

Toward a New Scribal Tendency: Reciprocal Corruptions and the Text of 1 Corinthians 8:2–3

MARK LETTENY

mark.letteney@princeton.edu

Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544

This article demonstrates that there are strong intrinsic and transcriptional grounds to posit the priority of the “shorter text” of 1 Cor 8:2–3 and explores the grounds for the longer text’s appearance in the context of a developing early Christian interest in divine reciprocity in love and knowledge.

From Clement’s chambers and Augustine’s episcopal see to the centers of production for some of our earliest biblical manuscripts, a late antique conversation transpired about reciprocity in knowledge between God and those who love God. While the details of these conversations are nearly all lost to history, glimpses of the controversy surrounding divine reciprocity remain embedded in the sources and point to an alteration of 1 Cor 8:2–3 that brought the text in line with a widely attested theological commitment and introduced thematic uniformity into the Pauline corpus.

In what follows, I argue that there are strong grounds, both intrinsic and transcriptional, to believe that the oldest recoverable form of 1 Cor 8:2–3 is the shorter reading: εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι [τι], οὐπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι. εἰ δέ τις ἀγαπᾷ, οὗτος ἔγνωσται (“If someone appears to know [something], he does not yet know as he ought. But if someone is loving, that person has come to know”), preserved in its entirety only in the late-second- or early-third-century manuscript p^{46} and in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis*.¹ Careful analysis of the manuscript tradition and of contemporaneous literary sources will demonstrate that the remarkable state of the textual tradition can be most compellingly explained with the shorter

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¹For the most up-to-date discussion of the dating of p^{46} , see James R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri*, NTTSD 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 199–201, 249–50.

text of 1 Cor 8:2–3 posited as the oldest recoverable form. With the addition of a mere five words, inserted during the transmission of the text on the grounds of assimilation to known Pauline doctrine and an emphasis on divine reciprocity, the “shorter reading” above became the “longer reading” of the Majority tradition and NA²⁸: εἰ δὲ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἔγνωσται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ (“[If someone appears to know something, he does not yet know as he ought.] But if someone loves *God*, that person is *known by him*”).

Strong intrinsic grounds for preferring the shorter reading are bolstered by its presence in p⁴⁶, one of the earliest extant biblical papyri, along with an unambiguous attestation by Clement of Alexandria, whose demonstrable preference would have been for the longer reading had he known it. Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ) and minuscule 33, which witness a “mixed reading” in the original hand, demonstrate a preference in both their text and their corrections for readings that emphasize the theme of divine reciprocity as epitomized in the longer reading of this verse. Analysis of both manuscripts will help to illustrate how the mixed and longer readings arose in these and other witnesses. What is visible in the redaction and transmission of these two manuscripts may well be present in textual units whose state of variation remains invisible due to the relative dearth of early manuscripts. It is quite possible that 1 Cor 8:2–3 is not the only New Testament text altered with an eye to heightening the motif of reciprocity. And were it not for the chance discovery of p⁴⁶, we may never have thought to query the transmission of 1 Cor 8:1–3 thoroughly enough to uncover the textual contours of this late antique discourse surrounding divine reciprocity in love and knowledge.

I. INTRINSIC PROBABILITIES

The text as rendered in NA²⁸/UBS⁵ is as follows, with variation units not found in p⁴⁶ enclosed in square brackets. Formatting and punctuation have been modified to highlight structure.

8:1 Περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων:

οἶδαμεν ὅτι “πάντες γινῶσιν ἔχομεν.”

ἢ γινῶσις φυσιοῖ, ἢ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ.

2 εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι [τι], οὕτω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι.

3 εἰ δὲ τις ἀγαπᾷ [τὸν θεόν], οὗτος ἔγνωσται [ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ].

4 Περὶ τῆς βρώσεως οὖν τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων:

8:1 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols:

We know that “We all have knowledge.”

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

2 If someone appears to have come to know something, he has not yet come to know as it is necessary to know.

3 But if someone loves [God], that person has come to know [or: has been known by him].

4 Therefore concerning the eating of food sacrificed to idols:...

“The most striking thing about this opening paragraph is how non sequitur it seems to be,” observes Gordon Fee in his commentary on the passage. “Paul begins with the regular rubric ‘now about’ (cf. 7:1), having as its present content ‘food sacrificed to idols.’ But what immediately follows (vv. 1b–3) says nothing about either eating food or idols.”² The formula *περὶ δέ* has been shown to be a common discourse marker in antiquity that distinguishes the beginning of a new thematic discussion, and the repetition of *περὶ ... τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων* from verse 1 (with *οὓν* replacing *δέ*) in verse 4 then serves semantically to link the first and fourth verses further.³ What remains intercalated is a startling interjection that has been variously interpreted as an elucidation of the ethical implications of certain spiritual gifts,⁴ an echo of later discussion of the ontological status of idols,⁵ an admonition of the “Strong” party in relation to the “Weak,”⁶ an invocation of the “stumbling block” principle,⁷ and so on. What is universally admitted is that the interstitial syllogism constitutes a coherent set and is indispensable for the interpretation of Paul’s teaching on food sacrificed to idols, though opinions differ regarding precisely how.

