Politeia and Privileges: Conflict, Confirmation, and Community in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

1. 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 (Revised Standard Version)

4 I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,
5 that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge --
6 even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you --
7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ;
8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 (NA27)

4 ἐγκαινιστὸς τῷ θεῷ ὑμῶν πάντως μετὰ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ δοθείῃ ὑμῖν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,
5 ὅτι ἐν παντὶ ἐλπισίαν ἐν αὐτῷ, ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ γνώσει,
6 καθὼς τῷ μαρτύριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ βεβαιώσθη ἐν ὑμῖν,
7 διὸ ὅτι ὑμᾶς ἡ ἐπιτρέπεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ χαρίσματα, ἀπεκδεχομένους τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,
8 καὶ βεβαιώσας ὑμᾶς ἐξ ἐκείνου ἀνεγκλήτους ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.
9 πιστὸς ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ὧν ἐκλήθητε εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ ὑιοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.

3. Three interpretive difficulties in 1 Cor. 1:4-9

a) τοῦ Χριστοῦ in 1:6; objective ('testimony about Christ') or subjective ('Christ's own testimony') genitive?
       b) ὃς in 1:8; referring to 'Christ' (1:7) or to 'God' (1:4)?
       c) κοινωνία in 1:9; what kind of 'community' or 'fellowship',?


Between the Roman people and the commune of the Lycians let there be friendship [and alliance] and community (κοινωνία) unshaken and unaltered for all time without malicious [deceit]. Let there be eternal peace (εἰρήνη) both by land and by sea between the Roman people and the commune of the Lycians. Let the Lycians observe the power and preeminence of the Romans [firmly] (βεβαιωμένας) as is proper in all circumstances in a manner worthy of themselves and of the Roman people. (ll. 6-11)

Let the Lycians hold, rule and enjoy the fruits of these under all circumstances, just as (καθὼς) Gaius Caesar Imperator decided and the senate passed a resolution and jointly confirmed (συνεπικύρωσεν) this. This is secured (περιφολαγμένον) by the law of Caesar. (ll. 61-64)

5. Letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians, AD 41 (PLond 1912)

Concerning the requests which you have been anxious to obtain from me, I decide as follows. All those who have become ephesians up to the time of my Principate I confirm and maintain (βεβαιούμενον ἐν κύριον τιμήσας) in the possession of the Alexandrian citizenship with all the privileges and indulgences enjoyed by the city, excepting those who have contrived to become ephesians by beguiling you, though born of servile mothers. And it is equally my will that all the other favors
shall be confirmed (βούλομαι βέβαια) which were granted (ἐξορίσθη) to you by former princes and kings and prefects, as (ός καὶ) the Deified Augustus also confirmed them (ἐβέβαιωσε). (II. 52-59)

If, desisting from [this conflict], you consent to live with mutual gentleness and kindness, I on my side will exercise a providence of very long standing for the city, as one which is bound to us by traditional friendship. I bear witness (μαρτυρῶ) to my friend Barbillus of the providence which he has always shown for you in my presence and of the extreme zeal with which he has now advocated your cause; and likewise to my friend Tibertius Claudius Archibius. (II. 100-108)

6. Ps.-Julian, Letters 198 (late 1st or early 2nd century AD)
But now the Corinthians, since the [Argos] was attached to them (for to speak this way is more seemly) by the ruling city, having swollen up to wrongdoing, are compelling [Argos] to contribute financially to them, and they began this innovation, as I am told, just in this last seven years (II. 22-26)

And yet one could fairly put this to the Corinthians: which seems better to them, to be persuaded to hold to the laws of ancient Greece, or rather to those they seem recently to have received from the ruling city? For if they love the dignity of the ancient laws, it is not fitting either for the Argives to contribute financially to Corinth or for the Corinthians to Argos. But now if they think it right to hold more strongly to the rights possessed by their city, since they received the Roman colony, we will appeal moderately that they might not consider themselves greater than their fathers (62-71)

And [this is so], above all, because they are making use of a more recent judgment, and they hold greedily, as a lucky gift, the ineptitude of the one appointed to bring the lawsuit on behalf of the Argives. (74-77)

And one shouldn't consider it out of place to have a retrial of the lawsuit. For it is advisable for private persons to overlook a little of their superior rights and more advantageous position, to purchase safety for the future... Cities, however, are undying, [so] unless there is someone who, justly adjudicates a settlement of the enmity between them, they must certainly hold an undying grudge, their powerful hatred growing even stronger with time. I have said more than enough, as the orators say; you yourself must judge the proper steps to take. (II. 110-113, 118-123)

7. Three interpretive proposals for 1 Cor. 1:4-9
a) 1:6 – Paul’s ambassadorial testimony about Christ was confirmed by proclamation
b) 1:8 – Paul promises Christ will confirm them blameless at the end
c) 1:9 – God’s power and pístis underwrite the community constituted and confirmed by Christ

8. The Function of Paul’s Confirmatory Thanksgiving
a) connects divine power and privileges with politeia
b) reconstitutes and reaffirms communal structure
c) responds to conflict
d) orients towards an ethical goal