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In this ground-breaking study of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, Kenneth Bailey examines this canonical letter through Paul's Jewish socio-cultural and rhetorical background and through the Mediterranean context of its Corinthian recipients.

Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians Details

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From Reader Review Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians for online ebook

Karl Dumas says

Ken Bailey skillfully meshes his knowledge of the New Testament and his knowledge of Middle Eastern Culture---he lived and taught in the region for many years.

I'm a bit of a nerd, so I enjoy the writing style that Bailey employs, but I realize that not everyone will get overly excited about his use of Chiasms. A.

B.

C.

B.

A.

Bottom line: it worked for me; I read and enjoyed the book.

And this book does deliver on the promise of being a cultural study of 1 Corinthians. What was going on in the area at the time Paul wrote this letter explains why the letter had to be written. It's not just about Paul's theology--the book of Romans handles that quite nicely. This letter is written to a church (or to the churches) to address specific issues happening which quite frequently were totally incongruous with the teachings of the Messiah.

Again, not an easy read, but well worth the effort for the serious student of the Pauline Epistles

John Willis says

Great read and this will be added to my collection. Love the literary analysis and the breaking down of the text with the history and culture of the time.

Soul Survivor says

Excellent for the reader who wants to study life at the time of Christ .

Bob Wolniak says

I really enjoy Bailey's books which bring to bear middle eastern scholarship and cultural background that is normally ignored in western commentaries. This is perhaps best used as a companion to Thiselton and Fee's classic 1 Corinthians commentaries (He refers to them frequently, as well as Wright near the end). I enjoyed the strong connections to the ring composition and prophetic template of Isaiah and Amos. His commentary and application is often very insightful in ways I don't get from others. The ring composition outlines are also eye openers for my preparation of studies or talks in 1 Corinthians, and gave me much (!) new appreciation for the composition and pattern of Paul's teachings in this letter. It is also laid out in such a way as to make it easy fodder for teaching a class or ongoing manuscript study in the epistle. Anyone studying 1 Corinthians would benefit from this book, especially the very strong sections in 1 Cor 12-14, as well as how

he unites the book's rhetoric and five theological essays.

Clint Walker says

A couple of weeks ago I received a promotional catalog promoting forthcoming books that were due to be released. I saw Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes and I had to have it.

Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes is written by Kenneth Bailey. For decades, Bailey has been known as an expert in Middle Eastern culture. He has lived and ministered as a missionary, pastor and professor in the areas the Bible people lived in. Along the way, he picked up new insights about the cultural context that God's Word was written in, and how the original hearers might have heard those texts.

His classic text was Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes. These texts helped readers see the parables in the gospel of Luke in a whole different light. Recently, Bailey compiled Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes, which offered unique perspectives on prominent passages in the Gospels. Now, in Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes, Bailey focuses his considerable intellect on the epistle of I Corinthians.

The book does not disappoint. Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes is deft at using literary analysis and cultural insight to communicate the essence of what Paul is trying to say in a simple and easy to understand way. Instead of simply going verse by verse through the book of I Corinthians, Bailey also takes on the book issue by issue. Thus, while covering the whole book, he gets to address hot button topics such as sexual ethics, the place of men and women in the leadership of the church, freedom and responsibility in the Christian life, and the centrality of the cross and resurrection in true Christian experience.

I particularly enjoyed his egalitarian insights on men and women as partners in marriage and leadership of the church. In this section, he interspersed deft analysis with personal anecdotes of his experiences working among Mediterranean people. His perspectives on the commands for silence, and what that command did in fact mean were both intelligent, and easy to pass on to others as I teach this passage.

First Corinthians is a popular book for many scholars to study and write about. There is a lot of work out there on this important book in the New Testament. Yet, none of what is out there in commentaries and other analysis is comparable to Bailey's unique perspective. I would recommend every pastor, teacher, and serious student of the word grab this book, purchase it, and add it to their bookshelf. It is well worth the money!

