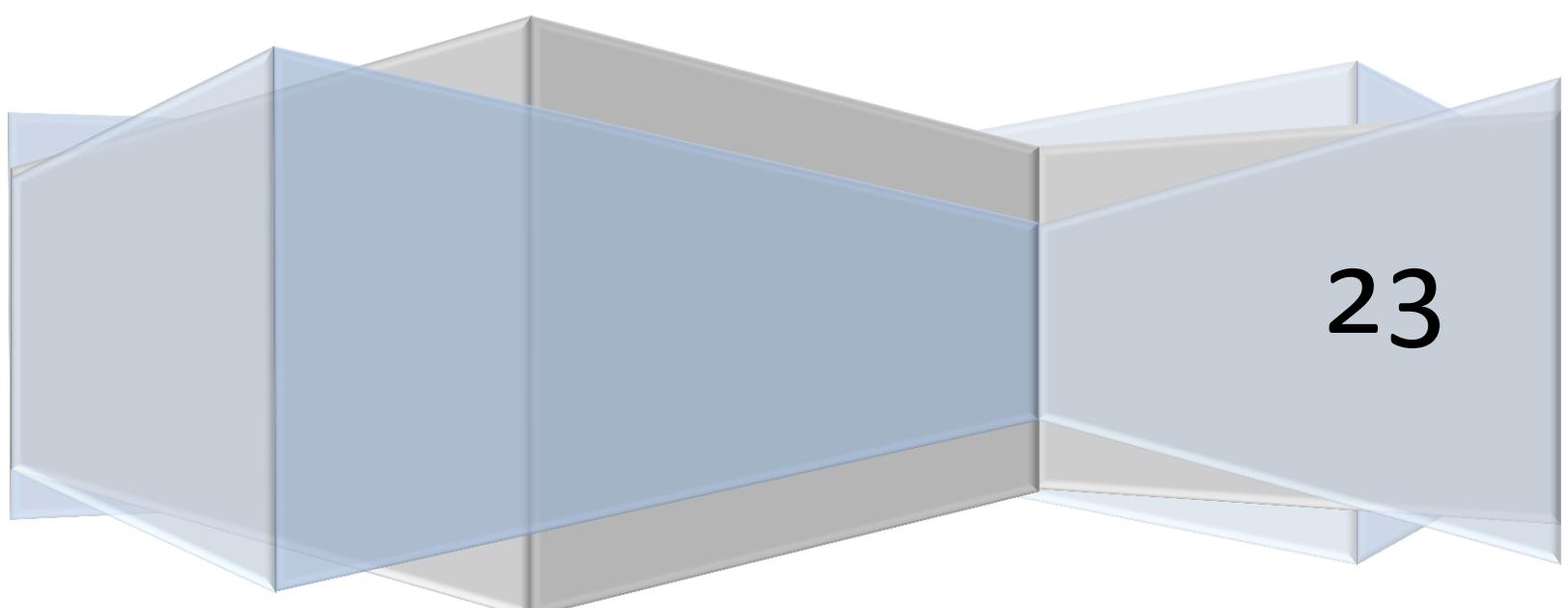


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**HUGH GOLDIE
THEOLOGICAL TRAINING
INSTITUTION, AROCHUKWU**

*(In affiliation with Abia State University, Uturu,
Abia State)*



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OLD TESTAMENT: THE BOOK OF RUTH

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Ruth takes its name from the Hebrew *Megilath* which can be interpreted as the Scroll of Ruth. It is included in the third division, or the Writings, of the Hebrew Bible. In most Christian canons it is treated as one of the historical books and placed between Judges and 1 Samuel (Allen 13). The book was written in Hebrew in the 6th–4th centuries BCE and tells of the Moabite woman Ruth, who accepts Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, as her God and accepts the Israelite people as her own. In Ruth 1:16–17, Ruth tells Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law, *"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me"* (Attridge 383). Ruth is held in esteem by Jews who fall under the category of Jews-by-choice, as is evidenced by the considerable presence of Boaz in rabbinic literature. The Book of Ruth also functions liturgically, as it is read during the Jewish holiday of Shavuot (Coogan 13).

AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

Like most Old Testament narratives, the book of Ruth does not identify its author (Hubbard 16). The most common suggestion is Samuel. Other suggestions are Hezekiah, Ezra, and even David (McCain 105). The Talmud credits the book to Samuel, but such attribution cannot be correct. The book must originate after David's rule (4:17b), and he reigned some years after Samuel's death (Hubbard 35). According to Hill, no author is named for the book, so it remains anonymous. Though it is placed after judges in the English bible, following the lead of the Septuagint and Vulgate, the Jewish ordering counts it among the third division of the canon, the writings (204).

DATE OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

Scholars disagree on the date, with estimates ranging from the early Monarchy to the post-exilic era. Most scholars agree that the time of the incidents in the book of Ruth was during the latter period of the Judges (McCain 105). Hubbard suggests that the evidence of the writing favors a date in the period of the Monarchy (tenth-sixth centuries B.C.) (Hubbard 35). A substantial number of scholars, therefore, date it to the Persian period (6th–4th centuries BCE) (Grabbe 105). According to Mays et al, the Book of Ruth is set by its opening line in the era of the Judges

and concludes with a mention of King David. The composition therefore must be from the time of David or later. Critical scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century proposed that the book was from the era of Ezra and Nehemiah, some 550 years after the reign of David. The arguments for this late date rested primarily on linguistic and grammatical features, such as expressions that appear to show the influence of the Aramaic (19). If it were written during the reign of David, that would be about 1011-971 BC (McCain 105).

CONTENT OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

The book is named for its principal character, Ruth the Moabite. Because of famine, Elimelech of Bethlehem takes his family to live in Moab. Sadly, he and his two sons died there, leaving his wife Naomi and the sons Moabite wives, Ruth and Orpah. When the famine ends, Naomi heads back to Judah. She persuades Orpah to go back to Moab, but Ruth resolutely refuses. The two widows return to Bethlehem just as the harvest begins. Ruth goes out to glean grain and by chance arrives in the fields of Boaz, a kinsman of Elimelech. As a relative, Boaz has to marry a widowed in-law. So Naomi sends Ruth to propose such a marriage. Boaz is willing, but a closer relative has the prior legal right to her. In the story's climax, Boaz cleverly obtains the right, marries Ruth, and the two have a son. The book celebrates him as a "son . . . born to Naomi" (4:17a) for the child Obed preserves her family line. More important, he turns out to be the grandfather of David.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

The book is written to show the background of David. To demonstrate that God continues to build the nation He promised to Abraham. Saul became king to establish the kingdom. However, Saul was a disappointment as a king to God. It was not until David became King that there was the type of Kingdom that God had promised to Abraham. The story of Ruth is simple; A man and a woman meet, fall in love, get married and have a baby. This baby turns out to be the grandfather of David. Secondly, the book is written to show that amid anarchy and spiritual darkness, God always has a remnant of people. There is a great demonstration of the sovereignty of God in the story of Ruth. Thirdly the book is also written to give a vivid picture of the kinsmen redeemer concept. The redeemer concept later became important in the New Testament description of the sacrifice of Christ (McCain 106).

MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

The author likes to identify Ruth as “the Moabite.” That label provides a clue to part of the message. The book stresses that God welcomes non-Israelites into the covenant. If they show the devotion of Ruth (1:16-17), they will likewise enjoy protective “refuge” under God’s wings (2:12). In extending God’s mercy to foreigners, Ruth reflects the same open attitude as other Old Testament books like Jonah. Further, the book promotes the practice of Israel’s covenant ideal, the lifestyle of *hesed* or loyalty. In essence, to do *hesed* is voluntarily to go beyond the call of duty. Ruth’s stunning statement of love and devotion puts that lifestyle into words: “*Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God*” (1:16). Also, the actions of the book’s main characters personify it. The story, thus, beckons readers to practice similar sacrificial loyalty. It calls them to emulate the costly commitment of Ruth, the perseverance and cleverness of Naomi, and the generosity and integrity of Boaz. In so doing, they too will experience God’s providential blessing (Hubbard 409).

