be a witness to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1: 22), was the very prerequisite which Paul claimed for himself (1 Cor. 9: 1; cf. Gal. 1: 15). The strong apologetic element in Paul's writings on his apostleship is not at all strange. The tenacious tradition concerning the twelve apostles

<sup>2</sup> In some manuscripts of the Testament of Joseph (12: 3), Potiphar's wife tells her husband to make Joseph his steward (*oikonomos*).

<sup>3</sup> The article by K. H. Rengstorff (*TDNT*, I, 398-447) shows *apostellō* to be a technical term for divine authorization. Accordingly, an *apostolos* represents the person and cause of another. In essence, the basis of the NT apostolate is the will and commission of the risen Lord (*ibid.*, p. 436). Paul probably preferred the title of *doulos* "slave" which he felt free to use when his apostleship was not in question (Rom. 1: 1; Phil. 1: 1; Tit. 1: 1; cf. Col. 4: 12 and 2 Tim. 2: 24). It reminded him of his Lord who assumed the form of a slave and became obedient unto death (Phil. 2: 7-8). In 1-2 Thessalonians Paul uses no title (but cf. 1 Thess. 2: 7). In Philem. 1, 9 and Eph. 3: 1; 4: 1 he calls himself "Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus" or "Paul the prisoner in the Lord."

(Matthias replaces Judas, Acts 1: 26) and Jesus' own word linking the twelve to the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19: 28) would surely make a Jewish Christian wary of Paul's claim since Paul was not one of the twelve. Without doubt, his apology is strongest in Galatians. Paul says that he is an apostle "not from men [plural] nor through a man [singular] but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead" (1: 1).<sup>4</sup> The phrase "from men" suggests a group or community, e.g. the church at Jerusalem and the apostolate associated with it. Thus, while Paul's opponents may have considered his apostleship as secondary, i.e. an apostleship derived from the apostles of the mother church,<sup>5</sup> Paul expressly denies their view.

Moreover, Paul affirms that his apostleship was not mediated "through a man." Conceivably, the "man" could refer to Peter or to James,<sup>6</sup> since, according to the book of Acts, both men held important positions in the early church. Accordingly, in Gal. 2, Paul may be stressing his independence of both leaders. He administers a stinging rebuke to Peter and thereby unmasks the error of representatives who had come from James and who had pressured Peter into his incongruous behaviour (Gal. 2: 11-12). Thus, it is possible that the words "neither through a man" suggest facts that Paul later develops in the Galatian letter. A. Schlatter, however, has a better view (*Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, Vol. 7, p. 2). Paul's apostleship, says Schlatter, is "not through a man" because it is not self-generated. It is not Paul's creation, not the product of his thoughts or flesh. Quite the contrary, all that Paul has, has been given to him by Jesus Christ and God the Father. His apostleship is the creative work of Jesus and thus also the creative work of God who raised up Jesus from the dead. Such a remarkable beginning was a sure omen of the success of Paul's apostolic mission among the Gentiles.

<sup>4</sup> Punctuation may be important in Gal. 1: 1. Th. Zahn (footnote to the Nestle text) and H. Schlier (*Der Brief an die Galater, übersetzt und erklärt*, Meyer series, p. 25) both insert a comma after "Paul" and omit a comma after "apostle." They may be right. Their punctuation connects "apostle" immediately with the following context giving the sense of a rapid outpouring of Paul's words, as though he can hardly write his words fast enough. Compare, on the other hand, the punctuation of the RSV which follows the Nestle text.

<sup>5</sup> The suggestion comes from Pierre Bonnard's work on Galatians (*Commentaire du Nouveau Testament*, vol. IX, pp. 19-20). Contrariwise, J. B. Lightfoot (*Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 72) suggests that "from men" may imply that a false colouring had been given to the "men"—prophets and teachers—through whom Paul had been commissioned at Antioch (Acts 13: 2-3). Rengstorf (*op. cit.*, 442) follows Lightfoot.

<sup>6</sup> Rengstorf suggests that the "man" is Barnabas who, according to Acts 9: 27, introduced Paul to the original Christian community in Jerusalem (*ibid.*, p. 442).

But, Paul's apostleship also implies a trust from Christ enabling Paul to minister in the church which Christ calls into existence. To be sure, he exercises his ministry by proclaiming the good news to the church, for the church needs to plumb the depths of the gospel (cf. e.g. Rom. 1: 15; 1 Cor. 1: 17-25; 2 Cor. 5: 14-21; Gal. 3-4). As a whole, however, Paul's ministry is pastoral. He aims to challenge the church (e.g. 2 Cor. 8-9) no less than to cleanse it (e.g. 1 Cor. 5) and unite it (e.g. 1 Cor. 1: 10; 2 Cor. 13: 9). To attain such a goal he calls on the Church itself to join forces together with him. The address to the erring Galatians for example, mentions not only "Paul, an apostle . . ." (1: 1) but also "all of the brethren who are with me" (1: 2). By "the brethren" Paul does not mean his fellow-workers for usually he names his associates if he intends to link them with himself in the address (cf. e.g. 1 Cor. 1: 1; 2 Cor. 1: 1, *et al.*). By "brethren," he must mean the Christian community living in the place from which he is writing. They join Paul in addressing the Galatian congregations and in warning them of the dire straits into which they have fallen. Schlatter observes that in v. 1 Paul has separated himself from men. He has no one as his teacher, he is under no one, obligated to no one for his knowledge of Christ and the commission which he has received from him. Yet, this does not mean that Paul alone speaks and serves. Much more, says Schlatter, now that he is established in Christ—on God alone—he draws men to himself and appears among them as one of them in order that he may speak with them and work with them in the service of Jesus (*Erläuterungen*, vol. 7, p. 3). Significantly, Gal. 1: 1-2 suggests the double revelation that came to Paul on the Damascus road; (a) the revelation of the risen Lord from whom directly—without human mediation—Paul received his apostleship, and (b) the revelation of the body of believers, the community of faith, with whom Christ is identified and who belong to Him ("Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Acts 9: 4).

