Chapter One

A Critical Review of Recent Scholarship on the Problems
Paul Addresses in 1 Corinthians 1-4

In recent Pauline scholarship there is a wide range of scholarly opinion about the reconstruction of the Corinthian situation and Paul’s relationship to it. Part of the problem is to identify who Paul’s ‘opponents’ were in 1 Corinthians and to describe what they based their wisdom (sophia) on. Pauline scholars have hotly disputed these issues for decades. Among the major hypotheses about Paul’s ‘opponents’ and their viewpoints are the following, summarised by the catch phrases: ‘over-realised eschatology’ (postulated by Albert Schweitzer, N.A. Dahl, P.H. Towner, B.J. Oropeza, Anthony C. Thiselton, and John L. Higeli), ‘proto (or incipient)-Gnosticism’ (proposed by Walter Schmithals, Ulrich Wilckens, Dieter Georgi, Hans Conzelmann, Charles H. Talbert, Frederick F. Bruce, Elaine H. Pagels, and Todd E. Klutz), ‘Hellenistic Jewish wisdom tradition’ (Birger Albert Pearson, James A. Davis, and Richard A. Horsley), ‘the Petrine party’ (F.C. Baur, Gerd Lüdemann, and Michael D. Goulder), and ‘rhetorical conventions or patterns’ (Bruce W. Winter, Peter Marshall, Timothy H. Lim, Stephen M. Pogoloff, Ben Witherington III, Duane Litfin, Joop F.M. Smit, Mark D. Given, and Richard B. Hays).¹

¹In addition to the mainstream of scholars, there is a minor group of scholars who hypothesise that the identification of the Pauline opposition lies in ‘Jewish apocalyptic thought’, though their hypothesis has much in common with those of ‘Hellenistic Jewish sapiential tradition’, especially in terms of the examination of Jewish literature as shown below. For a detailed explanation of this position see Alexandra R. Brown, The Cross & Human Transformation: Paul’s Apocalyptic Word in 1 Corinthians (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); cf. Robin Scroggs, Christology in Paul and John (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); “Paul: Sophia and Pneumatikos,” NTS 14 (1967-68) 33-55. Brown analyses Jewish literature in detail, such as Sirach, Baruch, Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo of Alexandria, and apocalyptic literature such as 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and Qumran literature (1QH 1:11-13; 21; 4:27-28; 1QS 4:19-26; 5:21;
Some scholars such as Hurd and Mitchell avoid mentioning Paul’s Corinthian ‘opponents’ at all. Mitchell doesn’t state her position on the opposition to Paul, but asserts that 1 Corinthians should be understood as “Paul’s response to Corinthian factions, not opponents.” In addition to Mitchell, Hurd claims that there is no evidence of the existence of ‘opponents’ who came into the Corinthian Christian ekklēsia from outside, for instance, like teachers of gnostic thought, and who attacked Paul and drew the Corinthians away from him.

Aware of the existence of such scholarly views, in the following section I will examine carefully and evaluate critically the major scholarly positions on the Pauline opposition and the basis of their sophia using the headings listed above. I will then suggest what seems to me to be the most persuasive hypothesis to give an appropriate explanation for these matters.

6:14; 9:17; 11Qpsa 18:3; 19:2 (Brown, Transformation, 36-64). She asserts that in 1 Corinthians there is terminology which reflects apocalyptic thought such as the “Wisdom of God versus Wisdom of this age” (Sophia tou Theou versus Sophia tou Aïōnos Tountou) (2:6-8), “mature/perfect” (teleioi) (2:6), ‘see’ (eidon) and ‘hear’ (akouo) (2:9), “Spirit of God versus Spirit of the World” (Pneuma tou Theou versus Pneuma tou Kosmou) (2:10b-14), “the revealing power of God (apokalypsis Theou) (2:10), “the psychikos versus the pneumatikos” (2:14-15) and “the mind of Christ” (nous tou Christou) (2:16) (Brown, Transformation, 105-148). She thus suggests that Corinthian sophia was grounded in Jewish apocalyptic teachings. In my argument, however, Paul’s opponents’ perception of sophia was rooted in Greco-Roman rhetorical patterns more than Jewish apocalyptic thought. This argument will be firmly defended in the following chapters. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that R. Hermès explores similarities of rhetorical elements between 1 Cor 3 and 1 Enoch 50 (Ronald Hermès, “Being Saved without Honour’: A Conceptual Link between 1 Corinthians 3 and 1 Enoch 50?,” JSNT 29 [2006] 187-210).

2Mitchell, Rhetoric of Reconciliation, 302.

3In the early 20th century Kirsopp Lake and Morton S. Enslin characterised Paul’s ‘opponents’ as the ‘spirituals’, ‘denying that they are ‘Judaizers’. Rudolf Bultmann, Ernst Kasemann, and Erich Dinkler saw them as reflecting a ‘Hellenistic and mystic ‘pre-Christian Gnosis’.” On the other hand, Hans-Joachim Schoeps put an emphasis on “the Jewishness of Paul’s ‘opponents’ at Corinth,” and Jacques Dupont especially regarded their wisdom as deriving mainly from “charismatic Jewish-Christians from Palestine” (J.C. Hurd, The Origin of 1 Corinthians [London: SPCK, 1965], 107).
1.1 Over-Realised Eschatology

The hypothesis that some Corinthian Christians were subject to an over-realised eschatology is still employed and defended by many scholars such as P.H. Towner, B.J. Oropeza, A.C. Thiselton, Christopher Mearns, and John L. Hiigel. Such scholars interpret the opposition to Paul in 1 Corinthians in terms of the consequences of an over realised eschatological outlook, and I will evaluate the work of A.C. Thiselton as the best and most recent exponent of this viewpoint.4

Thiselton, based on the works of predecessors like Albert Schweitzer and N.A. Dahl, presents his argument that the Corinthian eschatological enthusiasts misunderstood Paul’s teaching of a partly realised eschatology which stressed both the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ as equal in importance. They thus misinterpreted it as an ‘over-realised eschatology’, over-emphasising the ‘already’ and neglecting the ‘not yet’. On this basis they justified their behaviour such as the eating of meat offered to idols (8:1-13), sexually immoral conduct (6:12-20), the self-interpretation of the Lord’s Supper as feasting and revelry (10:14-33; 11:17-33, esp. 21-22) and of understanding of the resurrection as having fully and finally taken place (15:1-58).5


According to Thiselton, a futuristic eschatological perspective is clearly evident in the Pauline language of 1 Corinthians 1-4,\(^6\) which Paul wrote particularly to counteract the Corinthians who adhered to an over-realised eschatology. Paul employs this future eschatological viewpoint in speaking of “the assessment of individual ministers” in chapters 3-4 in particular.\(^7\) In support of this, Thiselton cites the following texts:

So do not pronounce judgment on anything before the proper time, until the Lord comes, who will shed light upon the hidden things of darkness and will disclose the hidden motivations of our lives. Then (tote) will recognition come for each from God (4:5). The work of each will become apparent, for the Day shall reveal it (3:13a)...the fire will test what kind of work each has done (3:13b). Each will receive (lēpsetai) their reward in accordance with their own labour (3:8b).\(^8\)

Such examples affirm for Thiselton that Paul criticised the Corinthians who over-emphasised the ‘already’ and neglected the ‘not yet’ and that he reminded them that the last days and the day of the Lord’s judgment had not been revealed yet (e.g. 4:3-5).\(^9\)

Thiselton further asserts that Paul inserted a futuristic eschatological perspective in tackling the Corinthians’ catchwords of “power (dynamis), discernment (anakrinō), especially wisdom (sophia, 1.18-2:16, 3:18-20, 4:10) and spirituality (pneuma, 2:10-3:4).”\(^10\) Arguing against the Corinthians who identified with these catchwords and preferred an over-realised eschatology, Paul instead stressed “a less finished but more

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\(^6\)Thiselton claims that “the main issue in 1 Corinthians 1-4 turns not in the first instance on questions about wisdom as such, but upon the Corinthian’s attitudes towards ministry. Questions about the communication of wisdom and about divisions which revolve around chosen personalities are discussed within this framework” (Thiselton, “Realised,” 513). In this regard I disagree with him, because in chapters 1-4 Paul primarily deals with the issue of sophia which caused divisions among the members in the Corinthian congregation (for a detailed explanation see 1.5 below).

\(^7\)Thiselton, “Realised,” 514.

\(^8\)Thiselton, First Corinthians, 295-96, 318.


\(^{10}\)Thiselton, “Realised,” 514. Surprisingly, Thiselton doesn’t mention the word schismata (1:10), though it is one of the most crucial words in 1 Corinthians 1-4.
dynamic perspective of being on the way to salvation (sozomenois, 1:19)."¹¹ On the basis of such observations, Thiselton believes that Paul emphasised this futuristic eschatological perspective in the writing of 1 Corinthians 1-4, precisely because he wished to correct the Corinthians who adhered to an over-realised eschatology.

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 1:7 Thiselton affirms that there is evidence of over-realised eschatology and neglect of the double perspective of ‘already’ and ‘not yet. In the phrase “wait for the public revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” at 1:7 Paul insists that for Christians, especially the Corinthian Christians, all has not yet arrived or been revealed, so that they have to wait for the revealing of Jesus Christ.¹²

In 4:8-13, according to Thiselton, Paul speaks explicitly of such an over-realised eschatological tendency in the Corinthian congregation. Some of the Corinthians or the “strong” (4:10; cf. 1:27) mistakenly behaved or acted as if they had already arrived or been filled. So they looked down on the apostles as well as the others or the “weak” (4:10; cf. 1:27) who seemed still to struggle in situations of difficulty, hardship, danger, and conflict (vv. 11-13).¹³

Moreover, Thiselton convincingly argues that the word ἐδέ used in 4:8 is a definite signal of the Corinthian adherence to an overly realised eschatology, particularly in conjunction with the phrase “without us” (chōris hēmōn). Borrowing Schrage’s idea, Thiselton then understands the word ἐδέ in close relation to the themes of resurrection (e.g. 1 Cor 15) and the Holy Spirit (e.g. 1 Cor 12). He claims that here Paul points out the Corinthians’ over-emphasis on “triumphalism” as “the illusion of the enthusiasts”

¹¹Thiselton, “Realised,” 514.
¹²In this regard Thiselton refers to Oscar Cullman and George E. Ladd’s arguments (Thiselton, First Corinthians, 99).
¹³Thiselton, First Corinthians, 99.
and on the Holy Spirit, so that they overlook “the realities of continuing sin and struggle and the need for discipline and order.”\footnote{Thiselton, \textit{First Corinthians}, 358.} They behaved, as if “the age to come” had already been consummated and they “had already taken over the kingdom (Dan 7:18).”\footnote{Thiselton, \textit{First Corinthians}, 358.} Likewise, in their thought or mentality there is only the perception of the ‘already’ of realised eschatology, not of the ‘not yet’. In reaction to them, Paul affirms that the victory has not yet come to them as a fulfilled reality.

For these reasons, Thiselton goes on to argue against the oft-stated claim that only at 4:8 in 1 Corinthians 1-4 as a unit is there seen a glimpse of the over-realised eschatological viewpoint.\footnote{“Already (ēdē) you are filled! Already (ēdē) you have become rich!” (4:8a) (RSV).} He states that “it is quite misleading to imply that in the first four chapters this perspective can be found only at 4:8,”\footnote{Thiselton, “Realized,” 515; \textit{First Corinthians}, 357.} since there is clear evidence of the Corinthian tendency to an over-realised eschatology and of Paul’s correction of their misunderstanding of his teachings.

In spite of Thiselton’s repeated emphasis of this position, there are clear criticisms to be made at several points. First, as mentioned earlier, Thiselton sees the main theme of 1 Corinthians 1-4 as the problem of the Corinthian attitude towards ministry. Within this framework, he argues, the issues of \textit{sophia} and divisions (\textit{schismata}) have to be discussed. I disagree with him on this, because the matter of ministry is addressed only in the third chapter of 1 Corinthians as a whole. And this matter rather has to be understood in terms of the broader issues of \textit{sophia} and schism which are widespread throughout 1 Corinthians 1-4 (e.g. \textit{sophia}, 1:18-25; 2:1-13; 3:18-20; 4:10; \textit{schismata}, 1:10-12; 3:1-4, 22; 4:6). In the first four chapters, I will argue, Paul

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14}Thiselton, \textit{First Corinthians}, 358.  
\textsuperscript{15}Thiselton, \textit{First Corinthians}, 358.  
\textsuperscript{16}“Already (ēdē) you are filled! Already (ēdē) you have become rich!” (4:8a) (RSV).  
\textsuperscript{17}Thiselton, “Realized,” 515; \textit{First Corinthians}, 357.}
mostly deals with the Corinthian misuse of rhetorical conventions in which the understanding of *sophia* is of importance, and which underlie the *schismata* in the Corinthian congregation.\(^{18}\)

Secondly, Thiselton understands the Corinthian behaviour as shaped particularly by their catchwords: power (*dynamis*), discernment (*anakrinō*), wisdom (*sophia*), and spirituality (*pneuma*).\(^{19}\) With respect to this understanding, I argue that rather than re-focussing the Corinthians on what will happen in the future, especially “at the eschaton,” Paul drew attention to what had in fact been happening in the Corinthian congregation at the time of his writing.\(^{20}\) Consequently, as described in 1 Corinthians as a whole, Paul addresses practical and growing problems such as internal schisms, social hierarchies, patron-client networks, underlying Greco-Roman rhetorical understandings, and ethnic discrimination. In this respect the Corinthian catchphrases can best be interpreted as being addressed predominantly from a present-time perspective rather than a futuristic eschatological perspective. In other words, these are best seen as factors which caused the disturbances and factions within the Corinthian community at Corinth and that Paul addresses in the present, rather than from the renewed perspective of a futuristic

\(^{18}\)For a detailed explanation see 1.5 below.