David says

I recall learning in seminary that the ancient Hebrews thought, and wrote, differently than we do today and this difference is a big obstacle to understanding their writing. Where we tend to write in a linear way so that the argument builds to a climax at the end (A-B-C-D), the Hebrews (Biblical prophets, Psalms) often wrote in a way that the main point is in the middle and everything surrounding it mirrors each other (A-B-C-B-A).

The crux of Bailey's argument is that since Paul was a Jewish Pharisee (rabbi) then it makes sense that he would also use this same style. In other words, if the scripture Paul read was filled with this then it is probably how he thought too. Bailey sees this clearly in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. He says that while scholars have tended to see 1 Corinthians as thrown together in response to problems in the church it is

actually a well-thought out, intricately crafted series of essays that is for the whole, universal church, though it is motivated by specific concerns in Corinth.

This is not a traditional dry commentary. It is a fantastic book and a must-read for any student of the Bible. It was the primary book I used in teaching 1 Corinthians on campus this semester.

Jeremy Bouma says

There is a pernicious Euro-American centricity that undergirds much of our understanding and perspective on the Scripture, which is why I am thankful that a number of scholars are taking a new look at the social, cultural, and rhetorical foundation that those Scriptures are rooted in order to help us re-capture a non-Western and pre-Western perspective on the Text.

Enter Kenneth Bailey's new book "Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians."

Bailey joins the likes of Ben Witherington--for which he is eminently known--in examining the socio-rhetorical-culture milieu that Paul's First Letter to the Church at Corinth is mired in. And Bailey seeks to pull the reader's head out of the sand of Euro-American centrism and into the new, fresh air of the Middle East by giving them Middle Eastern eyes. As Bailey states, "in the wider world, Middle Eastern Christians are often forgotten. The current discussions of the emergence of the Christian 'Global South' and its numerical dominance over Christians in Western Europe and North America, overlooks the Middle East entirely. Have already discussed a few topics in the Gospels in the light of important Middle Eastern Christian sources, this volume intends to focus similar attention on 1 Corinthians." (18)

Over the past forty years or so as Bailey has worked through this text, he says "at critical points in the text, I have asked, 'How did Middle Eastern Christians across the centuries understand this text?'" Bailey sets out to answer this question throughout his examination of 1 Corinthians. He has three basic concerns in his approach to 1 Corinthians: 1) Paul, a Middle Eastern Jewish Christian, uses rhetorical styles that were available to him in the writings of the Hebrew prophets; 2) Middle Eastern life and literature is of assistance in recovering and bringing to life Paul's metaphors and parables; and 3) he examines 23 representative samples of the long heritage of Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew translations of 1 Corinthians. (19)

Bailey begins by arguing that 1 Cor is Paul's most contemporary letter, holding along with an apparent cloud of witnesses throughout the historic Church (including Ambrosiaster, Chrysostom, Bishr ibn al-Sari, and Calvin) that this letter is not simply occasional but written to all the Church. And it's a letter "with a carefully designed inner coherence that exhibits amazing precision in composition and admirable grandeur in overall theological concept" with "five carefully constructed essays, which themselves showcase a discernible theological method." (25)

Here's Bailey's thematic outline:

- I. The Cross ad Christian Unity 1:5--4:16
- II. Men and Women in the Human Family 4:17--7:40
- III. Food Offered to Idols (Christian and Pagan) 8:1--11:1
- IV. Men and Women in Worship 11:2--14:40
- V. The Resurrection 15

He also argues this outline reveals three principle ideas: the cross and resurrection (I, V); Men and women in the human family and in worship (II, IV); and Christian living among pagans (III).