The structure of Paul’s argument in his opening salvo (vv. 1b–3) involves a deductive syllogism and concerns the proper qualification of *γνώσις*.⁸

“We all have *γνώσις*,” offers Paul either as a concession (“We know that ‘we all have *γνώσις*,’ as you say”) or as a maxim (“We know that we all have *γνώσις*”). But Paul retorts that *ἀγάπη* and *γνώσις* can be at odds—while *γνώσις* makes arrogant, *ἀγάπη* edifies. The opening slogan “we all have knowledge” is balanced at the close of the passage by a new slogan—one that is reformulated in light of the “love principle” of the second premise. The reformulation of the common slogan “we all have *γνώσις*” plays on the dichotomy between supposed knowledge and true knowledge. Paul’s new slogan, “If someone loves, he has come to know,” is not merely a maxim. Rather, it is a conditional that explains the new slogan with reference to its inverse.

Premise 1:	<i>οἶδαμεν ὅτι “πάντες γνώσιν ἔχομεν.”</i>
Premise 2 (“love principle”):	<i>ἡ γνώσις φυσιοῖ, ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ.</i>
Conclusion:	<i>εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι, οὕτω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι. εἰ δὲ τις ἀγαπᾷ, οὗτος ἔγνωσται.</i>

²Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 364.

³Margaret M. Mitchell, “Concerning *Περὶ Δέ* in 1 Corinthians,” *NovT* 31 (1989): 229–56.

⁴Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 366.

⁵Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, EKK 7.2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995), 221.

⁶Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 140.

⁷David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 376.

⁸I will treat all three variants in question (*τι* in v. 2 and *τὸν θεόν* and *οὐτ’ αὐτοῦ* in v. 3) as a group, for reasons that will be discussed below.

Careful attention to tense in Paul's choice of verbs bears out the internal coherence of the passage: **If someone thinks he has come to know [something]** (or "appears to know"), as expressed with a perfect verb (ἐγνωκέναι) to denote completed action, **he has not known truly**, as expressed with an aorist verb connoting a simple past (γνώσκειν). **However, if (εἰ δέ) someone is in the act of being loving**, with a present verb denoting progressive aspect (ἀγαπᾷ), **that person has come to know**, expressed with another perfect verb (ἔγνωσται) correlating to the perfect ἐγνωκέναι at the beginning of Paul's conditional. The reflexive force of the perfect middle ἔγνωσται is then to convey that the γνώσις is had by the doer of the action, "the one who is being loving." LSJ notes particularly that the perfect middle-passive of γιγνώσκω can be employed with an active meaning, as it is in Demosthenes, to which I add a similar second-century CE usage in Appian's *Punic Wars* 81.⁹ The logic of Paul's conditional implies that the act of loving others is reflexive with respect to knowledge, and thus a middle construction deftly reinforces grammatically what the passage expresses rhetorically.

Paul's reformulation of the opening maxim "we all have knowledge" as "if someone is loving, that person has come to know" hangs on the conditional—the argument "if someone thinks he knows, he does not yet know as he ought," which refers both back to the principle "love builds up/knowledge puffs up" and forward to its inverse "if someone is loving, that person has come to know." The first half of the conditional, "if someone thinks he has come to know" explains Paul's statement about γνώσις puffing up and ἀγάπη building up by distinguishing between γνώσις proper within the Corinthian community—that which is tempered by active love—and γνώσις that is improper. The irony to which Paul points is that those who imagine themselves to have found γνώσις but do not actively love never had γνώσις in the first place.