Finally, the book teaches the divine providence which brought forth David (4:17b). The closing genealogy (4:18-22) sets the story of these ordinary folks from Bethlehem in a larger context. It shows the direct link between their lives and God’s work in Israel as a nation. The son born to Naomi is more than just God’s gift to continue her family line. He also begins the history of God’s rule through the dynasty of David. In this way, the book ties into the Bible’s main theme of redemptive history. Thus, directed by God’s hidden guidance, the faithfulness of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz achieved more than they knew. From their family stemmed the great David and, many generations later, great David’s greater Son (Hubbard 409). The message of this book is that God preserved families of faith and that from one such family King David came (Hill 206). As Hubbard has pointed out, the preservation of this family shares many motifs with God’s preservation of the patriarchs (42). Thus it provides another example of God’s covenant loyalty and the faith it engenders.

THEOLOGICAL THEMES

1. The Peaceable Community: Beginning with famine and death, the story of Ruth ends with community harvest and rejoicing over the birth of a baby. The narrator's portrait of Bethlehem in the concluding scenes of chapter 4 offers a vision of a harmonious and joyful community. Boaz ensures that all matters are handled decently and in order; there is uprightness in the meeting at the town gate. The leading man of the Israelite village and the poor Moabite

widow is married with the blessing of the community elders and others gathered around. The child of this union is celebrated by the women of the town as he is placed into the arms of Naomi. The continuing bond between Ruth and Naomi is underscored as the women compare Ruth's value to that of seven sons. It is a human community in which the marginalized person has dared to insist upon full participation, in which the one in the center has reached out beyond societal norms to include the marginalized. It is a community in which children are celebrated and the elderly are attentively cared for. It is a community in which all are fed, a community in which joy is the dominant note. Thus the story offers to its readers "a memory of the future" (Russell 27), a vision of future hope couched in the form of a story from the past (Mays et al 15).

2. Examples of Loyal Living: The story of Ruth portrays not only an instance of a peaceable community but also examples or models of ways of human interaction that foster the coming into being of such a community. Each of the principal characters Ruth, Boaz, and to a lesser extent Naomi chooses to act in ways that promote the well-being of others. The praise accorded to Ruth and Boaz, validating their actions and choices, lies generally on the lips of other characters in the story, rather than in the words of the narrator. Ruth is praised by Boaz (2:1112; 3:10) and by the women of Bethlehem (4:15). Boaz is praised indirectly by Naomi (2:1920), by Ruth (3:17), and by the townspeople who pray for his marriage. It is notable that the minor characters Orpah and the nearer kinsman who appear briefly and just as quickly leave the stage are not criticized for their behavior. It is as if they do what is expected in the context of the story, not less but not more, nothing requiring reprimand, yet nothing worthy of praise, whether from the narrator or other participants. Thus it is the extraordinary behavior of Ruth in response to Naomi's need, together with the extraordinary behavior of Boaz in response to Ruth's example and suggestion that moves the story from grief to joy, from emptiness to fullness. The Hebrew term for the kind of extraordinary behavior witnessed in this story is *hesed*, usually translated as "kindness" or "loyalty" in the NRSV (Mays et al 16).

The Hebrew term is a strong one. It refers to care or concern for another with whom one is in a relationship, but care that specifically takes shape in action to rescue the other from a situation of desperate need, and under circumstances in which the rescuer is uniquely qualified (Mays et al 16). Ruth is summarized to be the book of *hesed* on both the human and the divine levels. The most explicit statement of this is found in Ruth's stirring expression of commitment to Naomi. The issue of *hesed* serves as the premise for the discussion between Boaz and Ruth as

negotiations are made; the Lord's *hesed* is introduced as the factor that will eventually lead to the successful remarriage of Naomi's daughters-in-law so that it cannot help but be recognized in the provision of a *goel* for Ruth (Hill 207). All these demonstrate that *hesed* to one another is among the most fitting vehicles God can use to display his *hesed*. This again provides a contrast to the book of Judges, in which loyalty within the bounds of the covenant is scarce.

