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Recent emphasis on the social matrix out of which the early church's documents arose marks a notable turn in the path of contemporary New Testament studies. Although the terms, goals, and procedures of scholars vary considerably, there is widespread agreement that much of the interesting and innovative work in the field is that of Gerd Theissen. Four of his most formidable and sustained contributions treat Paul's correspondence with the Christian community at Corinth. Together these four essays provide a composite picture of the social stratification at this ancient urban center and of the concrete organizational and ethical problems that that stratification engendered for the Christians' common life. A fifth essay helps to focus the critical questions of methodology that arise whenever one approaches ancient religious texts for information on issues which to the texts themselves are of peripheral concern. A lucid introduction by the translator and a helpful bibliography of the author's major writings round out this significant exploration and interpretation of the social world of early Christianity.

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