The shorter text as it stands in p⁴⁶ and Clement's *Stromateis* demonstrates profound economy of language with a coherent syllogism that logically reformulates one maxim ("γνώσις puffs up, love builds up") into a new, Christocentric slogan on the basis of two premises and a conclusion. The appearance of ὑπ' αὐτοῦ at the end of verse 3 in the majority of witnesses, however, leads to the consequent construal of ἔγνωσται as a perfect passive verb. This not only confounds the internal logic of the argument but also suggests the logical absurdity either that anyone who presently loves necessarily has, in the past, been "known" by god, or that the only people capable of being loving are those who have been known by God. The idea of Christ-followers being foreknown by the deity certainly is a Pauline doctrine (cf. Gal 4:9), but nowhere does Paul suggest that the foreknowledge of the deity is the necessary precursor for present expressions of ἀγάπη. If the longer reading of verses 2–3 were indeed older, this confusion could have been avoided by mirroring the phrasing in the first part of the conditional: opting to repeat the

⁹LSJ, s.v. γιγνώσκω.

aorist to correlate with γινῶναι from verse 2, highlighting past time and simple aspect. The third verse would then read: εἰ δέ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἐγνώσθη ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, and verses 2–3, “If someone thinks he has come to know [something], he does not yet know as he ought. But if someone loves God, that person is known by him.”¹⁰ If the shorter reading is prior, however, an aorist form is not likely to have been used in verse 2, as no correlating aorist form exists with the middle aspect. Thus, the choice of tenses privileges the shorter reading on intrinsic grounds.

According to Fee, the shorter text without ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ “fits the context so perfectly that it is either the Pauline original or else the work of an editorial genius.”¹¹

That leads to the real problem with the standard text of v. 3, which seems to deflect Paul’s point. He is not here dealing with loving (or knowing) *God*. Rather, his concern is with their failure to act in love toward some in their midst who do not share their “knowledge.” The standard text, it should be pointed out, does indeed reflect Paul’s theology of God’s prior action in our behalf. That is, our love of God is predicated on God’s prior knowledge of us. The problem is in finding a satisfactory reason for him to have said that here. On the other hand, the text of Clement and p⁴⁶ reflects exactly the point of the contrast. True *gnōsis* consists not in the accumulation of so much data, nor even in the correctness of one’s theology, but in the fact that one has learned to live in love toward all. . . . In either case, this shorter text brings Paul’s point home so powerfully that it is most likely what he originally wrote.¹²

Hanz Conzelmann likewise notes the aesthetic appeal of the shorter reading, arguing that it “produce[s] a very pregnant text.”¹³ Paul’s new maxim, if the shorter text is indeed older, resonates powerfully with his conditional in chapter 13 in form, vocabulary, and meaning: “If I have prophetic powers, and know all of the mysteries and all knowledge, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2).¹⁴ On the longer reading, however, Paul’s logic both within the passage and with its parallel in chapter 13 is inconsistent. The famous “love passage” of chapter 13 does not suggest that one is not *able* to have love without knowledge, as does the longer text of 8:2–3; it suggests, rather, that knowledge is meaningless without love. Likewise the shorter reading does not deny that some form of knowledge can exist without love, but only that knowledge is worthless without the active expression of love.

¹⁰Needless to say, the similarity between English translations belies the rhetorically significant distinction between an aorist and perfect construction.

¹¹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 367.

¹²Ibid., 368 (emphasis original).

¹³Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 139 n. 3. See also Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 118: “The words ‘God’ and ‘by him’ (v. 3) were almost certainly missing in Paul’s text, and are both redundant with regard to the Corinthians’ *gnōsis* and diversionary with regard to Paul’s point. The simple but subtle statement in verse 3 fits perfectly with the contrast Paul drew in verse 1c.”

¹⁴1 Cor 13:2: ἐὰν ἔχω προφητεῖαν καὶ εἰδῶ τὰ μυστήρια πάντα καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γνῶσιν ... ἀγάπην δὲ μὴ ἔχω, οὐθέν εἰμι.

Only on the shorter reading are these two passages opposite sides of the same coin, and only on the shorter reading are *γνώσις* and *ἀγάπη* conceptually linked in a consistent manner throughout the letter—a manner that is not only aesthetically pleasing but makes most sense of the internal logic of Paul's argument.

On the shorter reading of 8:2–3, Paul's passage begins and ends with the proper relationship between *ἀγάπη* and *γνώσις*. Knowledge puffs up, claims Paul, but love builds up. Therefore if anyone loves, that person is the one who truly knows. This simple yet pregnant maxim is obscured, however, by the non sequitur introduced in the longer reading, wherein the passage begins with the relationship between *ἀγάπη* and *γνώσις* in the community of Christ-followers but ends with the relationship of love for the divine and divine knowledge of the believer. The *inclusio* bounded by the repetition of Περὶ ... τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων becomes a mere asyndeton, and the coherence of Paul's argument is dashed.