I find both this outline and these three principle ideas helpful, if not innovative. A glance through my commentaries on 1 Corinthians--Fee, Thiselton, Collins, Ciampa/Rosner, and Witherington--don't share his thematic outline, though Collins comes close who identifies 6 rhetorical "demonstrations." And from what I remember, and in my review of these commentaries in light of this review, I don't recall them drawing out the Hebraic rhetorical style that Bailey centers upon. In fact the most recent addition to the 1 Corinthians commentary library from Ciampa and Rosner state Paul uses Graeco-Roman rhetoric. Except a Hebraic rhetorical style culled from the prophets themselves is what Bailey argues for: "Using his own Jewish literary tradition, he built on the rhetoric of the classical writing prophets and composed a series of masterpieces not the topics he selected." (27)

He also argues that rather than being an occasional letter written specifically to the Church at Corinth, Paul "looked at the specific problems that surfaced in Corinth and selected some of them. The topics he chose were those that new Christian communities were debating in many places. He then composed 1 Cor and sent a copy to Corinth and to churches everywhere. He did address Corinthians and at the same time, he invited the rest of the Church to 'listen in' on his 'phone conversation' hoping to serve the entire church." This is why he argues the book is composed of five carefully constructed essays. (27) This seems to fly in the face of prevailing modern commentaries, which D. G. Dunn states and whom Ciampa and Rosner quote: "1 Corinthians cannot be properly understood unless it is read against the backdrop of its historical context and as part of a dialogue with the Corinthian church itself." I'm sure Bailey would agree with this to some extent, but ultimately would move beyond what appears to be a straightjacket approach to interpreting the letter by doing so in broader, general sense. Here is how he summarizes his argument:

it appears when a long list of problems surfaced in Corinth, Paul selected those of general concern and addressed both the Corinthians and the church at large in a single letter. For this extraordinarily well-constructed, important document Paul reached back into his own Jewish past and co-opted rhetorical styles sanctified by the classical writing prophets...The result was one of Paul's finest efforts and it can indeed be called "Paul's most contemporary epistle." (30)

Again, an interesting methodological position, but also seemingly innovative in comparison to the modern exegetical tradition. That's not to say it's a bad thing. But I think it's a supplemental position, since it does seem to be an unusual one.

Additionally, as mentioned before, Bailey uses his extensive Middle Eastern background--which amounts to 40 years worth living and teaching experience in Egypt, Lebanon, Cyprus, and Jerusalem--and historical commentaries from the Middle East that stretch from the 4th through the 5th centuries to illumine Paul's use of metaphor and parable. As we've come to realize over the past few decades, getting the 1st century backdrop to Paul and his letter-receiving communities is important. Bailey seeks to do so by emphasizing the Middle Eastern nature of that backdrop, which he does in his own unique way. And while this way is a good supplemental way, I wonder how safe that way is considering how informed it is by "how Middle Eastern Christians across the last 1,600 years have understood 1 Corinthians," especially those from the 4th and 5th century.

That's not to dismiss them, however. I think us Euro-American centric interpreters need the voices from across the ocean and throughout the past, especially the ones closer to the moment and closer to the environment. My caution is that sometimes such a method can bring things to the text that simply weren't there before or intended by the author, but we shall see.

So how does Bailey use his Middle Eastern experience and sources to help give us a sharper, crisper reading of 1 Corinthians? Look at some examples:

His commentary on 1 Cor 1:17-2:2 draws a parallel between this passage on the cross and the suffering servant hymn of Is. 50:5-11. Bailey argues the same rhetorical device of Is. appears in this 1 Cor. passage, which is an important piece of Jewish background to Paul's hymn to the cross as "by building on Isaiah, Paul discusses the cross in a way that could communicate to Jewish readers/listeners on a very deep level. Likewise, Paul was "concerned for his Greek readers/listeners who would not have had the background in the book of Isaiah." Therefore, according to Bailey, Paul takes a page out of Greek hero tradition by formulating this piece after Greek funeral orations: "A careful examination of Pericles' oration and Paul's hymn to Christ crucified reveals seven points of comparison and contrast." These two points illustrate how Bailey situates Paul's letter in Hebrew rhetoric and Middle Eastern culture. (90-95)

In commenting on the guilt induced by receiving the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner found in 1 Cor 11:27, Bailey illuminates the strong connotation by bringing into the discussion Middle Eastern versions of the word used over the last thousand years for the Greek enokhos (guilty): "Some read shajab (destroy) or shajib (destroyer). "Guilty against" appears along with "criminal in regard to." Khati'a ila (sin against) is used both in Arabic and in Hebrew. All of these versions recognize that something dark and sinister is taking place." So we can see commentors and words from the Middle East use strong language to talk about the person who is "guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. (322-323)

