A chapter by chapter summary of
After Paul Left Corinth

Winter says the aim of “After Paul Left Corinth” was to gather for the first time all relevant extant material about life in the first century in the Roman colony of Corinth from literary, nonliterary, and archeological sources. The author explores how the culture and social/political system of the day affected the new faith of the Corinthian believers. Winter uncovers and illuminates a wide array of topics relating to the Corinthian church and the book of First Corinthians: secular discipleship and Christian competitiveness (1 Cor. 1-4), criminal law and Christian partiality (1 Cor. 5), civil law and Christian litigiousness (1 Cor. 6:1-8), elitist ethics and Christian permissiveness (1 Cor. 6:12-20, 10:23, 15:29-34), veiled men and women and Christian contentiousness (1 Cor. 11:2-16), “private” dinners and Christian divisiveness (1 Cor. 11:17-34), religious curses and Christian vindictiveness (1 Cor. 12-14), secular patronage and Christian dominance (1 Cor. 16:15-16), the present crisis and the marriage bed (1 Cor. 7:1-5), the present crisis and the consummation of marriage (1 Cor. 7:25-38), the imperial cults, the games, and dining in the temple (1 Cor. 8-10:21), and kosher food and idol meat (1 Cor. 10:25-28). The first part of “After Paul Left Corinth” focuses on the exploration of culturally determined responses to situations found in the letter of First Corinthians; whereas, the second part of the book concentrates on the social changes that occurred in the city of Corinth between Paul’s departure and the time he received their letter of request and the verbal reports.

In chapter two, Winter establishes that the Corinthian community was influenced by the secular educational mores of Corinth. He examines the nature of the secular teachers to their disciples (μαθητης). The exclusive relationship between the teacher and the student promoted extreme loyalty from the pupil. So much that the pupil criticized other disciples of other teachers. The effects of the secular teacher/student relationship was debilitating the Corinthian church after Paul left. Paul rebukes the Corinthians and corrected the misunderstandings of their relationship to their instructors.

In chapter three, Winter seeks to explain the dichotomy of social statuses in the Corinthian church as it related to the case of incest in the church. The church was sinfully made up of the elite and the non-elite. Winter shows the cultural background which afforded the secularly minded Corinthians to show impartiality to the man who had his step mom as a wife. The Corinthians judged one man scrupulously because of his social status while leaving another...
free to continue in his lawlessness all because of the Roman criminal law provided such legal advantages.

In chapter four, Bruce Winter demonstrates how the Roman jurisprudence was further devalued because of vexatious litigation in the civil courts which became a legitimate arena for the elite in their power struggles in the political system and private associations. The Corinthians were acting as the elite had always done in Corinth in their defrauding fellows brothers in the church with their bringing them to the unrighteous magistrates. The author examines who the “unrighteous” judges and juries were who presided over the case, the enmity and vexatious litigation in the Corinthian church, private arbitrators and their conflict resolution, those of “no account” in the church, the process of defrauding a brothers, and shaming others in the Roman culture.

In chapter five, Winter handles numerous ideas centered around the elitist’s ethics and the Corinthian Christian’s apparent liberalism regarding spiritual matters and their bodies. Winter debates whether or not any of the Corinthians were actually in the elite. Regardless, they were portraying and even at times functioning ethically as if they were. The Corinthians were basing their permissiveness on philosophical arguments recorded by the Alexandrian Jew, Philo instead of Scripture or Apostolic tradition. Winter deals extensively with the elitist aphorisms that were pervading the Corinthian church and creating Christian lawlessness. The author also includes an appendix discussing Roman homosexual activity and the elite. He adds further validity to the ongoing debate in Christianity surrounding homosexuality with his historical etymology of the words μαλακοὶ (soft; effeminate) and ἀρσενοκοιταί (abuser of self with mankind; homosexual). He shows the relation between the homosexual offenders (one being the passive partner and the other being the aggressive partner) and the Roman status quo concerning such a practice.

In chapter six, Bruce Winter seeks to examine the controversial subject of head coverings found in First Corinthians 11:2-6. Based on historical information found in Roman and Greek cultures, the author deduces that husbands and wives veiled or unveiled their heads in certain situations in the Corinthian society. Men of high social status also participated in such things. Winter thoroughly goes into detail about the implications of an unveiled woman and what that meant in the Corinthian society. He also improves the deliberation surrounding ambiguity with the word “γυναῖκος” as either wife or woman. Winter also believes the term “ἀγγέλους” should be correctly translated as messengers rather than angels. He closes the chapter with exegesis.
surrounding the Corinthian Christian’s “contentiousness in the congregation.”