*Secondarily*, the term "apostle" has a somewhat wider significance for Paul. The brothers who are to gather the relief offering are named apostles (2 Cor. 8: 23); James, the half-brother of Jesus, was apparently recognized as an apostle (Gal. 1: 18-19); Ephaphroditus was designated the apostle of the Philippians (Phil. 2: 25), and Timothy and Silas together with Paul bear the title of "apostles" in their relation to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2: 7). It is not clear whether the appearance to "all the apostles" (1 Cor. 15: 7), is limited to the twelve (cf. F. Godet) or is wider in scope (cf. C. K. Barrett). At any rate, the above references are few and quite incidental, indicating that the term "apostle" was limited in scope and in time. Presbyters (Acts 14: 23; 20: 17), bishops, and deacons (cf. Phil. 1: 1; 1 Tim. 3: 1, 8; Tit. 1: 7; cf. Acts 20: 28 and Didache 15: 1-2) continued to be ordained in the early church but there is no record of

any "apostolic" succession.<sup>7</sup> It is quite clear, therefore, that "apostle", in Paul's writings, refers primarily to Paul's commission from the risen Lord to preach to the Gentile world and to minister to the church that is called out of the world.

(3) *Fellow-workers* of God. Out of 13 occurrences of the term, 12 occur in Paul. The term "fellow-workers of God" (1 Cor. 3: 9; cf. the Nestle and Bible Society texts and the NEB translation of 1 Thess. 3: 2) is important since elsewhere the term is simply "fellow-workers," always connoting human associates. Thus 1 Cor. 3: 9 with its context indicates the unique and responsible position of Paul and Apollos in relation to God and to the Corinthian Church. The church constitutes "God's plowed field"; Paul and Apollos have laboured in that field, planting (Paul) and watering (Apollos), but God, with whom they are "co-workers," constantly made the plants to mature.

(4) *exousia*. The word denotes government officials (e.g. Rom. 13: 1-2), rulers in the spiritual world (e.g. Eph. 1: 21; 3: 10) and may even refer to God (Rom. 9: 21). In the Corinthian correspondence the term has two emphases. First, it refers to a "right" which Paul claims he has to receive financial support from the Corinthians, a right which he has renounced for the sake of the Gospel (cf. I, 9: 4, 5, 6, 18). Second, the term implies that Paul has a responsibility not for ruling over, but for building up, the congregation (II, 10: 8; 13: 10, cf. also 12: 19). Apparently Paul senses that his "authority" has a direct relation to the goal of Jesus—to build His church (Mt. 16: 18).

(5) *A wise architect* (1 Cor. 3: 9b-17). Paul's position is distinct from that of the Corinthians. They are God's building; Paul is the architect who constructs the building on Christ the corner-stone. Paul performs his task only by means of the grace of God which has been given to him.

(6) *Servants* or *assistants* of Christ (1 Cor. 4: 1). The word occurs about 20 times in the NT, only here in Paul's writings. Set within the context of the divisions in Corinth, the word affirms that Paul and Apollos are not beholden to the Corinthians but that, as apostles, they are at the disposal of Christ, and thus under his direct command (cf. K. H. Rengstorf, *TDNT* 8, 542 f.).

(7) *Father* (1 Cor. 4: 14-16). Only to the Corinthian and Thessalonian churches (1 Thess. 2: 11) does Paul call himself "father" and only in Phil. 2: 22 to an individual, i.e. Timothy.<sup>8</sup> To give the right

<sup>7</sup> Ignatius (c. A.D. 110) was bishop of the church at Antioch but he claims to be no more. He insists upon a sharp distinction between Peter and Paul on the one hand and himself on the other: "Those were apostles, I am under sentence" (Ignatius to the Romans 4:3).

<sup>8</sup> Paul uses "my child" in speaking of Timothy and Titus as well as of Onesimus (1 Cor. 4: 17; 1 Tim. 1: 2, 18; 2 Tim. 1: 2; 2: 1; Tit. 1: 4, Philem. 10).

perspective to the term, we should observe that in twenty references in 1 Cor. alone, Paul calls Christians *adelphoi*, "brothers", four of the 20 times "my brothers." Paul never forgot that the gospel brought persons together from various cultures and backgrounds into a family fellowship. To be the sons and daughters of *the Father* (2 Cor. 6: 18; Gal. 4: 4-7) meant at the same time to be brothers and sisters in *the family of God*. As Schlatter points out (*Paulus der Bote Jesu*, p. 162) Paul does not forget the one who is really the Father of the congregation, i.e. God, nor does Paul impose his fatherly authority over the congregation so that he ceases to be their brother. He remembers that he, no less than the Corinthians, has received the gospel, that he, no less than the church, is forever in debt to the grace of God. Yet, the one through whom the Corinthians receive the gospel and its saving power, the one who is their brother, is at the same time their father. Though they may have numerous teachers, quite obviously they have only one founding father, i.e. Paul. He is their father, however, only in Christ, only through the gospel (1 Cor. 4: 15). As father, he can challenge his children to demonstrate by their conduct who their parent is (4: 16, cf. Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, ICC, p. 90.)