The famous passage on love in 1 Cor 13 carries an interesting translation of vs. 8: "love never fails." We're used to the translation "love never fails," but Bailey reveals that "Oriental versions have preserved this concrete image and consistently translated the text literally. In the days before dynamite, bulldozers and backhoes, most Mediterranean mountain "roads" were narrow paths. Falling was an ever real possibility. Strabo describes the road from Athens to Corinth by saying 'The road approaches so close to the rocks that in many places it passes along the edge of the precipices, because the mountain situated above them is both lofty and impracticable for roads.' Paul had walked that road. Regardless of danger along 'the mountain pass,' love does not fall. Paul's model was surely the life of Christ. He was the one whose love never "fell down," even when nailed to the cross." Interesting illumination of the cultural background and Middle Eastern translation/interpretation! (379-380)

In 1 Cor 15:25 we read that Jesus "must reign until he has put all his enemies are under his feet." Bailey explains that his "image 'under the feet' the projects the extent of his victory is a powerful Middle Eastern Metaphor." He goes on to explain how a life-size wooden statue of Pharaoh Tutankhamen is on display in the Cairo Museum of Antiquity, and this statue is of the Pharaoh on a throne with his feet elevated on a stool with all of his enemies carefully carved onto its surface with their hands tied behind their backs! And as Bailey goes on to say, "For Paul, all things will be under the feet of Christ. The language carries with it the image of total surrender and the impossibility of the enemies ever contemplating a 'comeback.'" (446-447). That little nugget refracts this passage a bit more sharply in the light of Middle Eastern perspective.

Obviously, in a massive commentary volume like this one on 1 Corinthians (a 560 pages worth!) you can't evaluate everything. And these few examples don't do this commentary justice. I do think they help one understand how Bailey is using his source material and Middle Eastern cultural understanding to illuminate the text for us. To be honest I was surprised there wasn't a stronger sense of that perspective woven throughout the text, which could be both a good and bad thing: good in the sense that Bailey isn't controlling the interpretive effort and bad in the sense I'm not sure the commentary does everything he set out to do. The commentary was "Paul through Middle Eastern eyes," or "Mediterranean eyes" as it was title, but as I made my way through the book it didn't seem to be as saturated as I thought it would have been, either in the

Hebraic prophetic rhetorical tradition or Middle Easter cultural experience as the author promised.

Now this isn't to say I don't think this is a solid offering, especially a solid supplemental one to the mainstay 1 Corinthian commentaries. It is and I think what it offers is more than made up in my perceived mark-missing. Not only does it bring good sense of the Middle East/Mediterranean world to bear on the interpretive enterprise--and when he does it's solid--the commentary also brings a (perhaps, much) stronger rhetorical analysis to that effort. Bailey brings much detailed rhetoric analysis to Paul's letter, even if it is more innovative and different than the prevailing structural analysis of 1 Cor commentaries of yore. It also provides interesting intertextual links between the Tanak, especially Isaiah, and has a fascinating appendix discussion on the role of the Book of Amos in the opening of the letter.

So by and large a good supplemental commentary that provides a needed service in helping pastors, students, and scholars alike shed a purely Euro-American centric in favor of recapturing a Middle Eastern perspective on one of the most crucial epistles of Paul for our contemporary situation.

Michael says

The author has a deep understanding of the historical and cultural context of 1 Corinthians that enables him to provide satisfying explanations for some of the cryptic phrases used by Paul and to compare Paul's writings with works from a surprising range of other people, including Abraham Lincoln and Plato! The author reveals the beautiful poetic form of many passages in 1 Corinthians, as well as some interesting background on Paul himself, such as ways in which his identity as an experienced lecturer may show through his writing. I haven't gotten very far into the book yet, but it's already made me feel much more "connected" to 1 Corinthians.

Debbie says

"Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes" is a very thick commentary on 1 Corinthians. From the title, I expected a book focused on the cultural background of 1 Corinthians that would help us better understand Paul's points. However, the main focus was on the rhetorical style used in 1 Corinthians.

