A CONCILIATORY PRINCIPLE IN 1 COR. 4:6

by

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Few achievements of the scholarship of the past century compare with Heinrici's proof of the existence of discrete analogies between Greco-Roman religious associations and the earliest Gentile-Christian churches. The surprising concurrence of characteristic expressions in Paul's epistles and in the cultic inscriptions led Heinrici to the conclusion that these were kindred forms of life. His investigations cast light, in particular, upon the troubled history of the Corinthian community, whose conflicts, errors, and enthusiasms demonstrate its proximity to the Roman world. Nor did Heinrici's comparative approach fail to illuminate the thought of Paul himself; for without minimizing the apostle's originality, it is nevertheless clear that the manner in which he expresses himself often reflects the influence of the rhetorical and political conventions of a Greek city in the imperial period. Heinrici faced opposition at the time from theologians who sought to maintain the priority of the Old Testament and Christian experience in the interpretation of Paul's epistles, as well as from philologists who...
viewed Heinrici’s analogical approach as a dangerous crossing of the academic disciplines. But the research of the past one hundred years has vindicated Heinrici’s method and its presuppositions; in particular, investigation of epistolary and rhetorical categories has proven fruitful in the exegesis of Paul’s epistles. The present essay seeks to determine whether consideration of the rhetorical form and social context of 1 Corinthians 1-4 contributes to the interpretation of one of its most perplexing statements, Paul’s explanation that he has written to the Corinthians ἵνα ἐν ἡμῖν μάθητε τὸ μὴ ὑπὲρ ἡγέραπται (1 Cor. 4:6).

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How many scholars have suspected that the words τὸ μὴ ὑπὲρ ἡγέραπται in 1 Cor. 4:6 were what the author of 2 Peter had in mind when he warned his readers about ὅσον τὰ τῶν in Paul’s epistles? A number of otherwise stalwart interpreters have returned from the fray convinced that the text is hopelessly corrupt and resigned to their lack of understanding. Other, more ingenious, critics have suggested that the phrase was originally a marginal gloss and argued for conjectural emendation. The majority persist in seeing