## II. THE NATURE OF PAUL'S STEWARDSHIP IN I AND II CORINTHIANS

*Introduction:* Paul is a responsible steward. The gospel is his stewardship (I, 9: 13-18), a gospel which he had received (I, 15: 3) and which brought God's saving work to those who believed (I, 1: 18; 15: 2). He admits that in himself he is undeserving, and that the grace of God alone has made him what he is (I, 15: 9-10). Christ broke through Paul's ignorance and unbelief and revealed Himself to Paul (I, 15: 8). Paul understands that he is a fragile clay vessel yet entrusted with the precious treasure of the gospel (II, 4: 7). According to I, 9: 23, he claims to do all that he does for the sake of the gospel in order that he might be a fellow participant of the gospel. To be sure, he preaches the gospel that others may reap its eternal benefits (I, 9: 19-22). But he preaches also, so that he himself can share those benefits with others (9: 23). The text presents a striking background to the disciplined life which Paul pursued, a view buttressed in I, 9: 24-27 by an appeal to the athletic contests.

Paul, the responsible evangelist, is also the responsible pastor. The apostle was never content with converting pagans and forming new churches. He sensed that salvation was not merely a completed work but, much more, an ongoing process related to a future consummation.<sup>9</sup> As he views mankind, he sees two momentous processes

<sup>9</sup> A Greek concordance shows that the present and future tenses of the verb "to save" occur far more frequently than the past (the aorist tense). That is to say, the stress falls not on a past act or even a present state (though cf. Eph. 2: 8-9), but on a present process with an eschatological goal.

occurring—some are being saved and some are perishing (I, 1: 18; II, 2: 15; cf. I, 15: 2). Obviously, he is concerned in his letters with those who are experiencing God's salvation. The sympathetic reader of Paul will thus always be aware of the apostle's stance. He is steward of a saving gospel which not only brings a body of Christ into existence but which, rightly interpreted, has implications for Christian living now and for the future.<sup>10</sup> Such convictions emerged from Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. Saul the persecutor of Christ and his church became Paul the steward of the gospel of grace. Life could no longer be lived in accord with the Jewish law. On the contrary, he saw that life is the gift of the risen Christ and that it is to be lived now—in freedom from Jewish laws. And so he affirms that, since the church is Christ's body and since Christ is risen, His people who are even now "in Christ" will also one day be raised to be with him always. It is clear, therefore, that to understand the nature of Paul's apostleship, one must appreciate the strong sense of stewardship which he had toward the gospel. The object of the following study is to understand what his stewardship signified in specific situations which developed at Corinth and what his stewardship may imply for the church today. The study is based on the assumption that the letters to the Corinthian church are pastoral in nature, written to specific situations and needs. The study also attempts to take seriously Paul's own distinction between what he says *kata kurion* "according to the Lord," *kata tēn emēn gnōmēn* "according to my opinion," and *kata anthrōpon* "according to man."<sup>11</sup>

A. *Situations where Paul senses that the stewardship of the gospel is at stake.* In such cases, Paul speaks *kata kurion* "according to the Lord" (cf. II, 11: 17) or "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (I, 1: 10; 5: 4), or "from the Lord" (I, 11: 23).

The first and fifteenth chapters of the first letter form two clear examples. Divisions in the church (chap. 1) strike a blow not only at the unity of the body but at the oneness of Christ himself (I, 1: 13) so that the cross of Christ is emptied of its meaning (I, 1: 17). Divisions magnify human wisdom which the cross of Christ lays bare only to cancel (I, 1: 20-21). The foolishness of the gospel pro-

<sup>10</sup> So, for example, in 1 Cor. Paul declares the solid base of the gospel to be Christ's work (I, 15: 1-11), yet he sees its implications not merely for the network of complex problems with which the Corinthian church must wrestle now (I, 1-14) but also for the future life of the church with the risen Jesus (I, 15: 12-58).

<sup>11</sup> The divisions, of course, cannot be neatly and definitely constructed. They tend to rub off on each other. The treatment which follows is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive.



duces the only valid divisions of humanity—those who are being saved and those who are perishing (I, 1: 18). The effective call which the Corinthians have received flouts human wisdom and man-made divisions, for God has chosen “foolish things” (neuter) to put to shame “the wise ones” (masculine—I, 1: 26-27). Thus the situation of divided loyalties at Corinth can only be resolved ultimately by a new and fresh look at the meaning of the cross of Christ and of the call of God. Moreover if the Corinthians question the resurrection of Christians (I, 15; cf. also II, 4-5) they place in jeopardy the basic structure of the gospel itself (I, 15: 1-11), for, fundamentally, the gospel hinges on Christ's resurrection (I, 15: 4, “since the third day he is risen”). Thus Paul claims that if the dead are not to be raised, then Christ is not risen (15: 13; cf. “if Christ be not raised” in 15: 14, 16, 17 with 15: 20, “But now Christ is risen . . .”). Furthermore, the issue facing the Corinthians has practical implications as well since ultimately, fruitful service depends upon a living Lord (I, 15: 58; cf. John 15: 5). In these issues, Paul speaks “according to the Lord”, i.e. according to the stewardship of the gospel.