The author carefully constructed charts showing how the 1 Corinthians format matched that of the Old Testament prophets. He claimed that understanding this format would help us better understand the meaning of Paul's words. To be honest, I sometimes couldn't easily see why the sentences were arranged in that format (except that's where they should be to fit the format) and ended up feeling stupid and confused (rather than enlightened) by seeing the rhetorical format laid out. Perhaps those who already have some background in rhetorical styles in the Bible would find it more enlightening.

The author also gave a commentary on the verses. While interesting, his comments didn't stand out to me as memorable nor did I feel like I'd gained new insight into the verses. When the author did mention how Middle Easterners might have understood the verses (so as to increase our understanding), I found it interesting and thought-provoking but rarely enlightening. Also, some of the things he said might explain the verses, but I've read Bible background books that give different explanations that seem to fit the text better.

So, overall, the book contained some interesting information, but I didn't feel like reading it cleared up any potential confusions I had about 1 Corinthians. It was more than it pointed out possible nuances that I might not have otherwise noticed.

I received this book as a review copy from the publisher.

Mark says

There are plenty of other reviews that go in-depth, so I will limit my comments to a brief summary of my reaction and recommendation.

Dr. Bailey provides a perspective into interpreting 1 Corinthians that is different from most other commentaries. The rhetorical approach that sees the Hebrew rhetorical structure is valuable in uncovering meanings that may be missed or undeveloped in the typical linear reading of the epistle.

As some reviewers have noted, this book is much closer to a traditional commentary than some of his other works that focus far more on cultural background. At the same time Bailey provides cultural insights that are vital to interpretation that are often not found in other commentaries.

Bailey departs from the conservative, evangelical interpretations of several key topics in Christian doctrine. These include the role of women in the church, the theory/model of Christ's atonement, and the nature of the human soul/spirit. I believe Bailey presents his case expertly, using history, cultural studies, literature, and rhetoric to build his case for each. Will it convince everyone? Probably not. Yet the weight he lends is considerable simply by the weight of his background, expertise, and experience.

I emphatically recommend this commentary. It isn't something from which one can directly create sermons, but used alongside more traditional commentaries and resources, it provides insight and understanding that cannot be found elsewhere. It fills in gaps that one encounters from more traditional studies. It helps the student see the epistle from a new perspective.

M Christopher says

This is another solid contribution to the field of New Testament studies from Kenneth E. Bailey. Not quite as enjoyable or as potentially useful to the working pastor as his fine "Jesus through Middle-Eastern Eyes," it nonetheless contains several very helpful passages.

Bailey's approach continues to be based on his knowledge of ancient and modern Middle-Eastern languages and his experience of life in Middle-Eastern villages, which have changed little since the time of Christ. In "Paul through Mediterranean Eyes," he turns from the Gospels and the parables of Jesus to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. He is able to provide several insights concerning Paul's Jewish heritage and the lives of his converts in Corinth.

Two things remove this book from the four star ranking I've previously given some of Bailey's work. First, there is a sense that in dealing with the Corinthian milieu Bailey is slightly out of his element. He is, after all, an expert in the area of the agrarian Levant rather than the urban centers of Rome. Secondly, much of his

approach in this book is built off of a thorough knowledge of Hebrew and Greek rhetoric. Form criticism is, in general, of interest only to the specialist. It doesn't preach well.

Still, this book is well worth reading and I recommend it with the reservation that it will not be as immediately applicable for the working preacher in search of insights for his or her congregation. I would rank it with most commentaries on I Corinthians rather than as the kind of breakthrough in Biblical cultural studies represented by "Jesus through Middle-Eastern Eyes."

Dave Courtney says

Kenneth E. Bailey brings an extensive knowledge of middle eastern culture to his commentary on 1 Corinthians, most importantly his experience in middle eastern village life. He previously wrote "Jesus through Middle-Eastern Eyes", which I think is a good representative of his passion and area of interest. Here he expands this focus to apply the same sort of "cultural studies" approach to the world from which (he understands) Paul to have penned this letter. Bailey argues that with the East/West discussion much attention has been given to the emergence of Christianity in the global south, but very little attention has been given to the Middle Eastern part of the world from which his passion and experience and knowledge is formed, and from which this text would have been formed.