Why, if commentators so strongly prefer the reading of the shorter text, do they so often assume the longer text to be the oldest recoverable form? In many cases, the canons of criticism have been applied unreflectively, without knowledge of the documents and sources in question, and the number of witnesses bearing the longer text has been confused for evidence of the reading's antiquity. James R. Royse points to this failure of implementation in his discussion of the scribe of p⁴⁶, conjecturing that the rationale behind Herman C. Hoskier's embrace of the shorter text was an unstated reliance on the principle of *lectio brevior*.¹⁵ But many interpreters also have used Günther Zuntz's conclusion about the sloppiness of p⁴⁶'s scribe to argue against his own contention that in this case, among a handful of others, p⁴⁶'s shorter reading is indeed older.¹⁶ Even among scholars who view the shorter reading as prior, arguments tend to rely on cursory engagement with the textual tradition and intrinsic arguments based in aesthetic preference. My discussion of transcriptional probabilities concerning the shorter and longer texts of 1 Cor 8:2–3, then, will investigate the documents that hold the shorter text and demonstrate that its transmission history can be most plausibly explained by widespread scribal addition of the three phrases in question (τι, τὸν θεόν, and ὑπ' αὐτοῦ) rather than by their omission in some of the earliest sources available to scholars today.¹⁷

¹⁵Royse, *Scribal Habits*, 296.

¹⁶Günther Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles*, Schweich Lectures 1946 (London: British Academy, 1953), 31–32; cf. P. Benoit, "Le Codex Paulinien Chester Beatty," *RB* 46 (1937): 62–63.

¹⁷The reason for treating τὸν θεόν and ὑπ' αὐτοῦ as a single unit should be apparent: the latter requires the former as its logical and grammatical referent and does not make sense otherwise. I treat the three variants together because where the final variant does not appear in a witness, neither do the other two. The τι in v. 2 appears to have been added to the text for reasons similar to those that lie behind τὸν θεόν, though one might as reasonably treat only the latter two variants as a set, and leave the τι quite alone.

II. TRANSCRIPTIONAL PROBABILITIES

The text and corrections of Codex Sinaiticus and minuscule 33 demonstrate that, if the shorter reading of 1 Cor 8:2–3 is indeed the older reading, even independent scribes geographically removed could reasonably be expected to behave in a relatively uniform manner—clarifying ἐγνωκέναι and ἀγαπᾶ with accusative objects denoting the content of the hypothetical “knower’s” knowledge and love. The choice of τὸν θεόν for the content of one’s love and its placement after the verb are hardly surprising and do not necessitate a singular origin for the variant. In fact, as will be demonstrated below, 33 and Sinaiticus both witness a preference in their text and corrections throughout the New Testament for readings that supply τὸν θεόν as the accusative object of the verb ἀγαπάω. But one would be hard-pressed to reason why any scribe, having the longer text at hand or read out in a scriptorium, would leave out these clarifying additions, which are perceived to harmonize the text to Pauline parallels that speak of reciprocal love and knowledge between God and humanity: Gal 4:9 and 1 Cor 13:12.¹⁸

The theme of reciprocal knowledge treated in Galatians (4:9: “Now that you have come to know God, or rather be known by him . . .”¹⁹) and later in 1 Corinthians (13:12: “Now I know partially, but then I shall know fully, just as I am fully known”²⁰) is in no way peculiar to Paul. In fact few, if any, followers of Christ (along with not a few non-Christian communities) in antiquity can be shown to hold divine reciprocity in knowledge and love in anything less than high esteem. From the Gospel of John (10:14: “I am the good shepherd: I know my own, and my own know me”²¹) and the First Letter of John (4:19: “We are loving, because first he loved us.”²²), to the Coptic Gospel of Truth (19:8–14: “He who made the totality, and in whom the totality is, and whom the totality lacked, is like the situation of a person with whom there are some who are unacquainted: that person [the deity] is wont to desire that they know him and thus love him”²³), and even the Corpus

¹⁸I follow Fee (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 368) in the supposition that, if the shorter text is indeed older, then 1 Cor 13:12 and Gal 4:9 are not, in fact, parallels, as Paul here speaks of γνώσις in a very different sense. But the conceptual difference is understandably obscured by the formal affinity in phrasing, a confusion that has led to interpreters thinking the longer reading to be conceptually Pauline and thus to present “no special difficulties.” So Roysse, *Scribal Habits*, 292.

¹⁹Gal 4:9: νῦν δὲ γνόντες θεόν, μᾶλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ....

²⁰1 Cor 13:12: ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθην.

²¹John 10:14: Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς καὶ γινώσκω τὰ ἐμὰ καὶ γινώσκουσί με τὰ ἐμὰ.

²²1 John 4:19: ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς.

²³ⲛⲧⲁϣ ⲡⲉ ⲛⲧⲁϣⲧⲤⲤⲌⲛⲟ ⲛⲓⲧⲏⲣⲓ ⲁϣⲱ ⲡⲧⲏⲣⲓ ⲉϥⲏⲣⲏⲧⲓ ⲁϣⲱ ⲛⲉⲣⲉⲡⲓⲧⲏⲣⲓ ⲡⲁⲁⲧⲏⲙⲏⲁϥ ⲡⲉⲃⲏⲣⲏⲧⲉ ⲁⲃⲁⲗ ρⲓ ⲧⲟⲟⲧⲓ ⲛⲟϥⲉⲓ ⲉϥⲏⲣⲁⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲉϥⲟⲓ ⲛⲁⲧⲤⲁϥⲏⲉⲃⲁⲣⲁϥ ⲡⲁϣⲟϥⲱⲡⲉ ⲁⲧⲣⲟϥϣⲟϥⲱⲛⲏⲧⲓ ⲁϣⲱ ⲁⲧⲣⲟϥⲏⲣⲏⲧⲓ ⲛⲏⲣⲏⲧⲉ. Translation of Kendrick Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth: A Valentinian Meditation on the Gospel* (New York: Abingdon, 1960).

Hermeticum (31: “Holy is God, who wants to be known and knows his own”²⁴), divine reciprocity in knowledge and love forms a major pillar of nearly every known Christocentric theology from antiquity and of some “pagan” discussions of the divine as well. Almost all commentators who treat the longer text of 1 Cor 8:2–3 see a connection between the middle-passive ἔγνωσται of verse 3, with or without ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, and the ancient discourse surrounding divine reciprocity. Wolfgang Schrage, for instance, comments on the longer ending of verse 3: “The sense is clear from Gal 4:9 and 1 Cor 13:12. These points show the Old Testament tint of the Pauline concept of γινῶσις.”²⁵

Moreover, it is not only modern interpreters who draw these two particular pericopes together. Discussing this passage in *De Trinitate*, Augustine similarly sees a connection between the longer text of 8:3 and Gal 4:9 and focuses on the longer text of 1 Cor 8:3 to stress the reciprocal nature of divine knowledge. A perceived connection between the sense of 1 Cor 8:3 and that of Gal 4:9 led Augustine to the supposition that the verb that translates ἔγνωσται could be written, or read, with an active meaning. He accordingly militates against an active sense of the verb, as would accompany a middle construal of ἔγνωσται, claiming that a nonreciprocal reading of the text “is a dangerous proposition.”

... and the Apostle: “If any man,” he says, “thinks himself to know something” he does not know anything in the manner he ought to know. But if any man loves God, this man “is known by him.” He has not said, “has known Him,” which is a dangerous presumption, but, “is known by him.” Likewise elsewhere, when he said “But now after that you have known God,” immediately correcting himself, “or rather are known” he says, “by God.” [Gal 4:9]²⁶

It is not unlikely that Augustine responds here to a particular community that espouses what he views as a variant reading of 1 Cor 8:3: some Latin or Greek form of the shorter text. Augustine often uses the very same construction (“ne dixit ... sed” or “non dixisse ... sed”) to combat particular “heresies” that could be bolstered by a reading that varies from his own, as in *Civ.* 11.13:

Whoever accepts this conclusion is at odds with those heretical Manichaeans or with any other pestilential sect that holds, as they do, that the devil derives as if from a certain contrary principle a natural evil substance that is peculiar to him.

²⁴ Corp. herm. 31: ἅγιος ὁ θεός, ὃς γνωσθῆναι βούλεται καὶ γινώσκειται τοῖς ἰδίοις.

²⁵ Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 234: “der Sinn erhellt aus Gal 4,9 und 1 Kor 13,12. An diesen Stellen zeigt sich die alttestamentliche Färbung des paulinischen γινῶσις-Begriffes” (my translation).

²⁶ Augustine, *Trin.* 9.1.2–3: Et apostolus: Si quis se, inquit, putat aliquid scire, nondum scit quemadmodum scire oporteat. Quisquis autem diligit deum, hic cognitus est ab illo. Ne sic quidem dixit, ‘cognovit illum,’ quae periculosa praesumptio est, sed, cognitus est ab illo. Sic et alibi cum dixisset: Nunc autem cognoscentes deum, statim corrigens, immo cogniti, inquit, a deo (translation adapted from *NPNF*¹). For a more thorough discussion of divine knowledge of creation in Augustine, see *Civ.* 11.10.

So great is the folly of their error that although they, like us, acknowledge the authority of those words in the Gospel, they fail to notice that the Lord did not say [non dixisse]: “He was no adherent of the truth,” but [sed]: “He did not abide by the truth.” (Wiesen, LCL)²⁷

It is ultimately irrelevant for my inquiry whether Augustine knew of manuscripts that carry the shorter reading in 1 Cor 8 or Christian communities that espoused it. His comment about an active sense of *ἔγνωσται* being a “dangerous proposition” demonstrates that in late antiquity, long before the time of the vast majority of extant New Testament manuscripts were copied, prominent thinkers placed incredible weight on the longer reading of this verse as a site of contestation regarding an “orthodox” understanding of the nature of the divine. Augustine’s comment alone is reason enough to suppose that manuscripts bearing the shorter reading would be harmonized with Gal 4:9. In antiquity, as today, a conceptual connection was made between these two texts, and little evidence whatsoever can be adduced to demonstrate that scribes of any known Christian tradition would purposefully remove the constituent pieces of the longer text of 1 Cor 8:2–3.

It is one thing to posit a hypothetical motivation for scribal interventions, such as changes arising from a desire to heighten the rhetoric of divine reciprocity. It is quite another thing to demonstrate scribal habits as they exist in extant documents. Is there any evidence that scribes in antiquity changed the text of the New Testament in ways that heighten the reciprocal nature of love and knowledge of the divine? There is. Both the text and corrections of Codex Sinaiticus, along with minuscule 33, show a clear preference for readings in variation from the expected Alexandrian text when such variants serve to emphasize divine reciprocity. We know that scribes edited New Testament texts in ways that emphasize this motif because, at least in Sinaiticus, we can watch them do it.

III. DIVINE RECIPROCITY IN CODEx SINAITICUS AND MINUSCULE 33

In 1 Cor 8:2–3, Sinaiticus and minuscule 33 witness a textual hybrid: a mixed reading where an object of the verb *ἀγαπάω* is present but *ἔγνωσται* is nevertheless rendered in the middle voice, without *ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ*.²⁸ A corrector of Sinaiticus came along at an unknown point and added *ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ* to the end of verse 3, with a different hand and lighter shade of ink. While the omission of *ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ* in both of

²⁷ Augustine, *Civ.* 11.13: Huic sententiae quisquis adquiescit, non cum illis haereticis sapit, id est Manichaeis, et si quae aliae pestes ita sentiunt, quod suam quandam propriam tamquam ex adverso quodam principio diabolus habeat naturam mali; qui tanta vanitate desipiunt ut, cum verba ista evangelica in auctoritate nobiscum habeant, non attendant non dixisse Dominum: A veritate alienus fuit; sed: In veritate non stetit.

²⁸ Thus, both read *εἰ δὲ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἔγνωσται* in their original hands.

these manuscripts can be explained as a mere parablepsis, close attention to the text and corrections elsewhere in these manuscripts demonstrates that both have a tendency to prefer readings that (a) heighten the motif of divine reciprocity, and (b) supply τὸν θεόν as the object for the verb ἀγαπάω—the two conditions that account for the appearance of the longer reading on the basis of the shorter's priority.

First Corinthians 8:3 is not the only place where a corrector of Sinaiticus alters the text of the original hand in a way that heightens the theme of divine reciprocity.²⁹ The initial hand of Sinaiticus in John 13:32, for instance, reads καὶ ὁ θεὸς δοξάσθη ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ εὐθὺς δοξάσει αὐτόν. A hand remarkably similar to that which corrected the passage in 1 Cor 8:3 also corrected this passage with the effect of a heightened reciprocal motif in the reading, appending εἰ ὁ θεὸς ἐδοξάσθη ἐν αὐτῷ to the beginning of the verse. The Majority tradition eventually picked up this longer reading, but it remains absent in a wide range of early witnesses, including p⁶⁶, Vaticanus, the original hand of C (Ephraemi Rescriptus), Claromontanus, f¹, and others.

In addition to Sinaiticus's corrections that heighten a motif of reciprocity, the text in the original hand demonstrates a preference for readings that render the deity as the syntactic referent for the verb ἀγαπάω. In 1 John 4:19, for instance, Sinaiticus breaks away from the Alexandrian tradition and witnesses a reciprocal reading that is found elsewhere only in versional witnesses and a number of minuscules, including 33.³⁰ While most witnesses read ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, Sinaiticus and 33 both add τὸν θεόν after ἀγαπῶμεν, in a reading strikingly reminiscent of both 33 and Sinaiticus in 1 Cor 8:2. In 1 John 4:19, again 33 and Sinaiticus together offer θεός as a clarifying referent for ἀγαπάω in variants that cannot be assumed to be the oldest recoverable reading.³¹

Not only do these variants show an interest in readings that elevate reciprocity between believers and the divine, but they demonstrate further a proclivity of Sinaiticus and 33 alike toward readings that add the word *God* as an accusative object for the verb ἀγαπάω. Whether the variation stems from an exemplar or from the hand of the scribe, it is clear that the type of change that would lead the shorter reading of 1 Cor 8:2–3 to become the longer reading is evident in both of these manuscripts.³²

²⁹It is likely, though of course impossible to demonstrate conclusively, that all of the corrections in Sinaiticus discussed here stem from the same hand.