Another situation where the stewardship of the gospel is at stake is the problem of immorality, whether incest (I, 5) or fornication (I, 6: 12-20). The congregation is to deal with the incestuous one “in the name” and “with the power of our Lord Jesus” (I, 5: 4). Christ, “our passover” has been sacrificed, says Paul (I, 5: 7) but the “feast of unleavened bread” is marred by the presence of the immoral one whose evil deed has permeated the body of Christ as yeast permeates dough. No less, claims Paul, does fornication (I, 6: 12-20) corrupt the Corinthian church body. He insists that the church has become a sanctuary of God (I, 6: 19) at the price of Christ's death (I, 6: 20). In brief, the gospel of Christ and its demand for total dedication of life (i.e. the body, I, 6: 20) provide the foundation for Paul's exhortation to flee fornication (I, 6: 18).

In addition, the apostle's treatment of spiritual gifts (I, 12-14) is firmly rooted in the gospel with which Paul has been entrusted. By the Holy Spirit or “in the Spirit”, the Corinthian Christians have confessed the Lordship of Jesus (I, 12: 3), received baptism into Christ's body (I, 12: 13), and participated in the holy eucharist (12: 13). From the same Spirit they have also received a rich diversity of gifts (12: 4). These gifts are surpassed only by the *agapē* of God (I, 13) and are to be used for the edification of Christ's body and the conversion of unbelievers (I, 14). The entire passage (I, 12-14) is unique not only due to Paul's emphasis on the Lordship of Jesus at the beginning of the section (I, 12: 3) but to his strong personal

claim near the close (14: 37). The things which he writes are "of the Lord".<sup>12</sup>

One final analogous situation appears in 2 Corinthians (especially 5: 11-7: 4)—the theme of reconciliation. The past (aorist) tense in 5: 18 affirms that God has already reconciled Paul and his companions to himself. In the background of the text lies Paul's early enmity towards Jesus and the church. The participle "reconciling" (5: 19) tells of God's continuous work in the world while the imperative, "become reconciled" (5: 20), suggests that God's work is channelled through the apostolic appeal. The double use of the noun, reconciliation, i.e. "the ministry of *reconciliation*" (5: 18) and "the word of *reconciliation*" (5: 19), emphasizes in turn the total life and ministry of Paul and the specific preaching message which he represents. Four main items stand out in the passage:

(1) Paul addressed his message of reconciliation to Christians. Hence the church must realize the meaning of the gospel for Christian faith and life, for health and wholeness.

(2) Paul based reconciliation on God's work in Christ thereby giving substance to his message. A confession which merely affirms what we will do apart from what God has done and is doing, will be shallow indeed. The particles of comparison and causation which appear at the beginning of 5: 19 suggest, in turn, a comparison of Paul's work with God's and the dependence of Paul's work on God's (cf. Schlatter, *Paulus der Bote Jesu*, p. 566). Thus, II, 5: 19 may be paraphrased, "He has given to us a ministry of reconciliation like unto his—no, I mean far more than that. The reason we have such a ministry is because God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."

(3) Reconciliation refers primarily to man's alienation from God. Hence, for example, pastoral counselling must always take seriously an "I-Thou" relationship. What Paul proclaims positively is found negatively in Joseph's steadfast refusal to sin against God as he

<sup>12</sup> There is good evidence—internal and external—for the omission of the word "commandment" or "commandments" in 14: 37. Quite apart from the question of 14: 34-36 and its relation to the passage, 14: 37 apparently refers to the entire section on spiritual gifts. To be sure, the section reveals Paul's thought and reflection and marks a definite advance on what the gospel tradition reveals. Yet there is no doubt in Paul's mind; what he has written is "of the Lord." Does Paul mean that there are suggestions in what Jesus said (according to gospel tradition) which form the basis for Paul's treatment of spiritual gifts? Specifically, does the imagery of the body and the emphasis on the work of the Spirit (I, 12) reflect the vine-branches metaphor and the stress on the Holy Spirit which is found in the Upper Room discourse (John 14-17)? And is I, 13, the *agapē* chapter, influenced by the tradition that underlies John 13: 34-35?

resists the advances of Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39) or in David's frank admission that his crimes against men (Uriah *et al.*) pale into insignificance compared to his crime against God: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned" (Psa. 51: 4).

(4) Reconciliation implies that righteousness is imputed to the ungodly and hence, righteousness is a live option for the Corinthian church. In brief, sins are imputed to Christ while righteousness is imputed to sinners (II, 5: 21).

Obviously then, there is a sense in which Paul is a steward of a gospel which constrains him and presses in upon him continually (I, 9: 16). He cannot escape from that with which he has been entrusted (I, 9: 17). "Here he stands, he can do none else" for what he speaks is spoken *kata kurion*, "according to the Lord". The resurrection of Jesus, the oneness of his body, the case for chastity, spiritual gifts, and reconciliation—these are all themes that Paul wrestles with at Corinth, themes in which he saw that the stewardship of the gospel was at stake. As we witness today the dilution of the verities of the Christian faith and the erosion of Christian life values, Paul's keen sense of stewardship may indeed have a sobering effect. Two of the above themes are singled out in what follows as suggestive for our time.

