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“After Paul Left Corinth” Bruce W. Winter  
Book Review

NT 550 The First Epistle to the Corinthians - 10/18/06  
Dr. Eckhard J. Schnabel

Throughout his book, "When Paul Left Corinth," Bruce W. Winter wanted to help his readers understand what happened to the Christian community after Paul's first visit to Corinth. It seemed many of the problems that Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians were cultural issues of the Corinthian people. This book presents a perspective and understanding of the Corinthian peoples' response and conversion to Christianity in regards to their traditions and culture. They had baggage or issues that they had to deal with since becoming Christians due to the culture. Winter also reviews the social changes that occurred in the city of Corinth between Paul's departure and the time he received their letter as well as verbal reports. This book shows that Paul did not deal with every problem when he was visiting Corinth that he dealt with in the book of 1 Corinthians. All of the research that Winter provides gives a better understanding of the context and reasoning behind why Paul addressed the issues he did in 1 Corinthians.

In the beginning of his book Winter shows how the Corinthian culture shifted into a Roman culture and worldview. After the battle between Rome and Corinth in 146 BC the city of Corinth was completely destroyed and all of its wealth and treasures were taken by Rome. Then in 44 BC Corinth was founded by Rome and thus began the cultural shift of Corinth. This is the beginning of the time frame when Winter provides detail to help explain the cultural influences.

During this time Roman styled structures were erected rather than classical Greek structures. Winter states that Latin inscriptions were found from the first century, which is typical for a Roman colony of that era. Also as a sign of social change in Corinth, there were Roman events added to the Greek games at Isthmia and restoration work and new housing for athletes was done in the Roman style. Winter states that magistrates would not speak to Greeks directly and Greeks had to speak through an interpreter. Winter takes his point further that Corinth was a Roman colony by the recent evidence of the Argive petition from the first century, which shows Corinth's adherence to Roman law and customs. The Argive petition shows Corinth's loyalty to Rome and is great evidence that the Roman culture was dominant in Corinth during the time of Paul. Corinth was transformed and built as a new Roman city. These social, ethical, as well as external

changes occurred and influenced the Corinthian believers and naturally led to skewed thinking on moral issues for the Christian. After Paul left difficulties arose in maintaining a Christian community in this cosmopolitan city partly because, as Winter states, the Christians were citizens of this “world” and citizens or residents of the Roman Corinth “world.”

In the beginning of his book Winter gives three arguments why the problems arose in the Corinthian Christian community after Paul left. One argument was the external influence of Gnosticism. This argument however diminished quickly as Winter states that there was no evidence for the movement at the time when 1 Corinthians was written. The second argument for the reason of divisions and problems arising in Corinth was that Paul himself created the problems by the way he taught the believers during his first visit to Corinth. Some would argue that it was the younger more enthusiastic Paul in his new faith teaching with an unguarded emphasis on “Christian freedom” during his first visit to Corinth. Later then, in 1 Corinthians Paul gives a more conservative stance on issues and modifies the extremes that the “younger” Paul taught. The last argument is that the Corinthian believers justified their lifestyle from the teachings of Jesus they heard of without the foundation of truth. However, they did the exact opposite of what Paul taught. Justifying their immorality at the same time advocating Christian morals in another situation. In all of this the Corinthians had a dilemma in hand. There was a new teaching of how to live for God. The teachings of Paul and Christ were a calling out into a radical lifestyle change for the Corinthian people. To help explain further the conflicts and ethical dilemmas that the Corinthian believers had when Paul left, Winter covers in more detail the secular ethics of that time.

Winter addresses many issues that were common to the Roman culture and that indeed influenced the mind of the Corinthian believer. The relationship between teacher and pupil was an issue. In the Roman culture the pupil was “owned” by the teacher. Competitiveness between teachers was something to be expected as well as the emphasis on merits. Exclusive loyalty of the pupil to a specific teacher was part of the Corinthian thinking, which was founded in the

Roman culture. This is why in the first couple chapters of 1 Corinthians Paul focuses on reshaping their thinking that faith was about the message not the messenger. Also, the people of Corinth were swayed in the way they judged what was a crime or not by the influence of Roman law. There were some forms of incest that may or may not be considered a crime depending on the distinctions of exactly who was involved in the act. Again, Paul is up against this thinking as he addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians 5. The social status of a person, which was stressed in the Roman worldview, was a factor that influenced people in Corinth's view of allowing someone to get away with doing an immoral act or not. Under Roman law there was a double standard that operated in favor of the elite in the Roman society. Winter points out that the boasting in 1 Corinthians 5:2 could be done because of this mind-set. This was also the view of homosexuality in Rome as well. Winter mentions that it was accepted for a Roman citizen to have homosexual relations with a non-Roman citizen, but if it was the other way around it was rejected by Roman law.

The different philosophical views of the time in Corinth were also influential in ethical norms. Philosophical justification for behavioral lifestyles was a factor that Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians especially when he states, "Everything is permissible for me but not everything is beneficial..." (1 Corinthians 6:12). Paul challenges the thinking that a right is not the sole criterion in determining one's conduct. Winter also mentions that Paul had to attack the philosophy of indulgence of one's body because the Roman mind-set had no concept of the resurrection of the body. They believed it was only the soul that gained immortality and it was encouraged that the mortal life/body must gain as much pleasures now, whether that included some form of degrading the body or not. Paul again was counter-cultural when he proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 15:33 and 6:14 to the Christians not to be misled that the body will rise to immortality for all those who are in Christ. Again, Winter brings an understanding of the culture by explaining the meaning behind the head coverings for men and women. In the Roman culture covering the head by their togas was done in local pagan rituals and if this was done while praying as a Christian it would associate them with the pagan rites. Paul wrote against doing such things in 1 Corinthians 11 as

well as women not having their head veiled or covered. Winter proves that the Greek word for woman in 1 Corinthians 11 is wife. The reason why Paul instructed wives, as Winter explains, to have their head covered was to let others know that they were married, which would keep them pure in a Roman culture that would indulge in adulterous acts.

Winter proceeds with how the culture infiltrated believers and describes how the degrading of the Lord's Supper occurred, of which Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 11. It was because of how the Corinthian believers embraced and accepted the convention of private dinners in secular Roman culture and applied it to the Lord's Supper. The dinner that was instituted by the Lord was never to be associated with the culture of Corinth in the first century in regards to drunkenness, overindulgence, or ever to be considered as a "private dinner." These of course were a part of dining ethics in Corinth.

Winter gathers great insights from relevant sources and materials to give the reader a much broader view of the first century Roman colony of Corinth. Winter shows how the role of the culture played a significant part in Corinthian Christians, which led to the writings of Paul in 1 Corinthians. There were many difficulties that arose from cultural influence that Paul addressed. Many of which I was not able to review in this paper. Winter explores how even social change, such as introduction of a new federal imperial cult, severe grain shortages and others in Corinth affected the Christian community after Paul left. These cultural and social factors that Winter addresses impacted the emerging Christian community of the city of Corinth and we gain a better understanding of what Paul was facing as he wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians.