

# **Making Sense of 1 Corinthians**

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<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Political and Cultural Background.....	5
The Corinthian Church .....	6
Paul in Cosmopolitan Corinth.....	7
The Writing of 1 Corinthians.....	8
The Christian Traditions .....	9
The Dominical Sayings.....	11
The Septuagint .....	11
The Ongoing Role of Cultural Conditioning .....	12
<b>Secular Wisdom and Christian Ethics</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Secular Wisdom, Teachers and Disciples (1-4).....	16
Secular Wisdom versus the Message of the Cross (1:13--2:16).....	18
The Call to Christian Maturity (3:1--4:21) .....	19
Church Discipline for Incest (5) .....	21
Vexatious Litigation (6:1-8) .....	24
Sexual Permissiveness (6:9-20).....	26
<b>The Corinthians' Questions</b> .....	<b>29</b>
About Marriage (7:1-40).....	29
To Those Already Married (7:1-7) .....	30
To Those Who Are Unmarried (7:8-9) .....	30
To Those Who are Married but Not Content (7:10-11).....	31
To Those with Non-Christian Spouses (7:12-16).....	32
The Excursus (7:17-24).....	32
To Those Who Are Unmarried but Considering Marriage (7:25-38) .....	33
To Widows (7:39-40).....	35
About Kosher Food (8-10).....	35
The Issue of Dedicated Food (8).....	35
Excursus on "Rights" (9) .....	38
The Lesson from Israelite History (10:1-13) .....	39
The Koinonia of the Sacred Meals (10:14-22) .....	40
Final Exhortation about Dedicated Food (10:23--11:1) .....	41
About Worship (11-14).....	42
Appropriate Decorum in Worship (11:2-16) .....	42

The Lord's Table and Private Dinners (11:17-34) .....	46
Spiritual Gifts and Elitist Ecstasy (12-14) .....	49
Curses in Jesus' Name (12:1-3) .....	49
Diverse Gifts, One Source (12:4-11) .....	49
One Body, Many Parts (12:12--13:1) .....	50
The Most Excellent Way (13) .....	51
Tongues and Prophecy (14) .....	53
About the Resurrection of the Dead (15) .....	56
About the Collection (16:1-4) .....	63
Travel Plans and Additional Instructions (16:5-18) .....	64
Final Words (16:19-24) .....	65

## MAKING SENSE OF 1 CORINTHIANS

### Introduction

Reading someone else's mail from the distance of a couple millennia creates substantial challenges. In most personal correspondence, certain information can be assumed by the writer. In all likelihood, he knows the recipient. Both writer and reader speak the same language, both are familiar with the same culture and both are aware of some common experience that brought them together. Because of this common knowledge, topics can be addressed without a full explanation of the circumstances surrounding the subject. Such assumed knowledge creates ambiguity for the reader who is not privy to the shared information. The outsider can only attempt to read between the lines and make calculated guesses about what certain phrases may mean.

This circumstance is especially true of Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians, which we call 1 Corinthians. In actuality, it was not his first correspondence to them (cf. 1 Co. 5:9), which complicates the circumstance even more, since we do not have a copy of the earlier communication. Hence, there are a number of passages in the book that raise difficult interpretive questions, and following is a sampling:

*One of you says, "I follow Kephass." (1:12)*

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife! And you are proud! (5:1)*

*If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? (6:1) Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! (6:4)*

*Everything is permissible for me! (6:12)*

*It is good for a man not to marry. (7:1) Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. (7:26) If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward his virgin...let him do what he wishes. (7:36)*

*Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience... (10:25)*

*If a woman does not cover her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. (11:5) For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. (11:10)*

*When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. (11:21)*

*Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed"... (12:3)*

*As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak... (14:33b-34)*

*Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? (15:29)*

It is fair to say that 1 Corinthians has more than its share of interpretative enigmas, and many of the puzzling phrases in the letter presume shared knowledge between Paul and the Corinthians to which the modern reader has limited access. Still, considerable light can be shed even on these difficult passages from our growing knowledge about ancient Corinth from the study of archaeology, ancient literature and Roman law.