He argues that this is the earliest of Paul's material (and thus the most contemporary to Jesus' life and ministry). From this he attempts to help us see the premise of his own cultural approach, an approach that suggests (and rightly so) that scholarship, clergy and the common reader alike have shared tendencies in assuming this letter and text to carry a sort of muddled and sporadic flavour that moves from topic to topic with a sort of closed interest in the Corinthian Church itself.

The two primary markers of the path that Bailey forges in regards to his cultural studied approach (which are the markers that set him apart from many or most other commentaries on 1 Corinthians) is:

1. The intentional comparisons between the Israelite prophetic writing tradition (of Isaiah and Amos in particular), while at the same time incorporating the Greek funeral oration of Pericles
2. His understanding of the (Scope of the) audience.

To point number one, to understand Paul through Mediterranean eyes the reader must recognize the template of the (book) itself. There is a large degree of difference in the writing style of the ancient Hebrews and some of the assumptions that have been made by modern criticism and translations that have persisted in the West. In the West there exists a stubborn tendency to read in a linear way, and much scholarship suggests that this stubborn tendency persists even when we are faced with a text that does not seem to fit. To this end we end up treating texts as requiring a certain kind of plot formation, and when this fails to arrive in (appropriate) fashion the text is then typecast as in-cohesive. This mentality has been unfortunately incorporated in to the translation of the text itself.

Bailey insists that Paul was writing from his own Jewish heritage and from a strong Middle Eastern Jewish tradition that utilizes what is called a "Ring Composition". The basic sense of this writing style is that the main point sits in the middle (rather than in the climax) while the outer layers on either side simply mirror the issues at hand. The understanding of the text as sharing the Jewish prophetic tradition lends him to see the book as a highly intentional structure and a cohesive narrative that consists of the following five essays:

1. The Cross ad Christian Unity 1:5--4:16
2. Men and Women in the Human Family 4:17--7:40

3. Food Offered to Idols (Christian and Pagan) 8:1--11:1

4. Men and Women in Worship 11:2--14:40

5. The Resurrection 15

Within these five essays we then find a summary of his primary concerns in the following:

Essays 1 and 5: the cross and resurrection

Essays 2 and 4: Men and women in the human family and in worship

Essay 3: Christian living among pagans

Bailey gives extensive attention at the beginning of each essay (which is identified through a description of the process of "receiving" and "passing on" the tradition) to how this flow operates and how it keeps intact as a functioning unit. And he is highly convincing (I would think so much so that it would be difficult to refute his larger theories, even if some of his interpretations, which he admits as such, do arrive with a bit of necessary mystery and question intact). Thus, as he moves through the text (which he does chapter by chapter, and to a point verse by verse), texts that were once commonly understood in isolation are suddenly given the opportunity to come alive in respect to a larger argument and focus. For example, it is quite shocking to see the difference it makes to take a text that is placed at the end of one section or essay and to see it instead as the introduction to a new one. And yet the beauty of Bailey's approach is even when this shock arises, he allows us the breath to take a step back and marvel at how much sense this fresh perspective actually makes.

The second part of point one above has to do with (as Bailey argues) Paul's Greek audience (which is addressed in point two). The basic premise of this assertion is that much of Paul's language and imagery and structure follows a Greek oration. Bailey sees this as highly intentional, and suggests in regards to the 2nd point above that recognizing this has the ability to transform the sheer scope of the audience Paul had in mind.