In chapter seven, Winter seeks to reconstruct the Lord’s Dinner and what actions on the Corinthian’s parts caused Paul to dissociate their celebration from that instituted by Jesus. Winter presents a very convincing case that the Corinthian elite or “haves” commenced their own meal before others arrived. The “havenots” or working class Corinthians were left hungry. Based on the phrase “to take before (προλαμβανει),” Winter believes Paul condemned their greed of “taking” their own food at the dinner without any thought of sharing with those who had none. Winter then continues to elaborate on Paul’s interpretation of Jesus’ words concerning the Last Supper. He closes the chapter describing the Roman view of dinners (δειπνον). The appendix closes the chapter with the exegesis surrounding First Corinthians 11:18 which can be translated “I partly believe it” or “I believe a certain report” and the implications and likelihood of each translation.

In chapter eight, Winter expounds upon Christian curses and Christian vindictiveness found in First Corinthians 12-14. Winter unearths numerous examples of curses in paganism that may have been carried over into the Corinthian’s faith. The authors says there were at least four areas where religious curses were used: rivalry, love, politeia, and the world of commerce. After showing how pagans used curses, Winter explains how Christians in the post-apostolic Church were not averse to using such things on people themselves. Winter’s last section of this chapter expounds upon the interpretation of First Corinthians 12:3. Based on earlier evidence that Winter uncovers such as the religious curses in the ancient world, the behavior of the Corinthian Christians in later centuries, and evidence from Christian Copts, he argues a case that there is justification in asking if it makes sense to translate verse three without a verb with “Jesus” as the subject and “curse” as the object. The scholarly writer then shows the ramifications of such an unusual translation. Winter says the chapter seeks to establish the nexus between pagan religion and the ancient phenomenon of cursing by investigating the literary form which was influenced by uttering the curse when the nail was plunged into the lead inscription.

In chapter 9, Winter handles secular patronage and Christian dominance found in the Corinthian church. He seeks to show that many Christian patrons operated in the same way in the Christian community as they did in politeia. As a result, they caused numerous internal and external problems in the congregation. The chapter illustrates the traditional role of patronage, its detrimental effect on the Christian community, and the new focus for Christian patrons that Paul
Chapter ten discusses the “present crisis” as it related to the abstinence from sex within marriage that the Corinthians were practicing. Winter argues that the Corinthians were not seeking abstinence because of the “leisure” of prayer but rather for the “present crisis (7:26)” of a Roman grain shortage. Winter believes the Corinthians were reading too much into the grain shortage as a sign of the end of time and were remaining abstinent within their marriages in preparation for such an event. The author examines the social outcome and repercussions of the grain shortage in the Roman world to further link it to the abstinence within marriage the Corinthians were performing. The appendix is concerned with the forward referent of the neuter demonstrative pronoun in 7:6.

In chapter 11, Winters converses his ideas about the Corinthian’s consummation of marriage found in First Corinthians 7:25-38 in regards to the “present crisis” discussed in chapter ten. Based on historical renderings and the background of each phrase or words, Winter exeges and explains what is meant by “if anyone considers he is behaving in an unseemly way towards his betrothed (ει δε τις ασχημονειν επι την παρθενον),” “if she be past her flower of her age (υπερακμος),” and “he feels he ought to marry (και ουτος οφειλε γινεθαι).” Winter then turns to the philosophical discussions in Corinth surrounding the eternity, duration, and form of the world and how that affected the youth’s thinking in regards to his or her marriage. Winter closes the chapter discussing Paul’s terminology and its origins as it relates to the engaged couples in Corinth.

In chapter 12, Bruce Winter links the establishment of the federal imperial cult in Corinth and the moving of the games from Corinth to Isthmia with the Corinthian’s dining in the temple fiasco found in First Corinthians 8-10:21. Along with Jews because of the ancient religious traditions, Christian were exempt from having to participate in the imperial cult and its quasi-civic events. The author examines “this right of yours (η εξοσια υμων αυτη)”and the Corinthian’s justification (8:4-6) for dining in the temple after being exempt from such matters. Lastly, Winter investigates how the cult, the games, and pluralism in general affected the Corinthian church and others churches abroad.

In his closing chapter, the author discusses Paul’s origin for his ruling to “Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. (10:25)” Certain concessions were made to the Diaspora Jews living in Corinth to have kosher food sold
in the markets. From information based upon the eviction of Jews from Rome by Claudius, the public humiliation of the Corinthian Jews immediately after the dismissal of the case against Paul, and Gallio’s quiet acquiescence of the action of other Corinthians out of loyalty to the anti-Semitism of Claudius, it has been suggested that after Paul left Corinth the magistrates and the Council moved to have the religious traditions changed and took the kosher foods out of the local market. Winter believes after such a change of circumstances, Paul had to make an apostolic ruling.

“After Paul Left Corinth” adds much enlightenment to the array of problems found in the book of First Corinthians from his historical analysis of the social, political, and religious information of the 1st century Greco-Roman world. In my opinion, Winter’s goal “to bring to life something of the first-century social and religious context of Corinth and help illuminate the text of 1 Corinthians for the reader” was well beyond accomplished in his work. Through reading it, I posses a better understanding of the book of First Corinthians and the problems that led to its writing.