## **Political and Cultural Background<sup>1</sup>**

Settlers on the isthmus between the Saronic Gulf and the Gulf of Corinth go back to the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. It is in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, however, that the actual city began under Periander, and by the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the city's population had exploded to about 70,000. As the guardian of the land bridge between Attica and the Peloponnesus, Corinth controlled the two harbors on either side. Its strategic location guaranteed economic success.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, however, Corinth suffered an overwhelming defeat at the hands of the Roman army under consul Lucius Mummius, and the city was burned and razed. For about a century it languished until in 44 BC it was elevated to the status of a Roman colony by Julius Caesar. Colonial settlers from other parts of the empire began to arrive, giving Corinth an international flavor. As a colony, Rome began to pump in financial resources, and major construction continued right on into the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, especially under the emperors Tiberius (AD 14-37) and Claudius

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<sup>1</sup> V. Furnish, "Corinth in Paul's Time: What Can Archaeology Tell us?" *BAR* (May/June 1988) pp. 15-27; J. Finegan, "Corinth," *IDB* (1962) I.682-684; B. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 7ff.

(AD 41-54). The new Corinth was laid out in the grid typical of Roman city planning, though some structures from ancient Corinth were repaired on their old foundations but modernized in conformity to Roman ideals.

The new Corinth was prosperous with an economic base in farming (vineyards, orchards, grains), manufacture and export (pottery, bronze), and commerce (transportation of shipped goods across the isthmus). In 27 BC, Corinth was designated the capital of the new Roman Province of Achaia. By AD 44, Claudius named Achaia a senatorial province, which meant that it was governed by a proconsul chosen by the Roman Senate for annual tenures beginning each July 1<sup>st</sup>. The official language was Latin (though doubtless most citizens spoke Greek as well), and the city was subject to Roman laws administered by a local government patterned after Rome itself.

Excavations in Corinth have been extensive. Across the isthmus, an ancient roadway about 3 ½ miles long was uncovered called the *diolkos*. Grooves about 5' apart served as tracks for wooden platforms on wheels that transported cargo from the Saronic Gulf to the Gulf of Corinth, thus eliminating the long sea voyage around the Peloponnesus.

Near Corinth at Isthmia was one of the permanent sites for the biennial Isthmian Games for athletes and artists. Paul's year and a half stay in Corinth meant that he was there in AD 51, when the games were held.

Like Athens, Corinth was home to many shrines and temples. Statues of Athena and Apollo along with several temples and sacred precincts have been excavated. These include a temple to Tyche, goddess of good fortune, a temple to Hera, wife of Zeus, another temple dedicated to the whole pantheon of Greco-Roman deities, a fountain shrine dedicated to Poseidon, the god in whose honor the Isthmian games were held, and a shrine to Aphrodite, goddess of love and fertility. Aphrodite also had a temple on the Acrocorinth, the rugged hill rising some 1500' above the city. Temples to Demeter and Kore also have been excavated on the Acrocorinth. The city featured the *Asclepion*, a medical complex dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing, and it had quarters for bathing, dining, exercise and sleeping. (The god's instructions for cures were believed to come in dreams.) Many terra-cotta models of body parts were excavated here, symbols of successful cures.

In addition to the religious shrines, Corinth had extensive commercial structures. These included a Roman forum, a theater, a market, public baths, two matching basilicas, extensive shops along the Lechaem Road, a gymnasium, a *bema* (judgment seat) and many other civic buildings.