\(^{19}\)Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 514.

\(^{20}\)Cornelia Cyss Crocker, *Reading 1 Corinthians in the Twenty-First Century* (NY; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 93. In emphasising the Pauline balance between ‘now’ and ‘not yet’, I basically agree with Crocker’s “aporetic approach” in reading 1 Corinthians, which “focuses on what is and remains tensive – tensive in an irreconcilable and irreducible way.” She claims that this approach is “different both from a dialectical perspective that seeks to mediate between opposing positions and from a thinking in terms of dichotomies and binary opposites that leaves any contradictions standing” (Crocker, *Reading 1 Corinthians*, 41). She uses aporia not in the NT sense, but in a postmodern hermeneutical sense.

Regarding Paul’s eschatology in 1 Corinthians, Crocker argues that it is partly realised and partly futuristic. So his eschatology “represents a middle way between these two extremes” (Crocker, *Reading 1 Corinthians*, 91 n.153). She says that in reading 1 Corinthians we readers need to find “new possibilities from the world of the text for (our) world in front of the text. As such, the text is more for (us) than a window into the Corinthian setting; (we) also allow it to function as a mirror of (our) own world and to challenge (us) to understand (ourselves) and (our) world in new ways” (Crocker, *Reading 1 Corinthians*, 46). Similarly in this thesis I attempt to re-read or re-interpret the text of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in terms of my own Korean-Confucian Christian context (see Chapter Four).
eschatology. Clearly Paul retains a future dimension to his eschatology, but the re-
assertion of this is not, in my view, his over-riding concern in 1 Corinthians. Paul’s 
concerns are predominantly ecclesiological rather than eschatological.

Third, as stated earlier, Thiselton asserts that the use of the word ἔδě (“already”) 
particularly at 4:8 points to an over-realised eschatology at Corinth. The word ἔδě occurs 
4 times in 1 Corinthians as a whole (twice in 4:8; once in 5:3; once in 6:7). Apart from 
4:8, the other references don’t have any hint of the over-realised eschatology in their use 
by Paul. Therefore, it would be unwise to interpret in terms of this perspective only the 
problems or issues as described in the whole book of 1 Corinthians, and particularly the 
problems of schisms and the matter of sophia in chapters 1-4.

Hays also rejects this position, remarking that “the over-realised eschatology 
hypothesis rests on only the scantiest evidence” in 1 Corinthians as a whole. Moreover, 
he denies that in 4:8 there is any evidence to support the over-realised eschatological 
view, but there is rather a close link with “philosophy and rhetoric.” In agreement with 
Hays, I agree that this over-realised eschatological view doesn’t give a persuasive 
explanation for the issues surrounding schisms and sophia in 1 Corinthians 1-4, although 
it may be possible to see a glimpse of it in 4:8 because of the sarcastic use of the word 
ἔδě (“already”) by Paul.

The limits of using over-realised eschatology as an explanation for the Corinthian 
problems are thus exposed. A social and rhetorical analysis, however, is better able to 
provide an adequate explanation for the social consequences of sophia as addressed in 1 
Corinthians 1-4. This is because in the Pauline language of these chapters there is a lot of

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evidence that Paul’s ‘opponents’ were influenced by rhetorical and sophistic conventions. They valued highly sophia and its equivalents, like sophia logou (which is translated as ‘eloquence’), because in the rhetorical situation of first century Corinth those people who possessed sophia and eloquence were understood as being well educated, of a high level of intellect, and ranking high in the social hierarchy (e.g. 1 Cor 1:26-31; 2 Cor 1:13-17). In reaction to such thoughts, however, Paul put a heavier stress on Christ the wisdom (sophia) of God than the social and cultural values of sophia and eloquence (e.g. 1:18-24).

1.2 Proto-Gnosticism

The Gnostic hypothesis was initially formulated by Wilhelm Lügert in 1908. Then its more influential and bolder formulations were made by Walter Schmithals and Ulrich Wilckens in the second half of the 1950s. Between the 1960s and 1980s this hypothesis was advocated and modified by such New Testament scholars as Hans Conzelmann, C.K. Barrett, Dieter Georgi, Charles H. Talbert, Frederick F. Bruce, and Elaine H. Pagels. Of them, such scholars as Conzelmann, Talbert and Bruce were more careful to describe Paul’s ‘opponents’ in 1 Corinthians as “proto (or incipient) Gnostics,” because

22 For a detailed explanation see 1.5 below.

it is anachronistic to name them Gnostics when Gnosticism proper appeared from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century CE onwards rather than in the days of Paul.\textsuperscript{24}

Subsequently, this general proposal (the Gnostic Hypothesis, or GH) was criticised and modified by a number of scholars, notably Gerd Theissen, who asserted that Paul’s epistles, especially 1 Corinthians, could be interpreted much more persuasively in terms of a sociological perspective. Although Theissen himself went on to formulate a version of the GH, he provided a helpful social corrective to an overemphasis on the history of ideas in the study of Corinthians.\textsuperscript{25} Together with this lack of social context, the most telling reasons for recent scholarly objections to the GH approach were the “uncertainties both about the boundaries of Gnosticism itself and its existence prior to the second century.”\textsuperscript{26}

Despite such scholarly objections, in recent Pauline scholarship there continue to be modifiers of this perspective. Amongst them, Todd E. Klutz suggests that there are significant similarities between the contents of 1 Corinthians and those of the \textit{Gospel of Philip} of the Nag Hammadi texts. These shall be more carefully investigated below. Prior to a closer examination of Klutz’s article, I will review briefly the traditional Gnostic hypothesis of Walter Schmithals and earlier modifiers of his view, particularly Elain H. Pagels.

Schmithals sees Paul’s ‘opponents’ in Corinth as Jewish Gnostics who, “(having) resided among the Diaspora, identify themselves…as Palestinian Jews…without having

\textsuperscript{26}Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 194-6. For more scholars who object to this proposal see below.
lost the inward and outward connection with the Palestinian homeland.”

With regard to the origin of Gnosticism Schmithals goes on to assert that it was “a phenomenon of the syncretism which was widespread in the period around the birth of Christ.” In addition, he contends that as “an understanding of human existence” it is older than the “religio-historical phenomenon of Gnosticism” because the idea that the Gnostic sees him/herself to be “imprisoned in this world as in an evil and alien world” and “the body as prison of the soul,” was presupposed in both “the anthropological dualism of Hellenism and the cosmological dualism of the religion of Zarathustra.”

Regarding Christology, which is a key theological issue in 1 Corinthians 1-4, Schmithals claims that “the Christology of the Corinthian ‘Christians’ expressed in the anathema Iēsous (“Jesus be cursed”) in 1 Corinthians 12:3, is a genuinely Gnostic Christology” that is rooted in Corinthian wisdom in contrast with the wisdom of God

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27 Schmithals, Gnosticism, 113-6. He says that it is undoubted that in the Corinthian community “there were Judaizers” and “Paul is dealing with Judaizers in the Corinthian epistles” (Schmithals, Gnosticism, 118-9). It seems to me that by ‘Judaizers’ he means those Jews who try to subjugate Gentile converts (or Christians) to the law, and try to make Gentiles or Gentile believers into Jews by circumcision and other works of law. This sort of understanding continues to be favoured by recent scholars such as Thomas Schreiner, Seyoon Kim, and Mark A. Seifrid (see Thomas R. Schreiner, Romans. BECNT. [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998], 162-75; Seyoon Kim, Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 22-83; D.A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume II The Paradoxes of Paul [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 21-36, 39-74).

Nonetheless, this understanding is challenged by scholars who are advocates of the ‘New Perspective’ on Paul such as N.T. Wright (N.T. Wright, Paul: Fresh Perspectives [London: SPCK, 2005], 13-20, 83-153), Terence L. Donaldson (T.L. Donaldson, Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], 3-78), and Brad H. Young (B.H. Young, Paul the Jewish Theologian: A Pharisee among Christians, Jews, and Gentiles [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997, fifth printing, 2006], 61-105). These scholars argue that the ‘old’ understanding of Judaizers can no longer be maintained in the light of the only other usages of the term referring to Gentiles who try to live like Jews by adopting or copying Jewish customs with no sense of forcing Gentile converts to be like Jews (see John M.G. Barclay, Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988], 36n.1; see also George Howard, Paul: Crisis in Galatia: A Study in Early Christian Theology [London: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 7-11, 39).

28 Schmithals, Gnosticism, 25-6.

and Paul’s gospel (1 Cor. 1-4). In their Christology Gnostics strongly rejected “a close connection between the heavenly Pneumatic-Christ and the man Jesus” and disputed that “the Messiah had come ‘in the flesh’ (1 Cor. 4:2), when they denied Jesus.” Gnostics “confessed Christ, but not Jesus as the Christ,” because the man Jesus was cursed (cf. 12:3) and crucified (cf. 2:2). On this basis it is quite understandable why Paul’s ‘opponents’ opposed Paul who was putting a strong emphasis on the crucifixion of Christ (1:23; 2:2; cf. 1:13), because of their Gnostic-oriented wisdom (sophia) or knowledge (gnōsis) that the man Jesus cursed on the cross should be separated sharply from “the heavenly spiritual being Christ.”

In a further development, based on Schmithals’ work, Elaine H. Pagels contends that Paul wrote his letters, especially 1 Corinthians, so as to make an assault on Gnosticism and to oppose Gnostic Christians and refute their claims of “secret wisdom” (sophia). Paul preached the kerygma of Christ crucified, the wisdom of God (e.g. 1 Cor 2:2; cf. 1:18-25) and warned of the coming judgement (e.g. 3:12-14). He further strongly insisted on the priority of love (agape) over knowledge (gnōsis) (e.g. 1 Cor 13) and proclaimed the resurrection of the body (e.g. 1 Cor 15). In speaking of these matters Paul intended to demonstrate his truly Christian attitude over against his Corinthian Gnostic ‘opponents’.

According to Pagels, however, rather than repudiate Paul as their most critical and “obstinate opponent,” later Gnostic writers claimed the Pauline epistles, and 1
Corinthians in particular, as “a primary source of Gnostic theology.” Pagels argues that evidence for this is found in the Nag Hammadi documents. For instance, the Naassenes and Valentinians in fact revered Paul as one of the apostles who initiated Gnostic theology. As we shall see, this partly underlies Klutz’s comparisons and conclusions.

These traditional Gnostic arguments, however, have been critiqued by other Pauline scholars at several points. R. McL. Wilson had earlier warned of the danger of reading 1 Corinthians through the eyes of second century Gnosticism. He maintained that “to speak of Gnosis in Corinth, and then to interpret the teaching of Paul’s ‘opponents’ by a wholesale introduction of ideas from the second-century Gnostic systems, is to run the risk of seriously distorting the whole picture.”

Edwin Yamauchi argues that there is no evidence to prove clearly that in the first century or before, a “pre-Christian Gnosticism” existed and, moreover, he disagrees that there would be a “fully developed Gnostic system” early enough to have influenced the New Testament writers like Paul in 1 Corinthians.