Here we have a story of two women working together to make a way out of no way, to find security amid a system that has little to offer to widows without families. First, one woman, then the other, as the occasion arises, takes initiative to set their course. The significance of this example of solidarity among women has heightened because of their different ages, their ethnic backgrounds from groups traditionally at enmity with one another, and their specific relationship as mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, a relationship regarded by many cultures as potentially filled with tension and even discord. For the sake of this relationship, Ruth is determined to make her way in a potentially hostile environment. That determination in turn is given an entry point by the openness of Boaz, whose example as a community leader appears, in the end, to win over any opposition in the Bethlehemite community.

3. The Place of God: In the Story, a key feature of the book is its effort to relate human care and concern to divine care and concern in the working out of human difficulties and pain along the road to a peaceable community. Here God does not have a speaking role; on the other hand, God is not so absent from the story as in the Hebrew version of Esther, where the name of God does not even appear. Nor is God completely behind the scenes, as in the Joseph narrative. In Ruth, the narrator reports two direct interventions by God into the human affairs of the story. The latter of these is stated quite directly: "the LORD made Ruth conceive" (4:13), thus bringing an end to her implicit period of barrenness during her marriage to Mahlon. The earlier intervention of God is stated somewhat less directly: Naomi "had heard . . . that the LORD had considered his people and given them food" (1:6). God is mentioned repeatedly in the words of the various characters, most often in their prayers, sometimes in other contexts. The first such instance appears in Naomi's words of farewell blessing upon her daughters-in-law (1:9).

Naomi, unable to help Ruth and Orpah find husbands, commends them and their need for God's faithful care. Subsequently, Ruth commits herself to Naomi's God (1:16), although the personal name Yahweh (the LORD) does not appear here. Upon arriving in Bethlehem, Naomi speaks of God as she expresses her despair (1:20-21), reiterating the theme expressed to her daughters-in-

law at 1:13. Four times she expresses the pain of her experience of abandonment by God, with no hint of expectation that this (perceived) condition will change. Although Naomi speaks here in terms of direct divine intervention, it should be noted that her words are her interpretive claims, not "facts" stated by the narrator. Within the design of the narrative, Naomi's bitterness over God's treatment of her will be undone by unfolding events through which she will discover that God has not after all abandoned her (2:20). Twice more God's name appears the text, first in prayers led by the elders of the community for Ruth's fertility in the upcoming marriage (4:11), then in the blessing (praise) of God by the women of the community for the baby boy and faithful daughter-in-law who make an end of the emptiness in Naomi's life (4:14-15). In the course of events, no one has prayed overtly for Naomi. But Ruth's loyalty to her from beginning to end has created conditions whereby Naomi's sorrow is turned into a celebration (Mays 18).

4. The Kinsman Redeemer: The levirate system is expounded in the legal literature of Israel in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. Under this law, if a man died without having a son, his brother was obligated to bear a son by his widow. That son would thereafter be considered the heir to the dead brother's household. In his way, families could not easily die out. An expanded interpretation of this custom of levirate marriage is combined with land redemption rights to provide the legal setting for the book of Ruth. The Hebrew term *goel* (kinsman-redeemer) is taken from the land redemption law. According to this law, land sold by a person could be brought back by a relative to keep the land in the family, and land covenant matters of the first degree. They were social provisions by which God's covenant promises could continue to be realized even for a family in crisis. The *goel* provided how jeopardized covenant blessings could be regained and thus served as an appropriate metaphor for God's grace. Yahweh constantly acted as *goel* for Israel, and the New Testament was quick to apply that concept to the role of Christ (Hill 207).

LITERARY NATURE OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

Scholars generally agree that the genre of Ruth is a short story. Its length falls between that of a brief "tale" and a long "novella." It has a simple plot that runs its course in a brief period (about six weeks). It also has only three main characters. More important, rather than tracing their development, it aims to help readers understand them. That suits the purpose of a short story to edify and instruct readers in an entertaining way. The following somewhat simplified schema highlights the book's main structural and thematic parallels:

Ruth 1:1-5 Introduction: the family of Elimelech

Ruth 1:6-18 Naomi's concern: marriage of daughters-in-law

Ruth 1:19-22 Naomi's grief, emptiness

Ruth 2:1-2 Dialogues: Naomi and Ruth

Ruth 2:3-17 Dialogues: Ruth and Boaz

Ruth 2:18-23 Dialogue: Ruth and Naomi

Ruth 3:1-5 Dialogues: Naomi and Ruth

Ruth 3:6-15 Dialogues: Ruth and Boaz

Ruth 3:16-18 Dialogue: Ruth and Naomi

Ruth 4:1-2 Legal process: land, marriage, heir

Ruth 4:13-17 Naomi's fullness in newborn son

Ruth 4:18-22 Genealogy: the family of David

Without a doubt, the short story of Ruth is a literary masterpiece. The story features a highly artistic, almost poetic, rhythmic prose. Masterfully, the author uses dialogue to advance plot. The story's many conversations, not the author's narration, move events along. Again, the writer cleverly dispenses information like a card player wary of tipping his hand. For example, in ch. 2, a "flashback" gives facts withheld earlier (v. 7). Similarly, the narrator withholds mention of Elimelech's field until late in the story to the surprise of readers (4:3). Also, the story uses language in powerful ways. For example, words with sexual overtones (e.g., "know," "lie down") dominate the report of Ruth's secret visit to Boaz (ch. 3). The sensual language makes the scene seem daring and dangerous. Further, the narrator shrewdly repeats keywords at crucial points. They knit the story together and signal its major thematic developments: (1) by repeating the word "child," the writer implies that the "child" Obed replaces Naomi's dead "children" (1:5b; 4:16); (2) the story twice mentions Ruth's "loyalty," a clue to one of the book's main themes (1:8; 3:10; cf. 2:20); (3) the repetition of "empty" shows that, with Boaz's help, Naomi's earlier emptiness is about to end (1:21; 3:17).

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

The Book of Ruth is one of the shortest books of the Bible and has often been described as a relatively simple story, a charming folktale with little theological depth. Most modern Bible

translations and commentaries divide the book into the common four chapters, but many of them further subdivide these chapters into different smaller periscopes and paragraphs, mostly without justifying the choices made. A penetrating analysis of several different structural analyses by Edward Greenstein led him to the conclusion that all were conditioned by 'prior experience and conceptualization'. In his opinion, we should admit openly that it is better 'to locate the making of sense not in the object of attention but in the perceiver' (Greenstein 1998, 222). The book is structured into four chapters:

Act 1: Prologue and Problem: Death and Emptiness (1:1–22)

- ❖ Scene 1: Setting the scene (1:1–5)
- ❖ Scene 2: Naomi returns home (1:6–18)
- ❖ Scene 3: Arrival of Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem (1:19–22)

Act 2: Ruth Meets Boaz, Naomi's Relative, on the Harvest Field (2:1–23)

- ❖ Scene 1: Ruth in the field of Boaz (2:1–17)
- ❖ Scene 2: Ruth reports to Naomi (2:18–23)

Act 3: Naomi Sends Ruth to Boaz on the Threshing Floor (3:1–18)

- ❖ Scene 1: Naomi Reveals Her Plan (3:1–5)
- ❖ Scene 2: Ruth at the threshing floor of Boaz (3:6–15)
- ❖ Scene 3: Ruth reports to Naomi (3:16–18)

Act 4: Resolution and Epilogue: Life and Fullness (4:1–22)

- ❖ Scene 1: Boaz with the men at the gate (4:1–12)
- ❖ Scene 2: A son is born to Ruth (4:13–17)