## **The Corinthian Church**

Paul may not have been the first Christian to arrive in Corinth (cf. Ac. 18:1-3),

but he certainly considered himself to be the founder of the church (1 Co. 4:14-15). On his second missions tour, Paul was compelled to leave Macedonia abruptly due to severe opposition (Ac. 17:10, 14), and after a short stay in Athens, he arrived in Corinth alone in about AD 50 (Ac. 18:1, 5). By his own admission, he came into the city in “weakness and fear and with much trembling” (1 Co. 2:3). Encountering a Jewish couple who had emigrated to Corinth after Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome the previous year,<sup>2</sup> Paul stayed with them because of their common trade as tent-weavers and attended the synagogue on Sabbaths where he worked to gain converts from among the Jews and God-fearers (18:4).<sup>3</sup> Silas and Timothy joined Paul eventually, and presumably due to the offerings they brought from the believers in Macedonia (cf. 2 Co. 11:8-9; Phil. 4:5), Paul was able to suspend his tent-making trade and devote his full energies to evangelism (Ac. 18:5). When opposition arose from synagogue members, Paul moved next door to the home of a God-fearer (Ac. 18:6-7). Among his converts were Crispus, the synagogue ruler (Ac. 18:8a; cf. 1 Co. 1:14), Erastus, Corinth's director of public works (cf. Ro. 16:23),<sup>4</sup> and various others (1 Co. 18:8b; Ro. 16:22-24; 1 Co. 1:14-16).

Paul's converts seem largely to have been drawn from the lower classes (1 Co. 1:26), though there were exceptions (1 Co. 10:27; 11:21, 33-34). How long Paul intended to stay Luke does not say, but after a vision of Christ Jesus one night in which he was urged to continue his evangelistic endeavor, Paul ended up staying a year and a half (Ac. 18:9-11), probably from sometime in late AD 50 until some time in late AD 52.

## **Paul in Cosmopolitan Corinth**

Two important public events happened in Corinth during Paul's stay. One was the holding of the biennial Isthmian games in AD 51. As early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Corinth had sponsored the Isthmian Games in honor of Poseidon, god of the sea. The festival with its many visitors during Paul's stay may well have influenced his language to the Corinthians, where he speaks of musicians (1 Co. 14:7), races (1 Co. 9:24-26a), boxing (1 Co. 9:26b), athletic disciplines (1 Co. 9:27), victory wreaths (1 Co. 9:27), huckstering (2 Co. 2:17), and the babble of foreign languages (1 Co.

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<sup>2</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, 25.4.

<sup>3</sup> Two excavated artifacts testify to the Jewish community in Corinth, a stone lintel with the inscription, "Synagogue of the Hebrews," and a marble arch post decorated with menorahs, though both may be from a time somewhat later than Paul, cf. Furnish, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Erastus' name has been excavated in a pavement inscription, an independent witness to his position in Corinth. It reads: *Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense*. An aedile was a magistrate in charge of streets, markets, games and public buildings, cf. Furnish, p. 20.

14:10-11), not to mention "many gods and many lords" (1 Co. 8:5).<sup>5</sup>

The other public event of note was the proconsulship of Lucius Junius Gallio, a brother of the famous philosopher Seneca. Gallio probably took office in July AD 51 (Ac. 18:12a),<sup>6</sup> and he presided over Paul's case when his Jewish opponents filed charges that he was foisting on the Corinthians an illegal religion (Ac. 18:12-13). Paul appeared before Gallio's bema (= judgment seat),<sup>7</sup> where the new proconsul threw the case out of court on the grounds that the contention was only a matter of Jewish religion. Gallio's ruling had important ramifications, for it meant that Christians were perceived to be a wing of Judaism, and Judaism had legal standing under Roman law and a number of special privileges, including the power to regulate their own communities, exemption from military service, freedom to observe the Sabbath, and exemption from worshipping the deities of the Roman state.<sup>8</sup> Especially, this meant that Christians could worship as frequently as once each week. Normally, the Romans restricted private meetings to not more than once each month to discourage sedition, but the Christians in Corinth were allowed to meet weekly following Gallio's ruling.<sup>9</sup>

## The Writing of 1 Corinthians

Paul departed Corinth for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila, the Jewish tentmakers (Ac. 18:18). After he left, he wrote them a letter no longer extant (1 Co. 5:9).<sup>10</sup> He also learned via a communication from one of the house churches that the Christians in Corinth had split into factions (1 Co. 1:11-12). At about the same time, Paul received a letter from the Corinthians asking advice about certain issues concerning Christian worship and the relationship of Christians to particular aspects of Corinthian culture (1 Co. 7:1; 8:1a; 12:1a; 16:1a).<sup>11</sup> Presumably, it had been carried to Paul by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Co. 16:17-18).