Stephen J. Chester further criticises those scholars who propose Gnostic influence upon the Corinthians by stating that they have indiscriminately mixed their sources. Chester claims that they have made a false assumption that “Gnosticism and the mystery

36Pagels, Gnostic Paul, 1.
37Pagels, Gnostic Paul, 1.
39Edwin Yamauchi, “Pre-Christian Gnosticism, the New Testament and Nag Hammadi in Recent Debate,” Themelios 10 (1984) 22-7, esp. 25. Very similarly Gordon D. Fee argues that “none of the essential phenomena of Gnosticism is present in this letter (or 1 Corinthians)” (Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 11). In addition, Carr strongly denies that there is evidence of Gnostic thought or influence in 1 Corinthians, particularly 2:6-8. He defines the archontes as human rulers such as Pilate and Herod rather than as angelic or demonic beings in a Gnostic sense. Then, he concludes that “we may no longer see any Gnostic hints behinds the obscure reference to the rulers of the age” (Wesley Carr, “The Rulers of this Age – 1 Corinthians 2:6-8,” NTS 23 [1977] 20-35, esp. 28, 35).
cults are essentially the same phenomenon.”⁴⁰ In fact, according to Chester, the two were quite different, because there are few specific references to the mystery cults in Gnostic texts, though as “the syncretistic religious movement par excellence” Gnosticism owed something to them.⁴¹

Furthermore, Peter Marshall critiques the GH in the light of Greco-Roman hospitality and conventions of friendship and enmity. He attempts to provide an alternative social explanation of the status of Paul’s enemies (or ‘opponents’) in the Corinthian epistles.⁴² He critiques strongly the hypothesis of Gnostic ‘opponents’ in the Corinthian Christian ekklēsia, because it doesn’t make sense to him that Gnosticism, which is supposedly “so central to 1 Corinthians,” is “absent in 2 Corinthians.”⁴³ He suggests rather that Paul’s enemies should be investigated not from the perspective of Gnosticism, but of “hybrists.”⁴⁴ He maintains that in order to explain, with satisfaction, the behaviour of the Corinthians, “the notion of hybris and related ideas” should be applied to the passages that have usually been accepted to have a connotation of “gnostic tendencies” (or influences).⁴⁵ This observation anticipates some of my own findings about the social consequences of rhetorical elitism in Corinth.

Consequently, it is difficult to conclude that in the Corinthian Christian community there existed clearly Gnostic thoughts or tendencies which deeply influenced the Pauline ‘opponents’ and played a critical and substantial factor in causing the

⁴⁰Stephen J. Chester, Conversion at Corinth: Perspective on Conversion in Paul’s Theology and the Corinthian Church (London; NY: T & T Clark, 2003), 223.
⁴¹Chester, Conversion at Corinth, 223.
⁴³Marshall, Enmity, 404.
⁴⁴Marshall, Enmity, 258.
congregation to be split into factions. Therefore, this traditional Gnostic hypothesis can’t be regarded as adequate to explain the social situation of 1 Corinthians and the factions caused by the Pauline opposition. More recently, nevertheless, T.E. Klutz re-investigates and defends this Gnostic proposal in another way, from a socio-cultural perspective. He initially takes ideas from both G. Theissen and Michael A. Williams.\textsuperscript{46} Ironically, these two scholars both argue against the Gnostic hypothesis in general.\textsuperscript{47}

Klutz derives from both scholars rich and significant ideas to help him reconstruct the Corinthian situation in terms of a Gnostic perspective. He seeks to re-read 1 Corinthians from a socio-cultural perspective, understanding the behaviour of Paul’s Corinthian ‘opponents’ in the light of their wider socio-cultural environment. He does this by a comparative analysis of the extant texts of 1 Corinthians and one of the Nag Hammadi tractates. So Klutz attempts to demonstrate behavioural similarities between Paul’s Corinthian ‘opponents’ or the ‘strong’ of the Corinthian Christian community and the implied author of the \textit{Gospel of Philip}, which was “probably composed in Greek during the second or third century and perhaps influenced by Valentinian circles.”\textsuperscript{48}

Furthermore, Klutz shows that there is a parallel between the usage of the Greek word \textit{gnōsis} in the \textit{Gospel of Philip} and in 1 Corinthians. He notes that several occurrences in the former echo one or another passage of the latter. For instance, there is an impressive similarity between the viewpoints on knowledge, freedom, and love in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and the \textit{Gospel of Philip} 77:15-30. The former says,

\begin{quote}
We know that all of us possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up…we are no
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{47}Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 193 n.1, 202.

\textsuperscript{48}Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 207. In his article Klutz uses the ‘implied’ author rather than ‘the author’, to avoid the historical issues surrounding authorship.
worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do…only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak…by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed…sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ…I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall (RSV).

And the latter says similarly,

He who has knowledge of the truth is a free man, but the free man doesn’t sin, for he who sins is the slave of sin…knowledge of the truth merely makes such people arrogant…it even gives them a sense of superiority over the whole world. But ‘love builds up’. In fact, he who is really free through knowledge is a slave because of love for those who have not yet been able to attain the freedom of knowledge. Knowledge makes them capable of becoming free.49

Likewise, at other points the Gnostic text has much in common with the Pauline epistle – sometimes sharing the perspective of Paul (as here), but more often the assumptions of Paul’s ‘opponents’. Hence, Klutz highlights that like Paul, the implied author of the Gospel of Philip clarifies an ambivalent perspective of gnōsis and freedom by promoting “the disposition of love over both of these possessions.”50 And as implied in the Pauline text, the Gospel of Philip denotes that those who possess gnōsis and its accompanying freedom are arrogant and do not build up others who don’t possess gnōsis. Furthermore, in at least partial agreement with Paul, the implied author of the Gnostic tractate regards “freedom as something that, paradoxically, mutates into a proper Christian servanthood when it is tempered by love for those who lack knowledge.”51 Based on the similarities between these two texts, therefore, Klutz argues that there is an analogy between Paul and the behaviour of Paul’s ‘opponents’ or the ‘strong’ in 1 Corinthians and the situation addressed by the implied author of the Gospel of Philip.

Klutz goes on to re-examine 1 Corinthians in the light of this socio-cultural approach. He describes Paul’s Corinthian ‘opponents’ as the Corinthian ‘strong’, the ‘knowers’ or the patrons. Klutz investigates their behaviour in terms of their wider civic

49Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 209.
50Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 209.
51Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 209.
social and cultural environment. He describes them as being probably ranked higher than Paul in the social pyramid and as holding most likely “aristocratic ideals of friendship similar to those espoused by Aristotle and Plutarch.”

Due to their interest in social status or position and knowledge itself the Corinthian ‘strong’ did not follow Paul’s own practice of “psychagogic adaptability.” In other words, unlike them, Paul was enthusiastic about the sharing of the gospel of Christ to all, not to them alone, and making more converts among all people regardless of social status and education (e.g. 1 Cor 9:19-23; 10:32-33, “I might win the more” in 1 Cor 9:19). He further “esteemed the cultivation of friendship with people of widely divergent types and to this end valued interpersonal adaptability over constancy and steadfastness.” In contrast, the Corinthian ‘strong’, unlike Paul, regarded more highly those friendships which could help them elevate their social status. In their mentality this elevation or promotion of social status would be achieved through making interpersonal friendships and social relationships with people of socially high standing and of superior knowledge.

According to Klutz’s argument, a similarity to such a Corinthian tendency as described in 1 Corinthians is found in the mentality and language of the implied author of the Gospel of Philip, despite his occasional similarities to Paul’s position. In a similar way to the Corinthian ‘strong’, he ranked knowledge and truth highly in a hierarchical pyramid of values and shows a steadfast commitment to them. Moreover, he understood those who possess gnōsis of the truth as superior to others who lack it. That is why he

doesn’t commend “anything like an ethic of adaptability” to people of gnōsis of the truth, but he rather urges those people who lack gnōsis to change. And he, like the Corinthian ‘strong’, didn’t show any generosity, consideration, or “protean sensibility” to other fellow Christians, but ignored their deficient views of gnōsis of the truth. Due to such similarities, Klutz claims that there is a significant analogy between the Corinthian ‘strong’ of 1 Corinthians and the implied author of the Gospel of Philip in the matter of adaptability.

Finally, Klutz goes on to raise the issue of intra-Christian strife or discord in order to present another notable analogy between 1 Corinthians and the Gospel of Philip. In these texts a similar proclivity towards intra-Christian conflict is found. Like Paul’s Corinthian ‘strong’ of high status and knowledge as addressed in 1 Corinthians, the implied author of the Gospel of Philip showed a corresponding tendency towards harmonious relations with the wider social community. Hence, he would apparently seek concord with other people in his wider social milieu. This is attested in the fact that in the voice of its implied author there is not found any sign that he experienced conflict with outsiders in the wider civic society. Rather, he displays discord or conflict with other Christians who were of lower standing in the hierarchical social structure (e.g. Gos. Phil. 55:23-31; 56:15-19; 56: 26-57:21; 66:7-20; 69:1-3; 76:17-21; 80:16-22). This experience is in accord with that of the ‘strong’ of the Corinthian congregation who had a high degree of strife and conflict with other fellow Christians. In this matter Klutz accepts Craig S de Vos’s argument that at Corinth “while there is a lack of conflict between the ἐκκλησία and outsiders there is also abundant evidence of conflict within the

56Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 211.
57Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 211-14.
Consequently, Klutz claims that on the issue of internal discord in a Christian community, there is an apparent similarity between 1 Corinthians and the Gospel of Philip.

Thus, in terms of their socio-cultural environments, Klutz compares the Corinthian ‘strong’ in 1 Corinthians and the implied author of the Gospel of Philip with particular reference to issues of knowledge, adaptability and intra-Christian discord. He then arrives at the conclusion that there is “a significantly high degree of ideological continuity between the Corinthian elites and the implied author of the Gospel of Philip” and that, in spite of “their many divergences,” the ‘strong’ of the Corinthian Christian community and the implied author/editor of the Gospel of Philip probably exhibit “very similar human types.” With these statements, Klutz argues for textual interconnection between 1 Corinthians and the Gospel of Philip and ideological continuity between the Corinthian ‘strong’ and the implied author of the Gospel of Philip.

Klutz also explores helpfully the problem of internal conflict and strife in the Corinthian congregation in the light of the social and cultural milieu of the Corinthian Christians. His insights into the ‘strong’ are also helpful for understanding the nature of the Corinthians’ improper behaviour which was closely linked with that of outsiders in the wider civic community at Corinth.

Nonetheless, I challenge Klutz’s proposal at several points. He argues that the relatively frequent occurrences of the word gnōsis (10 times in 1 Cor; cf. 6 times in 2 Cor) and its initial appearance in the greeting and thanksgiving (1:5), indicates that it is a

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58 Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 213; Craig S. de Vos, Church and Community Conflicts: the Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philiarian Churches with their Wider Civic Communities (SBLDS 168; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 214.
59 Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 215, 216.
key theme of 1 Corinthians and that it is related more directly to his audience in particular than some other concepts. This argument can be criticised at two significant points. One is that at the simple level of word statistics, the words *logos* (17 times) and *sophia* (17, and *sophos* 11 times) occur more frequently than the word *gnōsis* in 1 Corinthians. Furthermore, the word *gnōsis* appears in 1:5 for the first time and is then found nowhere until 8:1. Then, it suddenly disappears until 12:8 whereafter it occurs 3 times (13:2, 8; 14:6). In contrast, the words *logos* and *sophia* continue to appear in the first three or four chapters. Thereafter, they are missing in the following chapters as well until they occur again in 12:8 where the word *logos* is found twice. On this basis it is clear that as we interpret 1 Corinthians we should consider these three important words together and treat them as a unit and relate them directly to the situation of Paul’s ‘opponents’.

In careful consideration of such an observation, therefore, I find it difficult to agree with Klutz’s assertion that the word *gnōsis* “emerges as a salient motif in the letter by virtue of its relatively frequent repetition and patterns of occurrence.” Rather, it is better to argue that in the entire epistle of 1 Corinthians there is an underlying motif which is intimately linked to the three frequently occurring words *logos, sophia,* and *gnōsis.* In my view, that motif is closely related to the rhetorical situation of first-century Corinth where those three words were of equally great importance. Accordingly, it is likely that rather than Gnostic tendencies as such, there is a concern to address certain

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60 Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 207.
61 It is used more frequently in chapter 8 than any other chapter, where it is used 5 times (vv. 1 [twice], 7, 10, 11). Thereby, it can be assumed that particularly in chapter 8 Paul speaks of a significant and crucial matter which is closely related to the word *gnōsis.* In that particular chapter Paul had tensions with some of the Corinthians over the understateing of meat offered to idols (e.g. vv. 12, 13). Here the word *gnōsis* played a critical role in Paul’s perception of the problem.
62 Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 207.
rhetorical influence or pattern in 1 Corinthians. Moreover, Klutz himself implicitly supports this view that there is evidence of the misuse of rhetorical conventions in the Corinthian congregation. This is because he sees some of the Corinthian “wise” and “powerful” in 2:6 as having “rhetorical prowess” or “oratorical skill.” In this regard, I assume that Klutz, to some extent, seems to agree with the argument that in 1 Corinthians Paul argues against his Corinthian ‘opponents’ who misuse rhetorical skills and value highly the possession of sophia, gnōsis, eloquence and oratory rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ who is the sophia of God (e.g. 1 Cor 1:17-25; 2:1-5).