Genealogical appendix (4:18–22) (West 209)

SUMMARY

The story subtly induces readers to share the characters' experience of God's providential activity. Implicitly, it asks them to emulate or avoid the examples of its characters. The book of Ruth, thus, compares favorably to other Old Testament short stories: the marriage of Isaac (Gen. 24), Dan. 1–6, and Jonah. Though not tightly arranged, the book generally displays a mirror structure. That is, later elements in the story parallel and resolve earlier ones. The most well-known phrase in the book is the '*whither thou goest, I will go*' passage. It is a common marriage

scripture at present, though at that time it had nothing to do with marriage. Rather it described a mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship. Strikingly, God's guidance takes a unique form. In much of the Bible, God intervenes directly and supernaturally in human affairs to affect the purposes of redemption. But in Ruth, no guidance comes through dreams, visions, angelic messengers, or voices from heaven. No prophet arises to announce "thus says the LORD". Instead, God is everywhere but hidden in purely human coincidences and schemes. In short, the book stresses that God works behind the scenes in the deeds of faithful persons like Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.

NEW TESTAMENT: 1 CORINTHIANS

1 and 2 Corinthians are to be considered primarily soteriological since they deal largely with the subject of salvation. These letters form the heart of Apostle Paul's writings. The important thing about Paul's preaching can be found in them, that is faith in Christ and dedication to Him (Dunnet 49). 1 Corinthians is an occasional letter, that is, it is a letter addressed to specific people and occasioned by concrete issues; the letter form is not a mere literary device by which the author shapes his view for general publication (Carson et al 415). The epistle passionately develops a theology of the cross that shapes Christian ethics, Christian priorities, and Christian attitudes, the apostles directly confront all approaches to Christianity that happily seek to integrate a generally orthodox confession with pagan values of self-promotion. The epistle constitutes the most telling condemnation of arrogance, self-promotion, boasting, and self-confidence in Pauline corpus; conversely, they describe in practical terms the nature of Christian life and witness, emphasizing service, self-denial, purity, and weakness as the matrix in which God displays his strength. Perhaps the high-water mark is the emphasis on love as the most excellent way all Christians must pursue (Ibid 450-451).

BACKGROUND TO PAUL'S LETTER

The church met Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey which was located in one of the great cities of that day situated on a narrow strip of land which is only four miles across. Corinth was simultaneously a strategic center of commerce by land and by sea. Flourishing commerce often translates into thriving debauchery, but Corinth took debauchery and licentiousness to new heights or new depths. The other pagan cities of the day acknowledged Corinth's moral corruption by coining the word "*corinthiazesthai*" to live like a Corinthian (MacArthur 8).

In Corinth, sexual immorality, perversion, covetousness, stealing, drunkenness, gluttony, pride abusive speech was prominent. This is evidenced by Paul's letter revealing Corinth had it all. Wiersbe suggests in summary that if anyone wants to know more about what Corinth was like, such a person needs to read Romans 1:18-32. This is because, Paul wrote the Roman epistle while in Corinth, and he could have looked out the window and seen the very sins he listed (68). A casual observer might suggest religion to be the answer for Corinth, but religion was plentiful and the tide of iniquity flowed on unabated.

The religions of Corinth were part of the problem found in this region. A temple to the goddess of love and fertility, Aphrodite, was there. A thousand priestesses plied the trade of prostitution as part of the religious rites. Long-hair male prostitutes were also a common sight. Only the church of Jesus Christ had the medicine this sick society needed, but, sadly, the true physicians were themselves down with the disease. Instead of their influencing Corinth for Christ, Corinth had influenced them, and the sins of society had cropped up in the church. John MacArthur says the Christians of Corinth could not get '*decorinthianized*', and he proceed to add these telling words. 'They wanted to have the blessings of the new life but hang on to the pleasures of the old' (ix). Their salt had indeed lost its savor, and their light had indeed been covered.