Point two regards the scope of the audience, and Bailey argues that the letter to the Corinthians was far more than simply a letter to one Church. Paul might use the Corinthians as an example to highlight some particular issues, but what he has in mind is not simply the Jewish readers, but the gentiles of the Greek world and ultimately "all believers" everywhere. The sheer weight of the evidence, when seen in light of the subtle Greek terminology and symbols along with his incredible efforts to speak to his own Jewish tradition (and Jesus transformation) in the careful terms of one who is living with both Jewish and Greek/gentile in mind, is overwhelming to say the least. This is one of the areas that simply makes so much sense, and really does change the way we read so much of the text. Indeed, Paul sets out this concern in the first chapter (from the Church in Corinth to the more generalized company of those "sanctified in Christ", to the all encompassing "all those who in every place call upon the name of Jesus as Lord"), and continues this scope all the way through.

Some of the insights that stood out for me:

1. The Love Chapter (13, with the supportive chapters 12 and 14 that sit on either side). He contends for the translation "love never fails" (instead of "ends" or "fails") which transforms the vision of the love text into a metaphor that we don't always see in traditional translations. At its core the entire love passage is set within a mountain metaphor. When Paul contends to show us a more "excellent" way, he uses a word to that carries strong inclinations of a "journey" and/or an "extreme journey" that is looking directly up a mountain (of which he carries over in the terminology of chapter 13), and of which we are required not to only run but to also rest, to learn patience and gain experience as we become aware of our surroundings. The imagery brings us up a mountain, and has us looking over the side precariously and down into the large valleys of our world. It is here that Paul uses a word for love that, as Bailey suggests, "has no footprint in the Greek

language". It is a word that can apply universally, and it is a word that Paul can use and form how he desires (which he deftly uses to create a picture of the economy of God, a new royal law based on a new definition of love). Love becomes the very component in which the issues we encounter in this letter become measurable. In this definition of love we can address the issue of division, both in the Church and outside of it. In this definition of love we can address the pervasive challenge of sexuality and culture. In this definition of love we can address what it means to participate in the economy of God within pagan (Greek/gentile) culture.

2. The subtle (and not so subtle) building bricks of the economy of God: If the core of this economy is Paul's new and shocking definition of love (which applies to both the weak and the powerful), in chapter 1 we are set directly on a path towards this conversation in the implications of "calling". There are two building blocks that become immediately necessary in a flow that sends us head over heals in to the question of a community divided:

- That God calls, God decrees, God prepares and God reveals
- That the "mystery" is the cross, the resurrection and the person of Christ.

The first building block leads us to the problematic challenge of jealousy that Paul contends is pervasive across the larger whole of the Church community in dividing what should be a united vision. The second building block addresses the theme of knowledge/wisdom, a central part of the discussion of how division is addressed.

A big part of the challenge that arises for Paul is balancing the nature of his apostolic position, which easily derailed in the eyes of the people in to a competition of "teachers" and "followers" and a unwelcomed heirarchy that stood opposed to the humility of being called and equipped by Christ for the sake of the people. Paul attempts to do the hard work of reconciling this tension, most notably in his willingness to set aside his contentious relationship with Peter. He contends that because we "all are yours (God's)", and "you are Christ's" and "Christ is God's", that which divides us needs to be necessarily set at the foot of the cross. The term used for Christ in chapter four is one that would have spoken directly to the image of "Shetiyah", a stone in the midst of the temple rubble that represented the elevated presence of the holy. In this sense he is envoking Jesus as the foundation on which all discussion must b built.

Some other notes:

Bailey gives us some of his more tantalizing and invigorating thoughts when it comes to the chapters regarding women in worship, to his discussions of sexuality, and as well on his focus on Paul's definition of love as it applies to the rich/poor divide. Set inside the Greek narrative and the Jewish Prophetic model, the discussion of sexuality in particular is shaped with an incredibly intentional focus on the dividing philosophies regarding the body, the flesh and the spirit. Bailey suggests that Paul is not necessarily attacking sexual immorality as a public problem (although it is), nor is he speaking of it as an action done to another. Rather he is addressing it as a part of our "individual personality". He is objecting the "dehumanizing" of sex and sexuality in the face of a pervasive dualism and a complicated Jewish tradition. As he does with the term "love", Paul is attempting to speak from both worlds in a fashion that can bring every side of the issue in to the view of Christ (or in to view of Christ).