The other criticism of Klutz’s proposal is that he never deals directly with the issue of sophia in chapters 1-4, though he tackles the issue of internal conflict or schism within the Corinthian Christian community that Paul addresses predominantly in the first four chapters (e.g. 1:10-12; 3:3). In those chapters Paul clearly relates the problem of intra-Christian strife to the matter of sophia which is found here 16 times out of the total of 17 in 1 Corinthians as a whole. It can be assumed, therefore, that there was a relationship between the issues of intra-Christian conflict and the abuse of sophia in the Corinthian Christian community. Consequently, it is unlikely that the problem of intra-Christian discord can be dealt with in one way, whilst the issue of sophia is tackled in another. Both have to be treated as a single related issue. In other words, sophia must be seen as a substantial part of the problem of internal division in the Christian community at Corinth.

So in my view, Klutz doesn’t pay adequate attention to examining the problem of intra-Christian discord as implied in 1 Corinthians in relation to the issue of sophia,

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63 Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 214
although he appropriately and correctly investigates such a problem in terms of the socio-cultural environment of the Corinthians.\textsuperscript{64} In my understanding, this is because he focuses his full attention on seeking the same echoes or similarities with respect to intra-Christian conflict between the Corinthian ‘strong’ as addressed in 1 Corinthians (1:27; 4:10) and the implied author of the \textit{Gospel of Philip} rather than considering that a fundamental cause of the problem is \textit{sophia}, and not just \textit{gnōsis}.

Having examined critically the traditional Gnostic hypothesis and its more recent modification in Klutz’s argument, I would argue that a social and rhetorical analysis would provide a better explanation of the issues of \textit{sophia} and the problems of schism and social hierarchy in the Corinthian congregation.

\subsection*{1.3 Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom Traditions}

In recent Pauline scholarship on the reconstruction of the Corinthian situation and Paul’s relationship to it, Richard A. Horsley, Birger Albert Pearson, and James A. Davis come to the conclusion that the speculations of Hellenistic Jewish wisdom form the most persuasive and convincing background to explain the Corinthian situation addressed by 1 Corinthians.\textsuperscript{65} I will review critically their arguments.

Pearson argues that Paul’s ‘opponents’ at Corinth were “Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian missionaries” and their wisdom was rooted in “Hellenistic Jewish wisdom

\textsuperscript{64}Klutz, “Re-Reading 1 Corinthians,” 211-4
speculation” or “Hellenistic Jewish speculative mysticism.” Pearson focuses his full attention on the pneumatikos-psychikos terminology in 1 Corinthians 2:13-14 and 15:44-47 to understand Paul’s ‘opponents’ and his response to them. The origin of the pneumatikos-psychikos language, according to Pearson, was the Hellenistic Jewish traditional exegesis of Genesis 2:7 (in the LXX) where the Greek words pneuma and phyche occur. This exegesis is focused in Hellenistic Jewish literature such as Philo’s writings, the Wisdom of Solomon, Qumran and Rabbinic literature. According to Pearson, it is particularly due to Philo’s interpretation of Genesis 2:7 that human being is seen as “a composite creation made up of earthly substance and divine spirit,” and that humans are composed both of “the body” as “mortal” and “the mind” as “immortal” at the same time.

Similarly, the teleios-népios terminology of 1 Corinthians 2:6 and 3:1 arose from Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom speculation. Pearson says,

For Philo teleios is one who has achieved the highest religious attainments, especially ‘wisdom’. The metaphor is that of ‘adulthood’ over against ‘infancy’: Those who have achieved ‘wisdom’ have arrived at a higher plane of existence, in contrast to ‘babes’ who still need to be fed a milk diet (e.g., Migr. 28 ff). The ‘solid food’ of wisdom is for the teleioi who live according to the propensities of the ‘mind’ or ‘spirit’ within them, the heavenly nature given to Adam in creation (cf. Leg. Al. 1.90 ff; Agr. 8 ff.).

Paul’s ‘opponents’ believed that the pneumatikos (or teleios) is superior to the psychikos (or népios), and that they had the potentiality to become pneumatikoi (1 Cor. 3:1) and teleioi (2:6) by virtue of having “the divine spirit,” the logos (as in Philo) or

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67 Pearson, PNEUMATIKOS, 11-12, 18.
68 Pearson, PNEUMATIKOS, 18-23.
69 Pearson, PNEUMATIKOS, 18.
sophia (as in the Wisdom of Solomon) granted by God, and that in cultivating sophia they would “rise above the earthly and ‘psychic’ level of existence and anticipate heavenly glory.”  

On the contrary, Paul argued that “in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through sophia, it pleased God through (the crucified Christ) we preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21).

Pearson’s argument, therefore, is that the Pauline ‘opponents’ at Corinth were Hellenistic Jewish Christians whose wisdom was grounded in this Hellenistic Jewish wisdom speculation originating from Genesis 2:7. This plays the most important factor in discerning or distinguishing between heavenly or spiritual things and earthly or physical things. Accordingly, this sort of interpretation becomes foundational for interpreting those passages requiring a religio-theological perspective, for instance 1 Corinthians 15:44-54 where Paul talks about the resurrection body.

In my view, Pearson’s analysis may help us to understand part of the thinking and world view of some in the Corinthian community, but it doesn’t explain how this thinking is related to the specific range of social issues that Paul addresses in this letter. In 1 Corinthians there is clearly a wider range of issues of a more practical nature. For instance, there are the problems of internal schism and social hierarchy in the Corinthian congregation (1 Cor 1:10-4:21). These demand that we interpret the text also with reference to the social and cultural environment of first century Corinth, and not just those intersections between Judaism and the wider world of Hellenistic wisdom. Pearson’s distinctions assist in understanding part of the issue in 1 Corinthians 15, but do not seem to be fruitful for the examination of the Corinthian schisms or the other ethical

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71 Pearson, PNEUMATIKOS, 20, 39.
problems in 1 Corinthians. In this regard, a social and rhetorical hypothesis can be argued to be the most persuasive and satisfactory approach to re-construct the wider Corinthian situation of 1 Corinthians, and especially chapters 1-4.

Nevertheless, James A. Davis also asserts that *sophia* at Corinth in the time of Paul was closely linked to “some form of later sapiential Judaism.”72 Davis attempts to find analogies between the Corinthian Christians’ concept of *sophia* and Jewish sapiential traditions in later Jewish wisdom literature or pre-Christian Jewish sapiential literature. These include the book of Sirach, the scrolls of Qumran, and the Wisdom of Solomon and the Philonic literature. The most striking point in Sirach is that the content of wisdom is essentially and ultimately rooted in the Torah or the law. Thus, in order to attain to a higher sapiential level one must study the law constantly. But one needs the divine spirit to help achieve success in the full comprehension of the Torah. In this consideration, as ben Sira believed, it is the scribes only who could acquire the potentiality of becoming the sage.73

At Qumran, as in Sirach, it seems clear that wisdom finds its primary locus in the Torah in which the wisdom of God has been revealed, that there is a close relationship between the comprehension of the Torah and the obtainment of wisdom, and that the acquisition of wisdom is closely related to the assistance and activity of the Spirit of God. In the Qumran community it was believed that more understanding of the law could lead one to a “higher degree of wisdom,” and a “higher spirituality.”74 In Philo, in a similar sense as in Sirach and in the Qumran community, the wisdom-law relation and

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the wisdom-Spirit link still appear. He says further that it is an attribute of the wise person that by the help or aid of God’s Spirit he will purify his soul to be able to receive “the higher wisdom of allegory” and to experience “a mystical transport into the divine presence.” So we can see that in the later Jewish sapiential tradition in the Greco-Roman era it was a common understanding that in order to attain to a higher level of wisdom or a higher sapiential status one needed to comprehend the law and continue to experience inspiration by the divine spirit.

Davis goes on to apply such an analysis to understanding *sophia* at Corinth as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1:18-3:20. He logically and carefully demonstrates a close relationship between the nature of the Corinthian wisdom and the Jewish sapiential tradition, arguing that through such a Jewish wisdom tradition some of the Corinthians have adversely affected the community. They identify themselves as the wise (1:18-19) and as having the highest sapiential status (2:6). In response to them, Paul replaces their wisdom rooted in the Jewish sapiential tradition by the ‘christcentred’ or ‘christological’ wisdom of God, its core being the crucifixion of Christ (1:22-24). He also substitutes the “natural” person, obtaining wisdom by the study of the law (2:14), with the person receiving the Spirit of God who brings wisdom (2:12-13). Again, Davis’ work is a helpful explanation of the general background of *sophia* in Hellenistic Judaism, which is particularly related to the Torah, and how this might impact on Hellenistic Jewish Christians in Corinth.

Nonetheless, Davis’ proposal can be criticised at the same point as Pearson’s, in that he crucially fails to present the Pauline text in its wider historical and social context.

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76 Davis, *Wisdom*, 143, 144, 147.
and especially to give a satisfactory explanation of the situation of the Corinthian factions. Critically, we may ask: To what extent can an explanation of Hellenistic Jewish wisdom help us to understand the social and ethical tensions of a mixed community in a Roman colony in Greece? In my view, for a clearer understanding of the problems of schisms (schismata) Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 1-4, we need to take into account a wider social and rhetorical perspective. This is because the Corinthian schisms were inevitably linked to the wider social and rhetorical situation of first century Greco-Roman Corinth, and especially the Corinthians’ understanding of sophia and the influence of rhetorical conventions and patron-client relations.

Lastly, just as Pearson and Davis have argued, so R.A. Horsley confidently contends that the Corinthian perception of sophia in opposition to Paul’s gospel in 1 Corinthians 1-4 is apparently rooted in the Hellenistic Judaism represented by Philo of Alexandria and the Wisdom of Solomon. According to Horsley, there are a few distinct similarities between 1 Corinthians 1-4 and the Hellenistic Jewish literature. At first glance, it is acknowledged that both in Hellenistic Jewish literature (Wis 8:8, 12-18) and the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians the Greek word sophia plays a prominent and important role. As Horsley observes, in the Hellenistic Jewish tradition ‘Sophia’ is the core and essential “agent of religion,” and moreover, it is accepted as the sole “means and content of salvation.” In 1 Corinthians it is demonstrated that the Corinthians

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80 Horsley, “Wisdom,” 228. In Philo’s treatises the equivalent Logos is preferred, but has no difference in function to Sophia in the Wisdom of Solomon (Horsley, “Wisdom,” 228; “Consciousness,” 575)
understood Sophia as being proportional to spiritual status. In other words, it seems to them that some who possess Sophia become the *pneumatikoi*, and achieve spiritual perfection, but others who don’t obtain Sophia become the *psychikoi* and are essentially different from the former (cf. 1 Cor 2:6-3:4; 15:44-45).  

Furthermore, from this *pneumatikos*-psychikos contrast Horsley attempts to find analogies between the language of 1 Corinthians 1-4 and that of Philo. He states that even though in Philo’s writings there is no actual use of the *pneumatikos*-psychikos language, Philo employs the analogous terminology of “*teleios*-nēpios” (“perfect”-“child”) which is closely paralleled to the *pneumatikos*-psychikos contrast and the distinction between “solid food” and “milk” in 1 Corinthians (3:2; 2:6-3:4; 15:44-45). In Philo the *teleios*-nēpios contrast has the connotation of different levels of “religious endowment” or “soteriological achievement,” thereby ‘perfection’ (*teleios*), just as the descriptor *pneumatikoi* (1Cor 2:13), should be seen as the spiritual perfection that is attained through the most intimate relationship with Sophia.

Finally, and more helpfully from my perspective, Horsley suggests that in 1 Corinthians 1-4 and in this Hellenistic Jewish culture, ‘eloquent (or persuasive) speech’ (*logoi sophias*) is very important. The close association of eloquent “speech” with wisdom (*sophia*) is most strikingly paralleled in the Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom-devotion…Hellenistic Jews readily fused the importance of eloquence in Hellenistic public discourse and philosophy with the high evaluation of speech in the Jewish wisdom tradition (e.g. Prov 1:2-7, Sir 6:5; 18:28-29; 38:33; 39:1-6). Most striking in connection with chapters 1-2 is Wis 8:8, 12, 18, where turns of speech and skill in public discourse are important benefits of a personal relationship with *sophia*. Philo elaborates the connection between eloquence and a close relationship with *sophia* in a number of images paralleled later in 1 Corinthians.

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82 Horsley, “Pneumatikos,” 280-1.
84 Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 47.
Philo valued highly ‘eloquent speech’ as part of God’s gifts and as necessary for spiritual perfection, and he emphasised its important role in the religious life of the wise and its proper use in communication (Mig. 70-80). For him it is an important means for the soul to express his/her intimate relationship with Sophia.\textsuperscript{85} In the Corinthian language addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4, as Horsley says, and in accordance with the Philonic idea that the Corinthians considered ‘eloquent speech’ as part of “the key gifts of wisdom” bestowed or granted on the wise (sophos), it is not surprising that they saw these gifts as an integral manifestation of the perfect and highest spiritual status (cf. 1:17, 26; 2:4-5).\textsuperscript{86} This interest in ‘eloquent speech’ foreshadows the later developments that have occurred in social-rhetorical analysis that I find even more helpful than the religio-historical analysis of Hellenistic Jewish wisdom for interpreting 1 Corinthians.