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was directed to a deeply troubled church amid a very challenging word. The central concept of the letter is that redemption must be applied to everyday situations. The believer is to remember that the new life in Christ calls for a new way of living. The appeal being made is to the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the believer. Corinthians was known for its wickedness and immorality. This identity is highlighted by the corrupt, sensual worship of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Her temple including a thousand religious prostitutes stood in manifest contrast to the believer as the temple of the Holy Spirit and God's demand for right living (Dunnet 50).

Before Paul's teaching, it is significant to recall that He first visited Corinth on his second journey. While waiting for Silas and Timothy to come from Macedonia and rejoin him in Corinth, Paul met Aquila and Pricilla and, finding them to be tentmakers as he was, lived with them while carrying on his preaching. Upon the arrival of his companions, carrying with them news of conditions to the north, Paul reemphasized his proclamation "that Jesus was the Christ. this brought about the usual reaction from the Jews, and Paul henceforth concentrated on the Gentile ministry in Corinth. It was not long after several people became Christian, even Crispus the ruler of the synagogue. For at least eighteen months, Paul continued a systematic teaching program among them (Walter 49).

Paul took time in his letter to teach and deal with the troubles that rose in the church's leadership. He also dealt with the problem of lawsuits and sexual immorality. In doing so, he rebuked the church at Corinth for not handling some of these matters. In the church, other problems related to the matter of spiritual relationships, either of believers to one another or

situations within the ministries of the church. According to Dunnet, Paul also resolves the matter associated with their consciences. He taught that nothing is permitted to remain in anyone's life if that thing causes another believer to fall. He further mentions that all things should be done to the glory of God (51).

THEME OF 1 CORINTHIANS

The epistle may be divided into two; the main theme of the book and doctrinal instructions. The main theme of the book gave attention to the cleansing of the Church from false conception of the ministry, intellectual pride, and social evils. This is found in chapters 1-11. The doctrinal instructions are concerning the diversity of spiritual gifts (Chapter 12:1-31), the preeminence of love (Chapter 13:1-13), the preeminence of prophesy over the gift of tongues, and the importance of maintaining proper order in the public assemblies (Chapter 14:1-40), the doctrine of the resurrection and the closing instructions and situations (Chapter 16:1-6) (Thompson 1622).

PAUL'S AUTHORITY AS AN APOSTLE

First, Paul reminds them of his authority as an apostle (1:1). This was the customary way of opening his letters, but that doesn't make his words any less meaningful. Paul knew he could not be of any help to the Corinthians until they recognized his authority and submitted to it. They were in trouble because they had lost sight of this very thing. Somehow they had got the notion that they could 'freelance' in the Christian life, they could make it up as they went along. By reminding them of his apostleship, Paul was pulling them back from this disastrous mentality. Did Paul have authority over the Corinthians? Or was this just a figment of his imagination? All Christians readily acknowledge Paul was an apostle, but very few seem to understand what this entailed.

Some Christians don't hesitate to question whether Paul had the right to tell the Corinthians what they should believe and how they should behave. Those who argue in such a way fail to realize the unique place an apostle occupied in the economy of God. The apostle was not one who just took up religious leadership on a mere whim, but one who had received a special commission from the risen Christ. He was the recipient and bearer of God's revelation to the churches. We might say the apostles were to the early church what the New Testament is to us. Since God had invested such authority in them it was not optional to believe them. To dispute apostolic teaching was the same as disputing God.

THE CALLING OF PAUL'S READERS

Paul was not content simply to remind the Corinthians of his authority. He goes on to remind them of their high calling. He says they are '*the church of God*', '*sanctified in Christ Jesus*', and '*called to be saints*' (1:2). The word 'church' was originally used for any secular assembly, but Christians took the term and made it distinctively theirs. They used it to designate those called out of the world by God for fellowship with him. They were also sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints. What riches there are in those phrases! Something had happened to the Corinthians. They had been acted upon by God himself. He had 'sanctified' them. He had cleansed them from their sins and set them apart for his use. Furthermore, he had done this through the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no cleansing from sin apart from him. God had also 'called' them. How Paul loved this word! He had been 'called' to be an apostle, and the Corinthians had been 'called'. God had come to them while they were in their sins and had called them to himself.