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<sup>5</sup> Furnish, p. 24-26.

<sup>6</sup> An inscription from Delphi puts Gallio's tenure in the 26<sup>th</sup> acclamation of Claudius as *imperator*, a date that can be cross-referenced with other Roman sources. Proconsuls normally took office on July 1, cf. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 253.

<sup>7</sup> Archaeologists also have uncovered this tribunal platform in the excavations of ancient Corinth.

<sup>8</sup> E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 342-343.

<sup>9</sup> Winter, pp. 134-135. Pagan worship, by contrast, was mostly an individual rather than a corporate affair. There was no congregational worship among pagans in the Christian sense of the word.

<sup>10</sup> Some scholars suggest that this lost letter may be 2 Corinthians 6:14--7:1, which survived as an interpolation, but on the whole this solution is doubtful, cf. W. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), pp. 276ff.

<sup>11</sup> Paul's use of the word *περι* (*peri* = [now] about) in these passages is probably a marker indicating that he is addressing specific questions raised by the Corinthians in their letter to him.



The writing of 1 Corinthians was Paul's response to these circumstances. It may have been delivered to the Corinthians by Titus (cf. 2 Co. 12:18), and in addition, Paul dispatched Timothy to Corinth as his personal representative (1 Co. 4:17; 16:10).

Where was Paul when he wrote? Almost certainly, he was across the Aegean in Ephesus, since he states his intention to stay on there for a time (1 Co. 16:8). In his concluding greetings, he includes the "churches of Asia" of which Ephesus was one (1 Co. 16:19a). Also, Priscilla and Aquila, who accompanied Paul from Corinth and whom he mentions in his salutations (1 Co. 16:19b), settled in Ephesus after they left Corinth (Ac. 18:19, 26).

When did he write? Assuming Paul left Corinth early in AD 52, time must be allowed for him to have traveled to Ephesus briefly, then to Palestine, and finally back to the churches in Galatia and Phrygia before arriving once more at Ephesus by an overland route (Ac. 18:22-23; 19:1). His tenure in Ephesus was considerable, since he spent the better part of three years there (Ac. 19:8, 10, 22). Hence, his 1 Corinthian letter must have been composed in about AD 55 or 56.

There has been no serious challenge to the authenticity of 1 Corinthians as genuinely Pauline. It stands as one of the "undoubted" letters of the apostle.<sup>12</sup>

## **The Christian Traditions**

One of the challenges for all the new Christian communities around the empire was the question of spiritual authority. Today, churches look to the canon of the Scriptures, the ancient Christian creeds, established Christian tradition, denominational confessions of faith, and a living body of pastors, bishops and biblical scholars. We assume such things as immediate communication and convenient travel, which makes the world accessible. None of these structures existed for the primitive church. There was no New Testament, no established church structure, no written guidelines, no printing technology, and no postal system. For citizens in Asia Minor and Greece, in all likelihood they never even had heard about Jesus of Nazareth until missionaries came to them with the gospel. So, where did spiritual authority lie? Who was to say what was proper Christian behavior or what was disallowed? How much weight still could be given to established customs from

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<sup>12</sup> Historical-critical scholars list only seven of Paul's letters as beyond reasonable doubt: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians and Philemon. The others are sometimes credited to a hypothetical Pauline "school" (i.e., disciples of Paul), W. Meeks, ed., *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), p. 1-104. Evangelicals, on the other hand, are insistent that all thirteen letters bearing Paul's name are authentic, e.g., see the extensive discussions in evangelical introductions, such as, D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-varsity, 1970) and E. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

Greco-Roman culture or Jewish culture, and especially, how did Christian principles of conduct relate to the norms of Roman law? All these challenges faced the new Christians in Corinth.

To sharpen the challenge, Paul left them after about a year and a half (18:11). How should they now respond to new challenges and ethical dilemmas that arose after the great apostle was gone? 1 Corinthians offers a number of features that help answer such questions.