First, the resurrection of Jesus. Paul's treatment suggests that the resurrection of Jesus is the sheet-anchor of the believing church in any age. The *kerygma* of I Cor. 15 assures us that Jesus' resurrection—no less than his death—is in accord with God's plan (vs. 3-4), that it is an objective fact that occurred in time (v. 4, "since the third day he is risen"), that, uniquely, it is God's action in behalf of Jesus (v. 4, "he has been raised," the verb is passive in voice, i.e. God is the Actor), and that it is affirmed by the faith of the church in every age.<sup>13</sup> (a) Jesus' resurrection occurred in time. This is shown by the various appearances that are listed, culminating in the appearance to Paul (15: 5-8). In his appearances Christ removed the veil of unbelief and brought assurance and hope to his own—"Peter, here am I," "My disciples, here am I." An appearance was also an encounter that implied both *recognition* and *mission* (L. Goppelt, *The Easter Message Today*, p. 47, ed. M. Barth). That is to say, the disciples recognize that he is alive and, at the same time they are

<sup>13</sup> It is true that at the time Paul wrote to Corinth, many of the 500 or more "brothers" to whom the risen Jesus appeared were still alive and thus able to bear witness to that appearance (cf. I Cor. 15: 6). As a whole, however, the early church—with respect to the resurrection of Jesus—occupied a position of faith that is comparable to that which the church occupies today.

made aware of their mission in the world (cf. I, 15: 1-11, especially, "thus we are proclaiming and thus you believed").<sup>14</sup>

(b) Jesus' resurrection also occurred for all time. The syntax of 1 Cor. 15: 4 is illuminating in this regard. The translation, "since the third day he is risen," attempts to embrace both the temporal element (dative of time) and the perfect tense of the verb. Illuminating likewise is the difference between the terms used to describe his resurrection to the disciples and to the church. The term ὤφθη "he appeared," used five times in 15: 5-8 (cf. also Luke 24: 34), implies that Jesus offered himself to his own. He did so to discouraged and disappointed disciples who thought their relationship to him was at an end. But, to the church, the language of resurrection is ἐν ὑμῖν ἔστιν, "He is in your midst (cf. II, 13: 5). The risen Jesus thus assures the church today of his presence as his *kerygma* or his word is faithfully proclaimed. He is ready to meet his own for he is with them whether to correct them (II, 13: 5), to discipline them (I, 5: 4), or to confirm them in their witness to him (I, 14: 24-25) and in their work for him (II, 9: 13-14).

A second suggestion growing out of Paul's stewardship of the gospel lies in the area of sexuality. Proponents of situational ethics recognize that legalism is not an adequate approach to the decision-making process in sexual life and tend to recommend that decisions be based on love alone (e.g. J. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, pp. 18-31).<sup>15</sup> In a very succinct way, Fletcher observes, "Whether any form of sex (hetero, homo, or auto) is good or evil depends on whether love is fully served" (*op. cit.*, p. 139). As support for his thesis, Fletcher appeals to the apostle Paul. It is very doubtful, however, if Fletcher has captured either the communal or theological tone of Paul's "sexual ethics," so desperately needed in the church today. The call of God is to holiness (e.g. I, 1: 2) and the community of faith is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (ναὸς τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, I, 6: 18-20, cf. I, 3: 16). Paul's indiscriminate use of the word σῶμα, body or person, to refer to the individual Christian as well as to the corporate body, is undoubtedly purposeful (I, 6: 15-20).

Furthermore, Paul affirms that a redemptive ransom-price has been paid for "the body" (I, 6: 20; cf. also I, 5: 7, "Christ our passover was sacrificed" having as its background the case of incest). This places sexual ethics in an entirely new light, i.e. in the sphere of the stewardship of the gospel. Neither the individual Christian

<sup>14</sup> It may be significant that the same connection between recognition and mission is found also in the gospels (Matt. 28: 16-20; Luke 24: 36-49; John 20: 19-23; 21: 15-17). Mark alone has no resurrection appearance and thus no commission or mission expressed at the end of his gospel.

<sup>15</sup> Otto A. Piper (*Christian Ethics*, p. 30) feels that Fletcher's approach is built on a vague concept of what love really is.

nor the gathered church are called upon to make mere *ad hoc* decisions in given situations. The sanctuary belongs to God. Thus, responsible decisions with reference to what is moral or immoral are to be made in the full consciousness of God's ownership of the body and its consequent holy nature. The church cannot afford to allow the complexity of sexual ethics today to divert it from its true base of action. The basic question which the church and the individual believer confront is not: What shall I do in this situation, not even, How shall I seek the welfare of my neighbour whether I like him or not? (cf. Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 119), but, How shall I, individually, and the church, corporately, be the sanctuary which belongs to God and act responsively as the purchased possession of Christ?

B. *Situations where Paul speaks as a responsible steward, but not through a directive from the gospel nor from Jesus.* In these cases, Paul speaks *kata tēn emēn gnōmēn*, "according to my opinion" (I, 7: 40).