Consequently, Horsley argues that because of the Corinthians’ self-understanding of spiritual perfection, Paul sharply rejects sophia as the soteriological means (1:21-24). Instead, he strongly argues that the crucified Christ (1:23) is the foundation of salvation (1:18) and also the power of God and the wisdom of God (1:24). He rejects sophia as persuasive speech (logoi sophias) (2:1-5), and instead, he presents “the demonstration of the Sprit and of power” (2:4).\textsuperscript{87} Based on Horsley’s argumentation it seems that there are analogies between the language of Hellenistic Jewish wisdom traditions and that of the Corinthian religiosity addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Both consider sophia as the most essential factor to maintain their religious and spiritual identity. Horsley also pays more

\textsuperscript{85}Horsley, “Wisdom,” 226-7, 229, 236.  
\textsuperscript{86}Horsley, “Wisdom,” 228, 235-6.  
\textsuperscript{87}Horsley, “Wisdom,” 237. Furthermore, Horsley attempts to find the “Hellenistic Jewish background of the Corinthian polemical situation” in chapters 8-10, for instance, regarding the matter of eating of idol-meats (for details see Horsley, “Consciousness,” 574-89; “Gnosis,” 32-51).
attention than Pearson and Davis to the examination of the wider Corinthian situation in terms of its social and cultural environment or milieu.

In his more recent works Horsley shows even more interest in studying the social and cultural situation of first century Corinth. Particularly, he gives much attention to the study of the Roman imperial order and such aspects as the imperial cult, patronage and rhetoric which were the essential elements of Greco-Roman culture in the days of Paul. Furthermore, Horsley states significantly that

First Corinthians, which features so many parallels to public rhetoric, should thus be read in the context of the functions of public rhetoric in the Roman imperial order… Paul’s own arguments display a composite rhetoric. He used the standard forms and devices of Greco-Roman rhetoric.88

Thus Horsley indicates that there is clear evidence of composite rhetorical usage in the language of Paul in 1 Corinthians. This is consistent with the argument that in the Corinthian Christian community there were also influences of rhetorical patterns and conventions which deeply affected the Corinthian behaviour. Moreover, Horsley remarks that rhetorical criticism can give an adequate explanation of the Corinthians’ lives in relation to the dominant imperial order.89 It seems that Horsley has moved from his earlier position to see that ‘rhetorical criticism’ provides a more appropriate method to explain the Corinthian situation of 1 Corinthians than simply the philosophical or religio-historical category of ‘wisdom’ itself. In other words, he supports the need to investigate the Corinthian attitude towards sophia in terms of the social and rhetorical


situation of first century Corinth. This is exactly the direction in which I wish to develop my argument about 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the next chapter.

From my perspective, the religio-theological proposals of Pearson, Davis and Horsley give a persuasive and logical explanation of the Hellenistic Jewish background to sophia at Corinth as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4. These hypotheses are helpful for explaining some aspects of the causes of serious tensions within the Corinthian factions (e.g. 1:10-12; 3:4, 22) – insofar as Jews are involved – and as background to the resurrection debate (1 Cor 15). But I regard the more recent developments in Horsley’s method and arguments as particularly relevant to my investigations below.

Nevertheless, this Hellenistic Jewish sapiential hypothesis has recently faced sharp criticism from S.J. Chester who argues that this proposal has a few significant weaknesses. Chester’s criticism is summarised as follows. Firstly, as noted already, the specific pneumatikos-psychikos terminology which is considered important by Pearson and Horsley in their arguments, is found in the Pauline language of 1 Corinthians but is used nowhere in Philo’s writings. Secondly, this hypothesis “rests upon an extremely narrow exegetical base,” because its proponents attempt to interpret 1 Corinthians as a whole in the light of “a Philonic ontological distinction concerning the origins of two different kinds of humanity.” As argued earlier, this kind of interpretation may be more appropriate for interpreting 1 Corinthians 15:44-54 than the rest of the letter of 1 Corinthians. Finally, Chester challenges Pearson and Horsley when they argue that Apollos, as an Alexandrian Jew and an advocate of Philo’s view, introduced to the Corinthian Christian community his philosophical thoughts, especially his ontological

\[^{90}\text{Chester,} \textit{Conversion at Corinth,} 224-5.\]
perspectives on humanity. Chester casts doubt on such an argument with his question as to how this fits the image of Apollos as “an enthusiastic advocate concerning the things of the Spirit with strong opinions to impart,” though “Apollos knew only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:24-26). ⁹¹

Moreover, I would make the critical observation that this general Hellenistic Jewish sapiential hypothesis on its own fails to take into account the influence of the Greco-Roman social system and conventions on the Christian ekklēsia at Corinth. I will argue that the former must have had a profound impact on the latter, so that the rhetorical culture and the patronage system penetrated deeply into the life of the Corinthian Christians and became one of the direct causes of the tense relations between Paul and his Corinthian ‘opponents’. ⁹² In order to comprehend this background to the Corinthian situation and the wisdom issues addressed in 1 Corinthians, a rhetorical and social analysis is a necessary corrective to those explanations which examine sophia using religio-historical and philosophical categories.

### 1.4 The Petrine Party

In the scholarly debate over the identity of the Pauline opposition and the nature of sophia in 1 Corinthians the hypothesis of ‘Petrine’ opposition has been advocated by scholars such as G. Lüdemann, W. Wuellner, W. Carr, Y. M. Gillihan, and M.D. Goulder. This proposal was initially postulated by J.E.C. Schmidt and then developed by

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⁹¹Chester, *Conversion at Corinth*, 225.
⁹²So also Chow, *Patronage*, 38-166.
F.C. Baur one and a half centuries ago. After a careful evaluation of the arguments representative of these scholars, I will outline the major criticisms of this position.

Firstly, Gerd Lüdemann claims in a recent development re-working Baur’s proposal, that in 1 Corinthians 1-4, and more certainly chapters 9 and 15, the Pauline opposition was the party of Cephas. He argues that in such references as 1:12; 3:4, 6; 4:6 the party slogans indicate that the advocates of “anti-Paulinism” were a group who expressed their solidarity with Cephas by claiming that “I belong to Cephas” (1 Cor 1: 12).\(^9\)

On the other hand, argues Lüdemann, the slogan that “I belong to Apollos” (1:12; 3:4) doesn’t reflect any explicit polemic against Paul for the following reasons. The groups who described themselves as belonging both to Apollos and Paul identified themselves with Paul as the founder of the Corinthian Christian community. In 3:6 and 4:6 Paul describes his close relation to Apollos. Here he speaks of Apollos and himself in a positive manner since Apollos is his co-worker in building the Christian community (cf. 3:16-17), so it is doubtful that the followers of Apollos attacked Paul.

On the other hand, in 3:10-17, Paul indirectly polemicises against the Cephas party, and he explicitly mentions the name of Cephas. Paul speaks of a definite person in verses 10-17 in parallel with the proceeding context (vv. 6-9), in all probability referring to Cephas. This is certainly evident in the immediate context (vv. 18-23). In verses 22-23 in particular, Paul once again tackles the issue of the factions or divisions in the Corinthian congregation. There, alongside Apollos and himself he speaks of Cephas.

This is because he intends to polemicise against the party of Cephas which formed in Corinth after Paul’s departure.

Therefore, Lüdemann’s argument can be summarised as the view that in the Corinthian congregation there was a Cephas party which formed after his departure and that sharply criticised Paul.94 This proposal, however, has to be criticised at two significant points: on the matter of the existence of a Cephas party at Corinth, many scholars throw doubt on the claim that Cephas was present at Corinth in the days of Paul. Thus they assert that Cephas’s party was not an actual entity. Rather they maintain that the slogan “I belong to Cephas” (1 Cor 1:12) was used by Paul merely to reflect the special esteem which some Jewish Christians exhibited to Cephas as a respected Christian leader at the time.95

The other significant point is that Lüdemann himself concludes that the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians provide “the weakest indications” of an “anti-Paulinism” among the Cephas party.96 It is inevitable that he should say so, because in these chapters it isn’t clear that Paul describes the divisions in the Corinthian congregation that existed between the Pauline party and the Cephas party. He no longer speaks of the Cephas party as such after 1:12, though in 3:22 he mentions once the name of Cephas along with Paul and Apollos, as he warns the Corinthians not to boast (kauchaomai). On the other hand, Paul does explicitly speak of the party of Apollos who opposed and criticised him. This idea is attested in such verses as 3:4-5 and 4:6. Thereby, Paul possibly indicates that there were serious tensions between the followers of Apollos and those of himself, although Paul also regarded Apollos and himself as God’s fellow co-

94Lüdemann, Opposition to Paul, 75-8.
95For a detailed explanation see below.
96Lüdemann, Opposition to Paul, 78.
workers (3:9). As such then, as Lüdemann concedes, there is no clear indication of anti-Paulinism by the Cephas party in 1 Corinthians 1-4. In addition, in his proposal Lüdemann doesn’t provide an adequate explanation of the fundamental cause of the schism in the Corinthian Christian community as described in 1 Corinthians 1-4, which I see as closely related to the issue of sophia. This is one of the weakest points in his hypothesis.

Michael D. Goulder is one of the major recent advocates for the Petrine hypothesis. Goulder comes to the strong and bold conclusion, in employing Baur’s and Schmidt’s language, that the ‘opponents’ at Corinth were definitely the ‘Petrine’ (or ‘Cephas’) party. In other words, they were Jewish Christians, but a “less radical group” than the Judaizers in Galatia, because they didn’t try to “impose the law on Pauline converts and have them circumcised.”

He states correctly that for a proper interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1-4 it is a significant matter to disclose the nature of sophia at Corinth against which Paul argues, because there is a close relation between the issue of wisdom traditions and the problem of schisms (schismata), that existed in the Corinthian Christian gatherings as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1:12-17, 3:1-17 and 3:22-23.

In the Corinthian congregation, Goulder asserts, rather than three (3:22) or four groups (1:12) there were only two. One group was composed of the converts of Paul and

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97 ‘Peter’ and ‘Cephas’ are used interchangeably here in identifying the same person (Dale C. Allison, Jr. “Critical Notes: Peter and Cephas: One and the Same,” JBL 111 [1992] 489-95).
Apollos, the other comprised the followers of Peter (or Cephas) who identified as *christou* (“of Christ”). Goulder bases this hypothesis on his two predecessors, Schmidt and Baur. Goulder explains that the claim of the Petrine party regarding oneness with Christ is based on them understanding themselves as having the same authority as Peter their leader who was chosen by “the historical Christ,” so they might also say “I belong to Christ” (1:12). He goes on to argue that rather than competitors, Paul and Apollos were colleagues. This is clearly attested in Paul’s own language (3:5-9) where the phrases “I planted” and “Apollos watered” (v. 6) denote a companionship between Paul and Apollos in “working on God’s field, God’s building” (v. 9) which is the Corinthian Christian community. Thus in the Corinthian congregation the opposition must be between the people of Paul and Apollos together and the Cephas party. This is explicitly stated when Baur concludes that “the opponents of the apostle Paul belonged to one class with the adherents of the party of Peter.”

It is proposed by Goulder that this opposition or *schisma* (1:10) between the two parties is primarily rooted in the issue of apostolic authority. The Cephas party didn’t admit, in the eyes of Goulder, that Paul and Apollos possessed the full and genuine apostleship authorised from the Jerusalem church, because their teaching was so different from the gospel of Peter. Nor did they speak “words of wisdom.”

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100 Baur, “Corinthians,” 267.  
101 Goulder, *Competing Mission*, 16.  
103 Baur, “Corinthians,” 269.  
Furthermore, in Goulder’s discussion it is important to note that ‘wisdom’ (sophia) means “the Torah (or nomos, the law)” which, “written in the Pentateuch and expounded by the sages,” was “the word of God and the essential basis of salvation,” while “word” (logos) refers to “sayings,” or “rulings” by “Jewish sage(s).”105 The combined words logoi sophias make the “OT prescriptions into a practical way of life.”106 So it follows for Goulder that the logoi sophias (words of wisdom) have to do with a message of salvation for Jewish Christians in Corinth.

Goulder goes on to claim that such a meaning of sophia is drawn into 1 Corinthians 1-3. Especially, in 1:17-2:16 it appears that “the word of the cross” (1:18) in the Pauline gospel fundamentally contrasts with “words of wisdom” (logoi sophias) among the Petrine Christian leaders (1:17-18). Paul rejected “words of wisdom” and instead proclaimed Christ as the power of God and the wisdom of God (1:24), while “they spoke of the Torah as wisdom (sophia) and of the specific rulings of the sages as words of wisdom” (logoi sophias).107 In other words, Paul proclaimed “the cross of Christ” as the only way to obtain salvation, but the party of Peter claimed the “halakah” as the “means to salvation.”108 It is clear then that for Goulder there was opposition between the Petrine party (or Jewish Christians) in claiming the Torah as wisdom and the party of Paul and Apollos in proclaiming Christ as the wisdom of God.