The result of God's gracious work in their lives was that they were now 'saints'. They were God's holy ones, those he had cleansed and called to himself. Sainthood isn't something therefore that applies only to a handful of super-Christians. All Christians are saints because they all share the common experience of being sanctified and called by God. In using these powerful phrases, the apostle was already issuing a strong encouragement to the Corinthians to deal decisively with the sins in their midst. God's grace had made them his holy ones. Those who have such a high calling could not take sin lightly. Their calling demanded the highest moral character, and Paul's introductory words urge them to live up to that calling. There is at the same time a vein of comfort in his words. Even though they had allowed sin to contaminate their lives, they were still God's saints. God's work of grace in the lives of his people can never finally be defeated!

In addition to calling them saints, Paul reminds them of the larger family of saints to which they belong. What was his point in this? It was to remind the Corinthians that they were part and parcel of a larger body of believers; they were not mere autonomous islands that could live without regard to the other members of the body of Christ. Paul's words imply that the Corinthians had failed to see that all the followers of Christ had a stake in how they measured up to their Christian calling. These reminders of their high calling constituted a very stern rebuke to

the Corinthians for allowing themselves to be swept away by the twin tides of contamination and confusion.

GOD'S CARE FOR THE CHURCH

Ellsworth asserts that Paul's introductory words also reminded the Corinthians of God's ongoing care and concern for them (1:3). We start looking at the mess this church was in and we find ourselves thinking the whole situation was irretrievable. Thank God, all was not lost. The God who had called them to himself in grace and who had given them peace through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ was calling this grace and peace to their minds and still wishing them grace and peace through his appointed apostle. Perhaps you are wondering what all this has to do with us. The sad answer is that 'Corinthianism' didn't die with the Corinthians. It is still alive and well in our churches. Like them, we know what it is to throw off God's authority and become contaminated and confused by the world. We also know what it is to be so paralyzed by the moral laxity and doctrinal uncertainty that we fail to appreciate our privileges or live up to our potential. We also know what it is to be so stricken with the sickness of our world that we are powerless to carry the life-giving medicine of the gospel to others (17).

No, we don't have an apostle to whom we can write for guidance, but we do have this record of how Paul helped the Corinthians with their contamination and confusion. What does this mean? It means the God of grace and peace is still speaking to us! He doesn't write off his children as soon as we fall into the world's evil ways, or as soon as we uncritically adopt the world's thinking. He continues to be concerned about us and to call us to grace and peace. This very letter is a token of his grace, and obedience to its teachings will bring us to a posture of peace amid a trying world (Ellsworth 18).

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- West, Gerald. *Ruth*. In Dunn, James D.G. Rogerson, John William (eds.) *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Eerdmans, 2003.

INFORMATION

Candidates should study the following information and act accordingly.

1. You are expected to study the two books as provided in the handout thoroughly
2. You will be examined in essay writing
3. You will be examined on general knowledge: Current Affairs and Presbyterianism
4. You are required to build five files with the following documents:
 - a. Baptism Certificate
 - b. Confirmation Certificate
 - c. First School Leaving Certificate
 - d. O Level Certificate (WAEC, NECO, NABTEB, GCE) and First-Degree Certificate, etc
 - e. Birth Certificate/Age Declaration
 - f. Medical Report
 - g. Letter from your Sponsor(s)
 - h. Letter from your Parish/Recommendation Letter
 - i. Admission Form
 - j. General Assembly Form (Ministerial candidates)
 - k. 2 Copies of Passport (if possible recent) for each file (Red Background)
5. Examination Date is 3rd May 2023
6. Examination time is 11:00 am Prompt @ Hugh Goldie, Arochukwu, Abia State.
7. It is advisable to be in the school the night before the examination date.

Note: All candidates (Ministerial and Non-Ministerial) MUST pass through the Session, Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly of the Board of Education before coming to write the entrance examination.