The issue, of course, may be "mixed." One such situation is the relief offering (II, 8: 9). On the one hand, the offering may indeed show a soteriological (II, 8: 9) or eschatological (cf. Rom. 15: 25-33) perspective<sup>16</sup> and thereby represent God's inexpressible gift (II, 9: 15) in the gospel. On the other hand, Paul's letters to Corinth reveal his personal and practical concern for the poor saints in Judea. Thus he feels free to state unequivocally how the church should be involved with him in gathering the collection. Ultimately, however, Paul claims that his concern for the Relief Fund is not an order to be obeyed (II, 8: 8) but an opinion to be weighed (II, 8: 10). Accordingly, the direct instructions found in his first letter (I, 16: 1-2—"Follow my directions . . . Every Sunday . . . put aside . . . a sum," *NEB*) are revised and mitigated in his second letter (II, 8: 10—"Here is my considered opinion on the matter," *NEB*).

The question of food offered to idols (I, 8: 1-11: 1) opens up another problem area. The phrase "according to my opinion" is not found in Paul's discussion but he *does give* his opinion. To our surprise, he does not appeal to the decree of the Jerusalem council that Gentile Christians should abstain from idol meat (Acts 15: 29). To be sure, the letter containing the decree was sent to churches

<sup>16</sup> O. Cullmann senses that the total message and ministry of Paul are eschatologically oriented. Cf. "Le caractère eschatologique du devoir missionnaire et de la conscience apostolique de S. Paul" in *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses*, 16 (1936), pp. 210-245, and *Christ and Time*, pp. 163-167. J. Munck makes a strong case for a particular eschatological emphasis in the relief offering. He thinks that Paul saw the offering as the act that would trigger the conversion of all Israel (Rom. 11: 26). Cf. *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, chap. 10, especially pp. 301-308.

in Syria and South Galatia before Corinth had received the Word. But, as Paul faces the same question in Corinth, why does he not simply appeal to the Council decree? Was he uneasy with a "church" ruling? Possibly so. His commitment to Christian freedom may have made him unwilling to subject a newly-formed Gentile church at Corinth to a ban on meat that had been offered to idols, especially a ban imposed by a Jewish-Christian body in Jerusalem. But what is Paul's opinion in the matter? Strangely enough, his opinion lacks precision. It varies according to the circumstances; "Eat," he says, "for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness of it" (I, 10: 25), or "Stop eating when you are in a pagan home and someone tells you the food has been offered to an idol" (I, 10: 28), or "I don't desire you to become partners with demons" (I, 10: 20, i.e. don't eat), or "If meat offends my brother, I will never eat meat" (I, 8: 13). For the Corinthian Christian who wants a simple brief answer to the problem, Paul is hardly the one to give it. Peter and James would have been much more plain and direct. Yet, Paul's intricate discussion is fascinating. He questions the shallow clichés of the church ("All of us have knowledge," I, 8: 1; "All things are lawful," I, 6: 12; 10: 23) and challenges Christians to think through the implications of their attitude toward idol food. They need to learn that genuine freedom has inherent limits (I, 9: 19), that it operates in the sphere of responsible edifying *agapē* (I, 8: 1-2), and that it recognizes in the brother for whom Christ died one who needs to be built up, not destroyed (I, 8: 11). Holy history itself teaches us, says Paul, that undisciplined freedom may result in tragedy (I, 10: 1-13). Obviously, to accept Paul's opinion as "authoritative" or "inspired" misses the real issue. If inspired or authoritative then the ruling of the Jerusalem council must have been uninspired and void of authority. Actually, both the Jerusalem decision (Acts 15) and Paul's discussion (1 Cor. 8-10) represent respectively—each for its own *Sitz im Leben*—far-reaching triumphs for Gentile freedom. Moreover, Paul's opinion apparently forced one church to think through the meaning of Christian freedom as it faced a particular problem. Thereby, providentially, the apostle has inculcated principles of Christian freedom for many a church facing many a difficult decision.

Paul faced still another challenge in the questions which the church raised about marriage. The answer in 1 Cor. 7 is "mixed"—what the Lord says and what Paul says (cf. I, 7: 10, 12). Paul does not thereby indicate that his word is on a par with the word of Jesus. He appeals to what tradition he knew from Jesus (e.g. on divorce), but then new situations developed in Corinth. He encountered, for example, the question of mixed marriages (I, 7: 12-16), a problem which the gospel itself had created (cf. Matt. 10: 34-36) and the question of the best course of conduct for the unmarried (I, 7: 25 ff.). In these questions, Paul confesses that he has no commandment of the Lord,

i.e. no oral tradition from Jesus. He simply gives his measured opinion as one who has received mercy from the Lord to be faithful (I, 7: 26). His zeal for the bachelor status (I, 7: 7, 8, 26, 32, 38) is tempered by the sober realization that each Christian has his or her own *charisma* from God (I, 7: 7, 28). Furthermore, his opinion is not unyielding in that it acknowledges no other opinion. The one who marries in the the Lord "does not sin" (cf. I, 7: 28, 36) and the one who gives his daughter in marriage does well, though—Paul thinks—the one who does not give her in marriage does better (7: 38). Hence the *gnōmē* ("considered judgment") of Paul is not rigid but flexible.