Other scholars such as Wilhelm Wuellner and Wesler Carr also take this line. In a similar sense they both concur that there is exhibited a Jewish tendency in the Corinthian

105 Goulder, Competing Mission, 48, 89. “Where there were many Jews, as in Antioch, or Asia Minor, or Rome, Torah was naturally thought of as law; in other European cities like Corinth there were fewer Jews, and in discussion with Gentiles, as in the (Christian community), it was presented as sophia” (Goulder, “Sophia,” 522).
106 Goulder, Competing Mission, 74.
107 Goulder, Competing Mission, 89.
which Paul records in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Wuellner in particular contends that the troubles or bickerings at Corinth were caused and inspired by “halakic and haggadic discussions” which were currently prevalent in the Jewish Christian community at Corinth as elsewhere throughout the Diaspora.109

Yonder M. Gillihan asserts convincingly that the Christian gatherings at Corinth were overwhelmingly influenced by Jewish concerns and laws consistent with the Jewish community, although he is primarily interested in illicit marriage (7:12-16). This is also supported by references to circumcision in 7:18 and food purity in 8:1-6, because there were a number of prominent Jewish members becoming converted to Paul’s gospel, such as Crispus and Sosthenes who were the Corinthian synagogue leaders (1:1, 14; the same as mentioned in Acts 18:8-17). Paul, as a Jew and having known “Jewish law thoroughly, would have been able to advise concerned believers about halakic issues and to expect at least some of them to understand halakic argumentation when he made it.”110 It is likely, therefore, according to Gillihan, that Paul contrasts his gospel message with the Jewish traditional desire for miracles (and, of course, the Greek concern for wisdom) (1:22), stressing that the cross on which Christ died, as the Power of God and wisdom of God, is able to lead them to salvation (23-25).111 It appears to me, however,

109 Paul employed “Jewish literary genres” in 1 Corinthians, like “haggadic synagogue sermons which Paul had heard, hymnic traditions or wisdom psalms, popular proverbial wisdom, (and) rabbinic wisdom teaching” (Wilhelm Wuellner, “Haggadic Homily Genre in 1 Corinthians 1-3,” JBL 89 [1970] 199-204, esp. 203; Carr, “Rules,” 30-1). Carr himself admits that this hypothesis has a weak point in that there is not evidence enough to prove that the Corinthian Christians were overwhelmingly dominated or influenced by “Jewish concerns” (Carr, “Rulers,” 31). However, another scholar (Yonder M. Gillihan) strongly argues for an overwhelming Jewish influence on the Christian community at Corinth (see below).


111 Gillihan, “Jewish Laws,” 713 n.6. In addition, Richardson recently provides an appropriate explanation of the relationship between the Jewish community and the Christian community at Corinth (see Peter Richardson, “Judaism and Christianity in Corinth after Paul: Texts and Material Evidence,” in Janice
that Gilliham’s proposals pay more attention to a minority of Jewish members in the Corinthian Christian community, who adhered to their own Jewish customs and legal responsibilities and demanded signs and miracles different to the Greeks who sought wisdom (1 Cor 1:22). Consequently, Gilliham doesn’t examine the issue of the words *sophia* and *logos* in terms of the wider Greco-Roman rhetorical understandings and culture, and thereby misses the major thrust of Paul’s concern about accommodation to the surrounding dominant culture. These two words are the most frequently occurring words in 1 Corinthians 1-4 that comprises a diversity of rhetorical elements (see further below).

As analysed above, Goulder describes the issues of the Pauline opposition and of *sophia* at Corinth as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 in terms of a speculative reconstruction involving connections with Palestinian Judaism. A tense atmosphere in the Corinthian congregation was fuelled by a dispute over apostleship between the Party of Paul and Apollos, as possessing no “proper authorisation from Jerusalem,” and the Cephas party, as representatives of the Jerusalem church (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-10; 2 Cor. 10-11). Goulder also argues that there was a close relationship between the Corinthian ‘opponents’ belonging to the Petrine party and the Galatians as Judaizing Jews, because of their links with the apostle Peter (and possibly James and John) (Gal. 2.1-10). So he

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113 Goulder, *Competing Mission*, 26, 47.
maintains that ‘wisdom’ (sophia) in 1 Corinthians 1-4 has to do with the ‘Torah’ or the law (nomos) as addressed in both Galatians and Romans. \(^{114}\)

Nevertheless, this proposal cannot avoid severe criticism at some points. As briefly stated earlier, there is a growing consensus in recent Pauline scholarship that it is difficult to know whether Peter had ever been present in Corinth, \(^{115}\) and that a Peter (or Cephas) party might not have existed as a real party created by Peter in the Corinthian Christian gatherings. \(^{116}\)

Furthermore, it doesn’t make sense to me that Goulder claims that in the Christian community at Corinth there was something like a Judaizing movement, although it was less radical than the significant phenomenon in the Christian communities at Galatia and Rome. This, however, doesn’t fit the problems of the Corinthian Christian community as described in 1 Corinthians. There Paul nowhere deals with Gentiles who claimed to live like Jews, while in Paul’s language in Galatians and Romans the word ‘Judaizing’ or ‘Judaizers’ refers to Gentiles who adopted “a (characteristically) Jewish way of life,”\(^{117}\) or lived like Jews, rather than Jewish Christians who forced Gentiles or Gentile Christians to Judaize or follow their Jewish tradition. \(^{118}\) Furthermore, the issue central to


\(^{116}\)Witherington, *Conflict*, 130; similarly Hays, *First Corinthians*, 22. Some critics against this view, argue that rather than the party of Peter, Paul had a tense relationship with that of Apollos at Corinth (Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 173-96; Witherington, *Conflict*, 130-1). I agree with their argument. For a detailed explanation see the following chapters.


\(^{118}\)Dunn, *Galatians*, 9 n. 2. I tackled this matter more fully in my previous study (Oh-Young Kwon, *Works of Law (Erga Nomou): Interpretation from the New Perspective on Paul and its Evaluation in a Korean-Confucian Context* [unpublished MTh thesis, the Melbourne College of Divinity, 2004]).
Galatians and to some extent in Romans – namely circumcision – appears only in passing in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 7:18-19).

Lastly, as examined above, Goulder employs a religio-theological approach to provide an explanation of the identity of the Pauline opposition and the background of wisdom traditions at Corinth. In my argument, however, such a method is not adequate to give a satisfactory description of the social and cultural situation of Corinth in the first century Greco-Roman world. There the Roman imperial order, and characteristics such as patronage, rhetoric, and imperial cults deeply influenced the civic life of the Corinthians in the days of Paul. In my view, accordingly, it is impossible to speak of the identity of Paul’s Corinthian ‘opponents’ and the nature of their wisdom traditions which were closely related to the schism in the Corinthian congregation unless we reconstruct the Corinthian situation in its social and cultural environment. In this respect, I argue that we have to reconstruct the situation of 1 Corinthians in terms of a rhetorical and social analysis.

1.5 The Misuse of Rhetorical Conventions

The Christian ekklēsia at Corinth clearly experienced schism (schismata in 1 Cor. 1:10) and bickering (eris in 1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; zēlos in 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20)

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119The phrase ‘rhetorical conventions’ here refers to the influence of the oral expressions of wisdom on the social and secular systems of Corinth, which caused the disturbances within the Christian community. At the time of Paul’s writing of 1 Corinthians, Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions and patron-client networks were foundational in the wider civic community at Corinth. Many scholars thus view rhetorical patterns and patron-client relations as producing the tensions and movements opposing the purposes which Paul intended for the Christian ekklēsia at Corinth. The issue of patronage shall be tackled in detail in the next chapters. Here I will concentrate my attention on the nature of the Pauline opposition and the significance of wisdom traditions at Corinth and scholarly opinions about them.
caused by issues concerning wisdom (sophia). For a proper comprehension of the background of such problems, we will argue that a ‘rhetorical and social’ approach is the most appropriate method.120 This is because the factions at Corinth (e.g. 1 Cor 1:12) can best be explained and understood as resulting from the inappropriate use of Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions and patron-client relations.121 These were two of the most significant elements in first century Greco-Roman culture.122 Of course Paul himself used rhetorical conventions in order to persuade and impress his Corinthian audience (e.g. 1 Cor 1-4).123 So it is essential that we give prime consideration to a rhetorical and social perspective when we read and interpret 1 Corinthians 1-4. Furthermore, this approach holds the promise of providing an accurate description of the identity of Paul’s Corinthian ‘opponents’ and the underlying Corinthian understandings of wisdom.

This approach is also in accordance with a growing consensus in recent Pauline scholarship on 1 Corinthians. A growing number of Pauline scholars have used this social-rhetorical method to analyse the problems at Corinth as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 in particular, although, technically speaking, some scholars prefer a purely social method,124 whereas others concentrate on a rhetorical approach.125

120Witherington, Winter, Mitchell, Marshall, and Pogoloff together have led me to use this rhetorical and social method in this thesis (see below).
122For more information see Chapters Two and Three below.
123Witherington, Conflict, 45.
Amongst these scholars, Bruce W. Winter and Stephen M. Pogoloff will be examined more carefully, because their hypotheses seem to be particularly suitable for my attempt to dialogue between the biblical text of 1 Corinthians 1-4 and a Korean Confucian context, especially in terms of wisdom traditions. The dialogue I am seeking is between the value of wisdom (sophia) in the rhetorical situation of first century Corinth and that of wisdom (jeehye or sulgi) in the Korean Confucian context of our time.126


127Both words jeehye and sulgi refer to wisdom in Korean language. The word jeehye is originally taken from the Chinese word chi which means wisdom in Chinese language. The word sulgi is a true Korean word. The two words alike are used in this thesis in relation to the Greek word sophia. In the last section of Chapter One I will begin the attempt to dialogue between Winter and Pogoloff’s proposals and a Korean Confucian context.

128Margaret M. Mitchell argues distinctively that “the wisdom of the world…1 Corinthians 1:18-4:21 refers to …the norms and values of human politics” rather than religious speculations (Mitchell, Rhetoric of Reconciliation, 221). She understands the Christian community at Corinth as a political body (ekklésia), where division was caused by ethnic diversity, such as one group of Greeks and the other of Jews (1:22-24). She argues that it was not “monetary wealth and property status” but an “ethnic diversity” that was
Gooch, because their work also provides a basis for a brief comparative investigation of Korean Confucian teachings, particularly Korean Confucian ideas of wisdom, in terms of varying social models.\textsuperscript{128}

Bruce W. Winter investigates the nature of Corinthian sophia addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the light of “the sophist movement” in the first century Greco-Roman world.\textsuperscript{129} He asserts that the Pauline ‘opponents’ at Corinth were sophists and their wisdom was rooted in sophistic rhetorical conventions. In order to defend this argumentation Winter seeks to establish two major supporting theses.

In Winter’s reconstruction, first, it is important to note that the Christian community at Corinth was profoundly influenced by the secular sophistic educational conventions such as the secular “disciple-teacher relationship” and “professional

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\textsuperscript{128} Many scholars understand Paul’s ‘opponents’ and the division at Corinth using sociological methodology, where social stratification is a major concern. For example, Chester states that an inner social stratification was a significant factor in the life of the Corinthian Christian community (Chester, Conversion at Corinth, 222). In many ways such scholars base their arguments on Gerd Theissen’s contention that the Corinthian Christian ekklesia was composed of a few powerful upper status members and a majority of lower status members (Theissen, Social Setting, 69-119). So Peter Marshall argues that the Corinthian ‘opponents’ of Paul were “hybrists” who were the wealthy and powerful and belonged to the upper ranks of social strata in Corinth and “constituted the major threat to Paul’s apostolic authority in Corinth” (Marshall, Enmity, 214).

John K. Chow understands the identity of the ‘opponents’ at Corinth primarily in terms of the patronal linkages in the first century Greco-Roman world. He argues that Paul’s ‘opponents’ at Corinth were the rich and powerful patrons in the Christian community. They “who kept their contact with pagans, namely the immoral man, the litigants, and the idolaters, may have been people who by their social status within Corinth were able to exercise influence in the (Christian community)” (Chow, Patronage, 123, 130, 139).

David G. Horrell also argues that the leading people of the division opposing Paul at Corinth were among “the socially prominent members of the community” who were “the people who had cause to consider themselves wise in the world’s eyes and who sought to maintain and further their social standing” (Horrell, Ethos, 131). For a detailed description of Paul W. Gooch see below.