In this same sense, Paul's discussion of women in worship is set directly in a wider (and cohesive) unit that is focused on Paul's somewhat shocking and culture shaping view of personal freedom and rights. Passages that appear in much scholarship as a commentary on women's place in the Church come in to view as an equalizing process that addresses not just the issue of division that the wisdom/knowledge and powerful/poor/weak discussions that have been pervasive throughout the first portion tend us towards, but also this startling assertion that love MUST reach to both sides in any situation and affect our responses regardless of our situations and where we find ourselves in social systems. The issues of marriage, the

conversation of food and idols, the prominence of the surrendering of rights in chapter 9 and the warning of the idolatry of self fueled and self centered thinking all play in to what becomes a discussion of head coverings (activity in the Church and women in the Church), spiritual gifts and church function as a body (and finally the place of spiritual gifts as individual shaping activity with a communal concern in light of Paul's transformative view on love). To read it in such a unifying fashion is, to say the least, absolutely exciting. It suddenly gives the triumphant return to the Resurrection in the final chapters an incredible piece of context. This is not just about a world that we are yet to inhabit, or an ideal that we are waiting to see achieved. It is about a life that we live now, about a God economy that takes active residence and shapes our day to day living our individual calling, but perhaps much more so our community living.

If Bailey is right, this letter is far from representing a limited engagement. Paul lives with the concern for a wide audience. He also sees an audience in both the present and the future. Paul lives with respect to the Greek/gentile culture, and yet, incredibly so, looks to transform his own Jewish community in a way that echo's the dangerous message of the economy of God without isolating the gentile community. In the process, and under the lens that Kenneth E. Bailey avails us through a study of the much forgotten Middle Eastern Culture (in which the activity of this book would have taken shape), we find a contemporary letter that was absolutely relevant to the person and ministry of Jesus (given its proximity to his earthly ministry), but that also carries over in to the Church and the culture of the ages to come.

Bryan says

Bailey is always a good voice to have at the table when looking at the original context of Biblical passages. I appreciated this work since in the past most of his books have been focused on Jesus and his parables. This book helped to look at Paul more in his 1C context. Paul traditionally gets maligned more than Jesus. People try to associate him more with a 16C devotee of Martin Luther when in reality Paul was a 1C Jewish teacher with his heart and mind focused on Jerusalem and Torah.

Bailey also bring in a lot of good analysis of textual rhetorical techniques. Sometimes he repeats himself as he explains for the umpteenth time this is how the "ring" or "high jump" structure works. But overall it's usually helpful repetition that one can skim through if need be.

Sam Eccleston says

More great cultural context and rhetorical analysis from Kenneth Bailey. If you are familiar with his use of the 'prophetic rhetorical template' as an analytical lens then it can become a bit repetitive, but the substantive commentary is always enlightening.

Sagely says

I ordered *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes* because I needed a commentary on 1 Corinthians and this one had won some important awards. Don't judge a book by its awards, I guess, is the lesson.

The strength of PtME is Bailey's close attention to the text and its rhetorical argumentation. Utilizing a

methodology he seems to have developed elsewhere, Bailey highlights the potential parallels or thought echoes running throughout 1 Cor. Particularly, by highlighting some chiastic/ring structures, Bailey succeeds in drawing attention to a shifted emphasis (to the center, not the end) in arguments that have long been interpreted otherwise.

But this strength verges into a flaw at points. Some of the parallels are striking, perhaps undeniable. Others seem forced, a gust of chiasmania.

Also, PtME's historical scholarship is often outdated or out of touch. Bailey warns at the beginning that his scholarly focus is not Pauline literature. He appeals to older commentaries and older historical works. The result is that some of the same old misunderstandings continue to be propagated.

I could say something similar about PtME's theological and pastoral applications. Many These are goodhearted but don't reflect sustained critical reflection on the relationship of what amount to truism and the text. PtME does, thankfully, forward some important reflection on the missiological and cultural impacts of application. That is a worthwhile contribution to the conversation around 1 Cor.

After preaching through 1 Cor for more than 3 months, I'm happy to have had PtME in my library. I'm also happy to be putting it back on the shelf until next time.