In no other place more than in 1-2 Corinthians does Paul offer so suggestive a pattern for true Christian stewardship.<sup>17</sup> As responsible Christians, we face the demand to give our "opinion" in problems that are both complex and challenging where we must speak without a clear directive from the gospel or from Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 7: 40; 2 Cor. 8: 10). How will we meet the moral problems found in the inner city, problems of a magnitude and depth unknown even to Paul? Where will we receive direction for everyday life lived out in both local and national social and political structures shot through with graft and corruption? And—to be quite blunt—how shall we be stewards of God's mysteries to the drug pusher, to the sex pervert, to the criminal, to the incurably-diseased and to the draft dodger, to the orphan and the widow, and to the one whose life has lost all meaning? In answer, two things seem quite certain; First, where we have no clear directive from the gospel, our words and actions as Christian stewards facing critical problems will not be rigid but flexible, not uniform but varied. And second, amid those problems, the gospel itself urges us to demonstrate a responsible *agapē* that edifies Christ's body and recognizes in the other person a brother or sister—actual or potential—for whom Christ died.

C. *Situations where Paul—as a responsible steward—answers charges made against his personal behaviour.* In these instances, Paul speaks *kata anthrōpon*, "according to man" or in a frank, human way. The phrase "according to man" is not actually found in such a setting but it is clearly implied. Compare, e.g. "What I speak, I do not speak according to the Lord but, as it were, in foolishness" (II, 11: 17). Three charges (all in 2 Corinthians) stand out for special mention.

(1) *The Charge of Inconsistency.* Paul made plans to visit Corinth twice, then changed his plans to make only one visit (II, 1: 15-22).

<sup>17</sup> W. Wrede, *Paul*, p. 59, saw the point clearly. The letter (First Corinthians), he says, "bears splendid witness to the circumspection, sobriety, and tact of the apostle—most of all, to his social sense."

For the announcement of a change in travel plans to be part of sacred Scriptures strikes us initially as somewhat amusing. What difference does it make, we say, whether the apostle pays Corinth two brief visits or one long visit? Do we mean, thereby, that the letters of Paul vary in their enduring significance or that portions thereof containing no theological interest may easily be omitted? Even if the apostle were criticized for changing his mind and felt constrained to defend himself, is not that his problem? Why spread it on the record? But, on the other hand, opposing questions vie for our attention, e.g., how important to Paul and to others was the promise which he had given? How important is it for Paul to have and to hold the confidence of the community of faith? If he vacillates between "yes" and "no" in something trivial, will this have implications in something vital? What does Paul say and why? In all frankness he tells why he made the change, which, in turn, leads him to set forth the certainty of the word which he proclaimed. Such an abrupt transition—from a disclosure about his visit to a disclosure about his message—apparently means that the apostle claimed integrity both in life and word. His change in travel plans had been clearly expressed (I, 16: 5 f.)—one visit not two—though now he shows the rationale for his original plan of two visits, a plan which he had apparently dropped before writing 1 Corinthians. The change did not result from vacillation or levity. Plummer (*Second Corinthians, ICC*, p. 33) points out that *elaphria* "lightness" (II, 1: 17) does not signify a change of mind but the "lightness of character of a man who has no mind, who makes a promise without any real intention of fulfilling it." Surely, this is not Paul for Paul claims to do what he says he will do. Obviously, he speaks "according to man," i.e. in a very human way, but he goes further. If personal integrity is at stake, he says, so is the integrity of the promises of God in Jesus Christ which Silas and Timothy and I proclaimed at Corinth. We can imagine that many of the Corinthians may not have grasped his swift transition from a promised visit to the promises of God. At any rate, the apostle should get "A" for effort!

(2) *A charge against Paul's financial policy.* To his opponents, Paul's refusal to accept financial payment from the Corinthian church showed that he was not a genuine apostle and hence, inferior to his opponents who accepted payment (II, 11: 7-15). In answering the charge, Paul speaks not according to the Lord (II, 11: 17), not even according to his personal opinion (cf. I, 7: 40) but simply as a man intent on defending his financial policy before other men. And yet, precisely in this way, the true character of the apostle appears. His irony (II, 12: 13) is tempered by a godly zeal (II, 11: 2) and love for the church that is at least known to God (II, 11: 11). Normally, he observes, parents provide for the needs of their children, not children for parents. And seeing that the Corinthians



are his children, he claims that he has neither sought nor accepted provision from them (II, 12: 14 cf. I, 4: 14-16). My defence, he claims, could be misunderstood (II, 12: 19).<sup>18</sup> But indeed, God knows what we speak for our life is in Christ. We speak<sup>19</sup> all things, beloved, in behalf of your upbuilding (II, 12: 19). And thus, what Paul speaks *kata anthrōpon*, "according to man," is not uttered flippantly since his life is always lived in God's presence and in union with Christ.