\textsuperscript{129} For a detailed explanation to the socio-historical background of the sophist movement in Alexandria and Corinth around the time of Paul’s Corinthian correspondence see Winter, Philo and Paul, 17-140.
competitiveness among teachers.”130 At the time of Paul’s Corinthian correspondence it was of the nature of the secular pupil-instructor relationship that students imitated not only their sophist’s oratorial and rhetorical style and accent but also his style of walking and dressing with elegant attire. Elegance in appearance was an important factor for successful orators. Students were challenged and motivated to show extreme zeal (ζῆλος) for their own sophist teacher by “demonstrating their exclusive loyalty” to him and “promoting his professional attributes (and) educative prowess.”131 At the same time they openly ridiculed and made sharp criticisms of the deficiencies of other teachers.132 Furthermore, among the sophists in first century Corinth there existed a spirit of rivalry and competitiveness, and they were full of quarrels and strife (eris) in order to attract and train a good number of disciples in their schools. This secured their public honour and guaranteed exceedingly high fees from their students.

Winter asserts that 1 Corinthians 1-4 indicates that the Corinthian Christians behaved in a thoroughly secular way (kata anthropon peripatein) (1 Cor. 3:3) in imitating and following such sophistic fashions.133 The schismata in the Christian community at Corinth reflected the influence of secular conventions in the Christian community which was overwhelmingly dominated by the secular conceptions of student-sophist relationships and a competitive spirit among sophists (1:10-12; 3:3-4). Just as the contemporary secular disciples treated the sophists, so the Corinthian Christians treated their teachers, Paul and Apollos, in a way that demonstrated their

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130Winter, After Paul Left, 31-2, 36.
131Winter, After Paul Left, 39.
132Winter, After Paul Left, 39-40.
133Winter, Philo and Paul, 173; After Paul Left, 40. This Greek phrase is interpreted as “walking in a secular way.” The concept of ‘walking’ metaphorically referred to “living” or “acting.” The phrase kata anthropōn describes “the fact that they were operating in the same way as the rest of Corinthian society” (Winter, After Paul Left, 40).
loyalty (which is closely related to zēlos and eris in 3:4) to one teacher. They also praised the rhetoric of their teacher, at the same time as they trenchantly criticised the other teacher due to his rhetorical deficiencies or inferiority and weak appearance (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 3:3-4; 4:6; 2 Cor. 10:10).134

In contrast to this, Paul describes Apollos and himself in terms of a functional and comparative working for the body of Christ rather than in terms of social status. The Corinthian Christians had imported such social status distinctions into the Christian ekklēsia from their contemporary secular Corinthian context. Instead, Paul puts a strong emphasis on exclusively belonging to Christ (3:21-23) rather than zealous loyalty to individual instructors (1:12; 3:3-4). Rather than puffing up the social elite and the promotion of professional achievement, Paul insists on different gifts and careful stewardship in building up the body of Christ. He describes Apollos and himself as labouring workers, despised in a Corinthian society influenced by Greco-Roman rhetoric, and expresses this in terms of agricultural language, i.e., planting and watering. So he declares them to be “the servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (4:1). As seen above, in 1 Corinthians 1-4 the Pauline language is definitely anti-sophistic and his ministry was conducted in absolute opposition to the sophistic conventions in which the Corinthian ideas of sophia were grounded.

Secondly in Winter’s argumentation, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 9 (which will not be tackled fully here) are significant evidence of the anti-sophist nature of Paul’s writings.135 In 2:1-5 Paul attempts to differentiate his “modus operandi” of

134Winter, After Paul Left, 41; Philo and Paul, 175-7.
135Winter, Philo and Paul, 143, 148; “Sophists,” 30. For an orator there were three important pisteis “confidences,” or “convictions,” that he must contain in his persuasive speech. “(The term) ethos (was) summarised as establishing the persuader’s good character and hence credibility. The speaker had to
coming to Corinth and establishing a Christian ekklēsia from the typical visit to a city by a sophist or orator who has tried to establish a reputation as a speaker by using rhetorical conventions and oratorial speech or wisdom (2:1). Paul distinguishes his oratory (logos) and message (kērygma) from the sophist’s eloquent speech which takes “the form of the persuasiveness of rhetoric,” that is, “the art of persuasion” (2:4a).\footnote{Winter, Philo and Paul, 143, 148, 158; “Sophists,” 30.} Paul stresses that his proclamation of the crucified Christ was undertaken in the “demonstration (apodeixis) of the Spirit and of Power” (2:4b).

Winter says that 2:3 describes the main reason why Paul was severely attacked by his “opponents” and failed to be a persuasive orator, because in his proclamation he did not employ the rhetorical techniques, ethos and pathos, which an effective persuader usually used in his oratory. So it is natural that the Corinthian audience regarded Paul as inferior to others. Paul’s presence as a persuasive orator did not match “the fine figure of the orator” which was recommended in “rhetorical handbooks.”\footnote{Winter, Philo and Paul, 158-9; “Sophists,” 30.} That is why Paul couldn’t help confessing (or I think perhaps ironically overstating!) that due to his inferior figure compared with other sophists he was in the midst of them in “weakness (en astheveia) fear (en phobō), and much trembling (en tromo pollō)” (2:3).

Winter further says:

The whole purpose of Paul’s renunciation of the conventions (ethos, pathos and apodeixis) surrounding the coming of an orator was designed to ensure that the Corinthians’ ‘proof’ (pistis) or ‘faith’ …might not rest in the wisdom of men but project a sympathetic image of himself as a likeable and trustworthy person. To make the necessary impression…this particular pistis, ‘character’, was …an important means of swaying an audience…(the second term) pathos refers to ‘playing on the feelings’ of an audience…one of the prime objectives of the rhetorician’s activity was ‘to play with the hearer’s emotions’…(the last) apodeixis …means ‘a clear proof’, ‘a method of proving what is not certain by means of what is certain” (Winter, Philo and Paul, 149).
in the power of God (2:5). Paul, by employing “a method of preaching” rather than following a sophistic oratorial fashion, intended to remind the Corinthians of having faith not in human sophia but in the power of God and the crucified Christ (1:24; 2:5). Paul’s policy of an “anti-ethos, anti-pathos and anti-apodeixis argument” elucidates his anti-sophistic stance and at the same time challenges the sophistic orientation of sophia at Corinth. By means of such a policy he clearly differentiated his preaching of the crucified Christ from the sophists’ oratory with its rhetorical elements. He intentionally rejected the sophistic strategy of taking a persuasive form of sophia which the Corinthians favoured and regarded as superior to Paul’s preaching. Instead, Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ in the “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (2:1, 4), which was opposite to the Corinthians’ expectation.

From my perspective, Winter’s reconstruction of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the light of the sophistic movement of the first century Greco-Roman world is essential for a proper understanding of the Pauline opposition at Corinth and the nature of Corinthian wisdom. As observed above, there are clear similarities between the sophistic fashions and the Corinthian behaviour as indicated in 1 Corinthians 1-4, such as the student-teacher relationships and similarly patron-client relations, a spirit of competitiveness and rivalry, the preference for rhetorical abilities, and the high value given to sophia. Such ideas have to be kept in mind and to be considered important as we interpret 1 Corinthians 1-4. Nonetheless, I argue that the sophistic view of wisdom was a part of the wider range of Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions in general, as typified by Cicero’s legacy of rhetoric and wisdom. These rhetorical understandings profoundly influenced the ethos and social

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139 Winter, Philo and Paul, 159.
140 Winter, Philo and Paul, 159.
behaviour of the Corinthian elite in first century Roman Corinth and the conduct of some of the Corinthian Christians who caused the problem of schisms in the Corinthian Christian community as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 (see Chapter Two further below).

Furthermore, in terms of intercultural dialogue and interpretation, Winter’s hypothesis challenges and helps us to make a bridging point between the cultural context of the Corinthian Christians in the first century Greco-Roman era and that of Korean Christians in our time. Just as the sophistic fashions penetrated deeply into the life of the Christian community at Corinth in first century Greco-Roman culture, so Confucianism has had a profound influence upon the life of Korean Christians in 21st century Korean-Confucian culture.141

Stephen M. Pogoloff, similarly to Winter, reconstructs the Corinthian situation of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the light of its rhetorical setting. So he employs rhetorical criticism as the most convincing method to give more accurate information about the identity of Paul’s Corinthian ‘opponents’ and the nature of their wisdom as indicated in 1 Corinthians 1-4.142 He argues that the entire Greco-Roman culture and society to which the Corinthian situation of Paul’s time belonged was profoundly influenced by first-century Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions. Early Christian communities were not able to avoid such influences, so there is no doubt that this influence penetrated the life of the Christian ekklēsia in first-century Corinth. In this regard, therefore, the situation to

141For further explanation see 1.6 below.
142In rhetorical criticism, which is an audience-oriented perspective, it is noteworthy that “the reader of discourse consciously or unconsciously constructs an implied narrative which makes sense of that discourse…the audience is not just any group of hearers or readers, but those who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change…the concept of rhetorical situation not only helps us construct an implied context, but also offers a bridge between that context and the situation of the modern reader…a text is actualised and its world created only in the act of reading” (Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 77-80). This notion is very helpful to me in this thesis, because I am attempting to re-read or re-interpret the insights (or implications) of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the light of my own Korean-Confucian Christian context.
which Paul responded in 1 Corinthians 1-4 should be studied carefully in the light of such rhetorical conventions.¹⁴³

Pogoloff then turns to the issues of schismata (“divisions” [NIV; 1:10]) and sophia logou (“eloquent speech” [RSV; 1:17; 2:4]) that Paul refers to. He also argues that the divisions in the Corinthian Christian ekklēsia were most likely related to the problem of sophia logou or rhetoric and social status (1:26-28; cf. 11:18-22). At first glance, the words sophia logou simply mean “clever or skilled or educated or rhetorically sophisticated speech.”¹⁴⁴ But in first-century Greco-Roman world they frequently meant more than such. They had the connotation of “a whole world of social status related to speech,” in which the word sophia in particular described implicitly the “educated or cultural characteristics of persons of high social standings.”¹⁴⁵ On this basis Pogoloff gives a further explanation:

In the Greco-Roman milieu of Corinth, one who was described as speaking en sophia logou would have been understood to be an educated, cultured individual who could speak to a group about a subject in a manner which persuaded them by evidence and argument presented in a suitable style…such speech communicated not just the subject matter, but also explicitly or implicitly communicated the character and authority (ethos) of the speaker. This ethos was…intimately tied to issues of social status, boasting, and rivalries…Although Paul shows no sign of finding primary or secondary education a source of problems, there are very clear indications that he had thrown himself into a total confrontation with those who espoused the reigning values of higher education.¹⁴⁶

From this it is clear that by the time he wrote 1 Corinthians Paul had serious tensions with those members (the teleios in 2:6) in the Christian community who had boasted of themselves as belonging to a better sophos possessing greater sophia (2:6) and speaking en sophia logou (1:17; en sophias logois in 2:4). He, moreover, was unintentionally and unconsciously driven into the spirit of contest and competition in sophoi logoi, which

¹⁴³Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 1-3, 8, 44, 52, 84.
¹⁴⁴Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 110.
¹⁴⁵Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 113.
¹⁴⁶Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 54.
was a part of classic rhetoric and of the Hellenistic culture in which the Corinthians lived. Such competition eventually led to bitter divisions, for instance, between one philosopher and another, or one rhetor and another.

The same tendency had apparently invaded the Corinthian Christian ekklēsia which Paul founded. It is likely, therefore, that the Corinthians had considered whether Paul was among those “persuasive speakers” and whether to regard him as a “persuasive rhetor, i.e., as sophos,” just as in other secular communities. Pogoloff goes on to claim that in the Christian community at Corinth there were only two groups or divisions, although there are four names given as the leaders of each party, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:12. This is because

Paul and Apollos garner far more attention than the other two (3:4-9, 22; 4:6; cf. 16:12). Those ‘of Apollos’ and those ‘of Paul’ are singled out as the target of Paul’s rhetoric (4:6). For these reasons, the slogans ‘I am of Paul’ and ‘I am of Apollos’ dominate the exigence. The other two slogans may be read as no more than hyperbole.

From this statement it is assumed that one group comprised people who still accepted Paul as an adequate rhetor, whereas the other included those who preferred Apollos as a sophos. “Apollos’s Alexandrian origin” should have appealed to the Corinthians, because Alexandria was well known for its rhetorical education and “any educated Alexandrian” like Philo was well disciplined and trained in rhetoric and in skilful and persuasive speech.

Pogoloff, however, differentiates Paul’s rhetoric from Apollos’s in a distinctive way. The former was appealing more to the educated and sophisticated people, while the latter to the less educated and cultured. This affirms that there were divisions of social

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147 Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 173-8.
148 Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 178.
149 Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 178.
150 Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 180-7.
status in the Christian community. These levels were not about “lines of class or income” but of “education and culture.”

Furthermore, Pogoloff asserts that the relationship of Paul with the higher status and more educated members in the Corinthian Christian ekklēsia is attested in his discussion of baptism (1:14-16) and patronal relations. He baptised Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanus. These were patrons of the Christian ekklēsia at Corinth, as well as Phoebe (called prostatēs in Rom. 16:1-2). Therefore, Pogoloff concludes that such members belonging to the Pauline group were of higher status than those of the Apollos group. The latter might be strong in number, but the former were the strongest in terms of status in the community. Yet although Paul’s rhetorical ability appealed to the higher status and more educated, that is, ‘the strong’, he took the position of ‘the weak’ (1 Cor. 8; 10:23-30) in order to parody those followers of Apollos, his ‘opponents’, who highly valued sophia as representing education and high social status from the perspective of first-century Greco-Roman rhetoric.