³⁰The reading is found also in one lectionary. The manuscripts are 048, 33, 81, 436, 442, 642, 1448, 1611, 1735, 2344.

³¹Similarly, in 1 John 2:15, minuscule 33 attests a variant reading that replaces ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ πατρὸς with ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ.

³²Minuscule 33 likewise witnesses an otherwise unattested reading in 1 John 4:12, which cannot be considered the oldest recoverable form of the verse but nevertheless shows the manuscript's preference for readings that heighten the reciprocity motif.

In parallel passages, early scribes evidence every scribal corruption that would lead to the creation of an intrinsically inferior (longer) reading of 1 Cor 8:2–3. If the longer reading were indeed prior, however, it is difficult to understand why details would be excised that were viewed as harmonious with Pauline doctrine and clarifying in content. The appearance of the longer text can be explained with reference to widespread independent scribal activity of the type for which evidence exists in abundance. But a logical explanation for the creation of a shorter text must propose independent transcriptional theories for each document, as Bruce Metzger does in his textual commentary on the passage. He proposes an accidental omission of τὸν θεόν in p⁴⁶'s exemplar, and consequent formal assimilation of verse 3 to the corrupt text of verse 2, along with accidental omission of ὅπ' αὐτοῦ from both Sinaiticus and 33 based on an expectation that the shorter text is intrinsically superior. While Metzger allows that the scribes of \aleph^* and 33 would see the shorter reading as intrinsically superior, which would lead to the accidental omission, he curiously proposes as a solution a form of the text that is extant nowhere.³³ The logic is strained at best.

IV. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

The last remaining witness to the shorter reading that requires critical engagement is the single “patristic” citation, which has been strangely omitted in many studies of this textual problem.

Clement of Alexandria's extant writings have long been heralded for their usefulness for establishing the text of the New Testament, and his fidelity to the form of the text that he possessed has been established with increasing confidence. Recently Carl P. Coasert noted,

While Clement's method of allegorical argumentation rarely centers on textual details and terminology, his whole methodology is found [*sic*] on his belief that the voice of God resides *in* the literal words of the text.... Thus the literal text is foundational to Clement's entire methodology, and the evidence indicates that Clement knew his text well.³⁴

The text of the New Testament permeates Clement's writings, and while he does appear to stray from textual authorities regarding details surrounding some

³³Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (Fourth rev. ed.)*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 490–91: “Their absence also from \aleph^* and 33 was regarded by the Committee as accidental, having arisen perhaps from the copyist's expectation that Paul was going to say something like ‘If anyone loved God, this man truly knows him.’”

³⁴Carl P. Coasert, *The Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria*, NTGF 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 23–24 (emphasis original).

quotations, in the Pauline Epistles Clement's quotations are extraordinarily accurate; "they almost always agree verbatim with readings extant today."³⁵

Clement's level of fidelity to the text of the Pauline Epistles is astonishing, and nowhere more so than in his citation of 1 Cor 8:1–3, where he records the shorter version of the text even though a looser quotation, which construed ἔγνωσται as passive, would fit Clement's theology exquisitely. His quotation reads:

“εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι, οὐπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι.” οὐ γὰρ ποτε ἡ ἀλήθεια οἴησις, ἀλλ’ ἡ μὲν ὑπόληψις τῆς γνώσεως “φυσιῶν” καὶ τύφου ἐμπίπλησιν, “οἰκοδομεῖ δὲ ἡ ἀγάπη,” μὴ περὶ τὴν οἴησιν, ἀλλὰ περὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀναστρεφόμενη. ὅθεν “εἴ τις ἀγαπᾷ, οὗτος ἔγνωσται” λέγει. (*Strom.* 1.11.54.4)

“If someone appears to know something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.” For truth is in no way an opinion. But, on the one hand, while the assumption of knowledge “puffs up” and fills full of arrogance, “on the other hand love builds up,” pondering not according to opinion, but according to truth. Thus, it says: “If someone loves, that man knows.” (my translation)

Notice that Clement's suggestion of the one “pondering not according to opinion, but according to truth” construes the action with a middle participle in keeping with the construal of the verb in the quotation. Not only does Clement's quotation witness the shorter reading materially, but semantically it requires the shorter reading and the construal of ἔγνωσται in the middle voice. Within this, one of the earliest citations of Paul's text, we see that the shorter reading is necessitated by the argumentation, which speaks to the intrinsic superiority of the shorter reading as well as to its use in early Christian theological discourse. Further, it can hardly be said that Clement's theology would favor the shorter reading, had he known of or preferred it to what he excerpted in the *Stromateis*. Eric Francis Osborn's magisterial overview of Clement's theology devotes two chapters to the mystical reciprocity of knowledge and love as absolutely central to the Alexandrian's theology.³⁶