(3) *A charge that Paul's credentials are inadequate in comparison to other apostles.* Paul's answer is found in II, 11: 16-12: 21. The evidence shows that Paul did not want to write chapter 11 but was constrained to do so by the charges made against him. Moreover, from the way he begins, he is not at all certain that his discussion will be fruitful (II, 11: 1). In all frankness he admits that he does not speak "according to the Lord" but in foolishness and in boasting. He apparently takes the Old Testament proverb seriously, "Answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes" (Prov. 26: 5). From Paul's opponents the Corinthians have endured a great deal of boasting. Now they will have to endure more of the same—this time from Paul. The church hints that as Paul is compared to others he shows up poorly, but Paul claims that the opposite is true. "Are they servants of Christ? . . . I am more" (II, 11: 23). Previously (II, 10: 12), Paul had resolved not to brag about himself nor to compare himself to other Christians. Now he engages in this very practice. We immediately ask, "Why?" How can he justify doing what he said he would not do? Why does he not simply proclaim the word (II, 4: 5) and indicate its clear implications for the life of the church? Part of the answer may be found in the vocabulary he uses. The word "foolishness" occurs three times (II, 11: 1, 17, 21), the word "fool" five times (II, 11: 16 twice, 19; 12: 6, 11), while the verb "to speak as one demented" (II, 11: 23) occurs here and only here in the entire New Testament. The terms show that Paul plainly detests what he does. "He is not indulging his own vanity; he is sinking his self-respect in order to rescue them from the machinations of seducing teachers" (Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 313).<sup>20</sup> What startles us is that the various details of his boasting pertain not to his strength and success but to his weakness. And, as

18 Is the first part of the verse a question or an affirmation? This is only one small indication of the punctuation problems which plague the interpreter of 2 Cor.

19 The verb is missing, but the immediately preceding context requires this very verb.

20 It is not clear whether the "seducing teachers" were judaizing or gnostic Jews. Were the Corinthians possibly exposed to both types? Cf. C. K. Barrett, "Paul's Opponents in II Corinthians," *New Testament Studies*, 17 (April 1971), pp. 233-254.

an amazing climax to this unusual autobiography, Paul offers a "double feature"—his unheroic escape from Damascus and his illustrious experience of ecstasy in Paradise.

Above all else, the apostle's defence is honest and forthright, even though "foolish." Nagging questions, however, do emerge from it. Does he make his defence as a responsible steward of God? Does he chart a course that we should follow or are his experiences unique to him? Does stewardship require that we must be ready at all times to protect ourselves? When accused and misunderstood by others, are we to respond as Paul does, i.e. are we to elaborate on our experiences? How much misunderstanding did Hugo's Jean Valjean endure with little or no attempt to clear himself! In a way, the questions are all hermeneutical, i.e. they relate to the way we interpret or apply the Word of God. In this sense, sections A, B and C above should probably be treated in a descending order of importance. As stewards of the grace of God, we need preeminently to take the gospel as our centre (A). Moreover, even in those instances where we offer an "opinion" (B), we will need to be conscious of our stewardship to God. But the question remains, do we need to defend our behaviour or policies before others, or, what is more, are we ever to boast of our own qualifications? (C). We live in a day when proper credentials weigh heavily with us and with others. But really, are we expected—under duress—to turn the spotlight on our credentials? For Paul, the answer appears to be a qualified "yes"—"qualified", since his boasting was both distasteful to him and of dubious value to others. Apparently, then, 2 Cor. 11-12 suggests that in all seriousness we are to beware of drawing up a brief in our own behalf.

#### CONCLUSION

Our study of Pauline terminology shows that the word "apostle" is the most significant term to describe Paul's stewardship or position of trust. His stewardship as "apostle" means that he is commissioned as preacher to a Gentile world and as pastor to Gentile churches. Acts depicts Paul as the itinerant preacher: the letters reveal Paul as the anxious pastor. As Paul writes, he claims to have the Spirit of God (I, 7: 40), which claim—in its context—must surely imply some sense of "inspiration" and "authority". Moreover, his letters reveal his commitment to the gospel and to the "word" of Jesus which he has "received." On certain issues he claims that the gospel he has received points the way to the solutions of church problems. On other issues, he frankly admits that though he is the steward or servant of Jesus, he has no direct word from him. In addition, he indicates that some issues are open to more than one possible solution, e.g. food offered to idols and marriage. Furthermore, when opponents question his credentials—though he is God's

steward and responsible to him—he feels compelled to answer his opponents by boasting of his service and sufferings for Christ. His dislike of “boasting” does not suggest that portions of his correspondence may be eliminated from holy writ. Contrariwise, it suggests that he is truly man as well as apostle. For us to know him as a man with human foibles gives us a better vantage point to understand him as the apostle and steward of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, if he does all for the sake of the gospel, Paul the steward of Christ may also be Paul the fool for Christ. It is precisely in this connection that we may understand his enduring significance for our day. We are grateful for the fact that the appearance and commission of the risen Christ to Paul made him an apostle, for this means that the Acts and the Letters of our New Testament signify the continuity of the work of the risen Jesus in the world (cf. Acts 1: 1-2). We are grateful for the fact that Paul, a Jew, is especially the apostle to Gentiles, for most of us belong to the Gentile world. But even more than his apostleship, we are grateful for his total devotion to the gospel which was entrusted to him. His sharp irony (e.g. II, 12: 13), his “foolish boasting” (II, 11: 17), even his hermeneutical method (I, 9: 9), do not embarrass us nor do we eliminate them from the record. All are bound up with his commitment and his commitment is total. He is the disciplined runner intent on receiving the incorruptible prize. He invites the Corinthians and us to enter the race in order to obtain the same prize (I, 9: 24).

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