In a reverse way, therefore, Pogoloff argues that in order to challenge the Corinthians to change their values and attitudes which were overwhelmingly influenced by the secular rhetorical conventions and social standards, Paul employed the narrative of the crucified Christ which had been preached and had become the foundation of the

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152 I disagree with Pogoloff’s argument that members of the Pauline group were higher than those of the Apollos group, because Paul clearly identifies himself with the Corinthian Christian believers who were poorer and of lower social-status (e.g. 1 Cor 4:8-13). We should also understand that Paul names those three baptised members in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16, as representatives of each ethnic group: the Greeks, the Jews, and the Romans, rather than as the highest social-status members in ‘his faction’ of the Corinthian congregation (see 2.2.3 below). 
Christian ekklēsia. He reminded them of the crucified Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God (e.g. 1 Cor 1:18-25).

In my analysis, Pogoloff consistently and satisfactorily explains the background of the divisions and the Corinthian wisdom addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 in terms of first-century Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions. His unique points are as follows: first, Pogoloff is interested in the Corinthians’ social values and behaviour as influenced by Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions rather than as the cause of the divisions in themselves. Second, in the light of the rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians 1-4 he has a unique understanding of sophia as representing those of socially high status and education, and further relates such an understanding to the emergence of the divisions in the Corinthian Christian community, where the followers of Apollos opposed Paul’s rhetorical ability. What is unique is that in the Corinthian congregation, according to Pogoloff, Paul’s rhetorical ability, in fact, appealed to the higher status and more educated people than those who preferred Apollos. We ought to bear such points in mind, as we reconstruct the situation of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the light of its rhetorical situation. Moreover, in terms of a cross-disciplinary approach, Pogoloff’s proposal has to be considered important for an attempt to dialogue between the rhetorical situation of first-century Corinth and the contemporary Korean-Confucian Christian context of our time, because in these two contexts the word ‘wisdom’, sophia in the former and jeehye or sulgi in the latter, signifies social standing and education.\textsuperscript{154}

As observed above, Winter and Pogoloff’s hypotheses are the most persuasive and helpful for me to reconstruct the situation of 1 Corinthian 1-4, and especially in terms of

\textsuperscript{154}For more details see Chapter Four below.
its rhetorical situation. Both convincingly argue that Paul’s ‘opponents’ at Corinth were some of the Corinthian Christians who were deeply influenced by Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions seen as a fundamental element of first century Greco-Roman culture. These Corinthians highly valued wisdom and eloquent speech. They esteemed such rhetorical influences even more than the message of the gospel Paul preached to them. And they also continued to practise uncritically in the Christian community such customs as patron-client systems and a spirit of competitiveness and rivalry. Furthermore, the majority preferred Apollos’ rhetorical ability rather than Paul’s, because of his Alexandrian origin. That is why in the Corinthian congregation there were tense relations between the people of Paul and those of Apollos. Later on, these developed into factions among the Christians.

In summary, rhetorical and social approaches appear to be the most appropriate method for an adequate description of the nature and background of Corinthian wisdom thoughts as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1–4. There are two apparent reasons. One is because the shaping of wisdom traditions at Corinth occurred in intimate relation to first century Greco-Roman culture, including the prominence of rhetoric and patronage. So it was that in many areas of life such as social relations, education, thinking systems, moral behaviour, and social systems, the Corinthian Christians were deeply permeated by these aspects of Greco-Roman culture. This I see as analogous to the fact that the entire Korean society and culture including social relations, family structure, education, philosophy, religion, political and economic systems, and especially Korean understandings of wisdom, has been deeply influenced by Confucianism, and in particular, T’oegye’s Confucian thought. For the purposes of exploring this analogy
further, it is essential that the nature and consequences of Corinthian wisdom as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 be analysed in terms of a social perspective.

The other reason for a rhetorical and social approach is because the overall shape of 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21 as a unit is dependent on the characteristics of Greco-Roman rhetoric. This is clearly evident in Paul’s frequent use of rhetorical terminology such as *sophia* and its equivalents (which appear 26 times in chapters 1-4) and *logos* (9 times). As seen earlier, in recent Corinthian scholarship many others have attempted to interpret 1 Corinthians 1-4 in terms of its rhetorical situation.\(^\text{155}\) Pogoloff especially claims that the rhetorical situation should connect the issue of *sophia* with the existence of divisions in the Christian community at Corinth and also with the issues of social status (1 Cor 1:26-28; cf. 11:18-22).\(^\text{156}\) Furthermore, Charles A. Wanamaker asserts that in 1 Corinthians 1-4 Paul uses “a rhetoric of persuasion” to reclaim the Corinthian congregation from the grips of schism and to unify the Christian *ekklēsia*.\(^\text{157}\) For these reasons, it is apparent that such a rhetorical analysis should provide the most persuasive answers to questions about the problems of wisdom as described in 1 Corinthians 1-4.


\(^{156}\)Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 119.

Consequently, a rhetorical and social perspective will be employed to explore the background to the cultural influences that Paul sharply criticised and opposed at Corinth. This involves exploring the social situation of Roman Corinth, the problem of social stratification in the Corinthian correspondence, an analysis of first century Greco-Roman culture such as patronage and rhetoric, and a rhetorical analysis of 1 Corinthians 1-4.

No Korean scholars, as stated earlier, have examined wisdom traditions at Corinth as addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 in terms of a rhetorical and social analysis, nor have any attempted to dialogue between Corinthian wisdom and Korean wisdom. So before undertaking a thorough social analysis of 1 Corinthians 1-4, I will briefly outline some possibilities for a Korean-Confucian reading of the text.

1.6 Conclusion: the Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians 1-4 from a Korean-Confucian Context

Prior to a detailed analysis of 1 Corinthians 1-4 from a rhetorical and social perspective and an attempt to dialogue between Corinthian wisdom and Korean wisdom and the social and cultural milieu of Roman Corinth and that of Korea today, I will briefly evaluate this recent scholarship on the rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians 1-4 from my own Korean-Confucian Christian context. As stated earlier, in recent Pauline scholarship on 1 Corinthians Winter and Pogoloff’s hypotheses are the most helpful methods for me to attempt to dialogue between the two extremely different horizons, the first century Corinthian Christian context and the 21st century Korean-Confucian Christian context.
Korean Christians have been profoundly influenced by Confucianism which has dominated Korean culture since its introduction, just as the Corinthian Christians were overwhelmed by the sophistic movement and its rhetorical strategies which prevailed in Corinthian culture in the time of Paul. In both cases it is apparent that Christians in every generation and everywhere are profoundly influenced by the prevailing and dominating culture, whether secular or religious, in which they think and live. Christians are not able to isolate and segregate themselves totally from such cultural influences and domains.

Accordingly, in order to contextualise the biblical message in our time, and the Pauline letters in particular, we need to observe thoroughly, study and examine the prevailing culture surrounding us and very carefully analyse similarities and differences between insights into the culture and the biblical message. We then need to attempt to dialogue between these two horizons.

Furthermore, Pogoloff’s position suggests ways to re-read or re-interpret the biblical text in the context of Korean-Confucian Christianity. As indicated above, the Corinthian conception of wisdom (sophia) was shaped and strongly inspired by the social and cultural values of Greco-Roman rhetoric which was an essential part of the first century Greco-Roman culture. Similarly, I understand that Korean understandings of wisdom (jeehye or sulgi) are overwhelmingly influenced by Korean Confucian teaching, especially T’oegye’s teaching on wisdom.\(^{158}\) I further see that Korean culture has to do with Korean Confucian influences, just as first-century Corinthian culture had to do with Greco-Roman rhetorical influences as well as patronage systems. Such

\(^{158}\)For a detailed explanation of T’oegye’s wisdom see Appendix 2.
bridging points encourage me to think deeply about these parallels and to bring the two together in dialogue.

Pogoloff’s understanding that Paul didn’t reject Greco-Roman rhetoric, which had been influential throughout the entire Greco-Roman world, but rather, he himself used it in his persuasion, is a very helpful perspective. Nevertheless, Pogoloff further argues that Paul rejected the cultural and social values of wisdom as they were enacted in the Christian community of first century Corinth. This is because these values took over the life of his Corinthian converts more than the message of the gospel he had proclaimed.159

In a very similar sense Paul W. Gooch argues;

(Paul’s) first-prong attack is against the misuse of reason (or philosophy) resulting in self-deception and boasting…it cannot follow that all philosophical activity is rendered illegitimate by his attack…Paul’s critique cuts not at reason (or philosophy) itself but its inflated pretender – intellectual conceit…the attack on rhetoric is against the deliberate misuse of words to convince beyond the proper bounds of knowledge… (we) distinguish the general target from reason (or philosophy) by calling it ‘worldly wisdom’…the same distinction needs to be made between ‘worldly persuasion’ and rhetoric or style. It need not follow for Paul that all worldly persuasion expresses the speaker’s own conceit (words in italics are mine).160

In this statement Gooch contends that since in 1 Corinthians 1-4 the words ‘philosophy’ and ‘reason’ don’t appear, in referring to ‘worldly wisdom’ Paul did not directly oppose philosophy or reason per se against faith, but human misuse of it in pride and conceit which obstructs his/her the attainment of the true knowledge of God or the wisdom of God.161

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159 Pogoloff, Logos and Sophia, 121.
160 In addition, “Paul was not ‘really’ attacking human wisdom or reason (or philosophy)…Instead his intended targets were particular philosophies, or sophistry, or religious speculation, or false wisdom based on competitors to revelation” (Paul W. Gooch, Partial Knowledge: Philosophical Studies in Paul [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987], 34-49).
161 Gooch, Partial Knowledge, 28, 40-42. In Gooch’s view the word “worldly” understood in a functional sense rather than in a “sphere-related” way emphasises “the misfunctioning of human knowing in the moral and intellectual vices from which incompletely redeemed people are not yet free” (Gooch, Partial Knowledge, 41).
Gooch’s ideas provide some significant pointers to my attempt to re-read Corinthian understandings of wisdom from a Korean-Confucian Christian context. Korean Christians do not necessarily have to criticise sharply Confucianism and Confucian understandings of wisdom as such to help re-shape the entire Korean culture in Christian life and the church, as long as they don’t distort the true gospel of Christ and Christian doctrine. Just as Paul also didn’t directly attack human wisdom or philosophy *per se*, which is part of human culture, but the human intellectual conceit and boasting rooted in it, because this prevents human beings from obtaining the true knowledge of God.

From such an understanding I take the idea that I needn’t reject the influence of Confucianism in the life of Korean Christians which has shaped Korean culture as a whole, including 21st-century Christians like myself, long before Christianity was introduced to the Korean peninsula.162 However, I may question and challenge those social and cultural values wedded to Confucianism, which may have taken over the life of Korean Christians and churches more than the message of the gospel. The social values rooted in Confucian teaching oftentimes distort the message of the gospel and make divisions of social status, hierarchy and discrimination in the Korean churches. In this regard these particular teachings should be challenged and critiqued in the life of Korean Christians, just as in 1 Corinthians Paul rejected the social values wedded to certain Greco-Roman philosophies and their conventions. In other cases, we ought to encourage the practice of Confucian wisdom and teachings as part of our own culture in the Korean churches in our time as well.

162For more information of the history of Korean Christianity see Chapter Four below.
For this reason, consistent with contemporary biblical hermeneutics, an intercultural reading of the Corinthian *sophia* addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4 will be made below.\(^{163}\) Using the methods of rhetorical criticism, Corinthian understandings of *sophia* will be investigated, then any insights will be re-read in a Korean-Confucian Christian context, especially in parallel with Korean Confucian wisdom (*jeehye* or *sulgi*). In so doing, Paul’s gospel and teachings can be re-born and clothed in a Korean-Confucian Christian context. In this process, Korean Christians can more clearly understand and recognise the importance of dialogue between the message of the gospel and the culture within which we live and into which we were born and have breathed and lived. This attempt is necessary to read and understand the gospel message in the light of our own Korean-Confucian Christian context. Such an attempt is part of the major concern in this thesis, but firstly, I now turn to a more detailed rhetorical and social analysis of 1 Corinthians 1-4.

\(^{163}\)Cosgrove, Weiss, and Yeo encourage contemporary readers to engage in cross-cultural readings of the Pauline epistles and interpret Paul’s teaching and message “sensitively” from their own cultural perspective. In this process, they can learn how “cross-cultural interpretation can be a journey to others and a journey to (themselves)” (Cosgrove, Weiss, and Yeo, *Cross-Cultural Paul*, 5).