Our love for God does not repay what he has done for us, for he is perfect and needs nothing, but it brings us to incorruption, “for in proportion as a man loves God, he enters more closely into God” (q.d.s. 27.5). The second ellipse indicates how the knowledge and love of God flows on. The supreme teaching which brings life is “to know the eternal God as both giver of eternal gifts and as first, supreme one and good God” (q.d.s. 7). We can possess God through knowledge and apprehension as a firm beginning and foundation for life. This knowledge apprehends the God “who truly exists and is the bestower of things that exist, that is of eternal things; in him the rest of things take their existence and continuance” (q.d.s. 7.2). Not to know him is death, but to know him fully, to be his friend, to

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁶ Osborn treats three “ellipses”: reciprocity between the Father and Son, the Trinity and the believer, and among believers. See Eric Francis Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 107–10.

love him, to grow in his likeness, is the way of life. This knowledge in the strict sense belongs, as Clement repeats many times, only to the son and to him to whom the son reveals the knowledge (q.d.s. 8.1).³⁷

No number of verbal parallels could fully demonstrate how central divine reciprocity is to Clement's theological project. This much can be adduced, however: even though it appears out of character for Clement to rely on a nonreciprocal reading of the text, his interaction with 1 Cor 8:3 both semantically and grammatically requires the shorter reading to be his understanding of Paul's meaning. Clement's interpretation of the text thus presents not only a window into the state of the text of Paul's Epistle in the second century but also the critical insight of one of the text's earliest interpreters, who interacts with the text in its shorter, intrinsically superior form.³⁸

V. CONCLUSION

The most compelling argument against the shorter text continues to be that it comprises a singular reading of p⁴⁶, a manuscript whose scribe has been shown to be less careful than textual critics would prefer. The shorter reading's unequivocal attestation in Clement of Alexandria, however, relegates it to the category of "sub-singular readings," and in any case it cannot be disregarded on this basis alone.³⁹ The intrinsic superiority of the shorter reading should give commentators pause enough to consider further transcriptional evidence, which shows a clear preference on the part of early scribes for readings that (a) supply τὸν θεόν as an accusative object of the verb ἀγαπάω, (b) correct readings to amplify the reciprocity motif where possible, (c) append clarifying additions to texts, and (d) assimilate texts to perceived parallels. Any one of these features could explain the widespread attestation of the longer text of 1 Cor 8:1b–3. On the other hand, so accomplished a textual critic as Metzger struggled to explain the omission of the longer text from

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁸ Likewise Ambrosiaster, in his commentary on 1 Cor 8:3, written nearly two centuries later, interacts with the shorter form of the verse even though manuscripts record his lemma as the longer form. "Si vero quis diligit deum, hic cognitus est ab eo. Hic diligit deum, qui caritatis causa scientiam mitigat, ut prosit fratri, pro quo Christus mortuus est" ("But if one loves God, one is known by him. The person who loves God is the one who tempers his knowledge for the sake of love, in order to be of some use to his brother, for whom Christ died," Ambrosiaster, *Commentaria in Epistolam ad Corinthios Primam* [PL 17:58]; translation of Gerald Lewis Bray, *Commentaries on Romans and 1–2 Corinthians*, ACT [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009]).

³⁹ See Peter M. Head, "The Habits of New Testament Copyists: Singular Readings in the Early Fragmentary Papyri of John," *Bib* 85 (2004): 400. Consider also the cautionary example of P.Oxy. 74.4968, in which many of the presumed singular readings of Bezae were found to be falsely so-called. See the treatment by David C. Parker and S. R. Pickering, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 74 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2009), 1–45.

early witnesses, and we can adduce no reason that any early Christian group, let alone the Byzantine communities from which the majority of our extant manuscripts stem, would prefer the shorter reading on theological grounds.

Understanding the shorter reading as the older reading not only gives us access to a piece of the Enlightenment-era puzzle of the “oldest recoverable form of the text,” but it also teaches scholars something more substantial. It offers us a window into the past regarding one piece of doctrine upon which, apparently, Christ-followers from across the known theological spectrum largely agreed: reciprocity with the divine in love and knowledge. Identification of a novel late antique scribal *Tendenz* that explains the widespread and uniform redaction of 1 Cor 8 opens up new possibilities for scholarly investigation and focuses the critic’s gaze once again on the theological commitments that underlie even texts not known to be in variation. Further, it demonstrates that, in the case of 1 Cor 8:2–3, Zuntz was correct in his assertion that here the shorter reading of a single manuscript is indeed preferable to the lot.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Zuntz, *Text of the Epistles*, 31.