In the first place, Paul refers to Christian tradition that first was handed down to him and which he in turn delivered to the Corinthians (15:1-8). The verb he uses to describe this passing of tradition is **παραδιδωμι** (**paradidōmi** = to hand down, to teach oral tradition).<sup>13</sup> The fundamental Christian tradition was the story of Jesus, especially his death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances. This tradition was the good news by which the Corinthians were saved. Only by their faithfulness to this tradition could they consider themselves Christian in the first place.

However, two other aspects of Christian tradition stood alongside the gospel. One was the decision of the Jerusalem council about circumcision--the apostolic conclusion that Gentiles do not have to become Jews in order to become Christians (Ac. 15). The apostles and elders in Jerusalem, along with representatives from the whole church, composed an encyclical letter to this effect and sent it to Antioch, Syria along with chosen delegates to confirm its authenticity by their personal presence (Ac. 15:22-31). One of the Jerusalem representatives was Silas, who later became Paul's missionary companion when he first visited Corinth (Ac. 18:1, 5). Paul with Silas backing him delivered this same letter to the other congregations he had established in Asia Minor (Ac. 16:4).<sup>14</sup> We should assume that Paul and Silas did the same to the Corinthians. The encyclical letter not only would have given a short list of disallowed behaviors, it would have established the Jerusalem church as a source for apostolic tradition and the fact that the Corinthian Christians did not stand alone as an isolated group. They were part of an empire-wide movement with accountability and relationship to other Christians in other cities, but especially to the church in Jerusalem.

Finally, again using the verb **παραδιδωμι** along with the word **παραδοσις** (**paradosis** = tradition), Paul refers to the teachings he passed down to the Corinthians, commending them for their faithful obedience (11:2). Among them was the ritual observance of the last supper, a tradition that Paul both "received" and

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<sup>13</sup> While this word has several nuances, in the passages we cite here the word is a technical term for the transmission of authoritative Christian teachings, cf. F. Buchsel, *TDNT* (1964) II.171.

<sup>14</sup> As did Paul, Luke uses the same verb **παραδιδωμι** to describe the passing on of this authoritative tradition.

"passed on" to the Corinthians (11:23).<sup>15</sup>

Paul nowhere offers us a complete list of the Christian traditions he delivered to his churches, but that he had such a body of teaching we cannot doubt (cf. 2 Th. 2:15; 3:6; Ro. 6:17; 16:17).

## The Dominical Sayings

In addition to the Christian traditions, the sayings of Jesus held a special place in the authority structure of the early church. While the composition of the canonical gospels was probably somewhat later than the letters of Paul, there seems little doubt that the stories and words of Jesus were preserved carefully in oral form. Since the person of Jesus was at the very heart of the Christian message, it comes as no surprise that Paul alluded to Jesus' sayings as a source of impeccable authority. This authority is obvious from way Paul quotes Jesus' eucharistic words: This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me, and This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me (11:24-25). On other occasions, also, Paul quotes Jesus directly (Ac. 20:35; Ro. 14:14; 1 Th. 4:15-17). To the Corinthians, Paul appeals to the words of Jesus as a final authority for questions about marriage and divorce (7:10-11; cf. Mk. 10:9-12), financial support of church leaders (9:14; cf. Lk. 10:7), and the regulation of spiritual gifts (14:37).<sup>16</sup> Sometimes his teachings echo the teachings of Jesus, even though he does not specifically point it out (4:11-13; cf. Mt. 5:11-12, 44; Lk. 6:22-23, 27-28).

Of course, the body of Jesus' sayings preserved by the early church could not address every situation, and in such cases Paul can appeal to his own authority as an apostle, though he makes it clear that his ruling is "not [from] the Lord" (7:12ff.).

## The Septuagint

In the Jerusalem church's discussion about whether or not one had to become a Jewish proselyte in order to become a Christian, James, the half-brother of Christ, offered an important observation in his summary of the issue. He said, "Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath" (Ac. 15:21). James referred, of course, to the Hebrew Scriptures, and since he was speaking of the various cities of the Roman Empire like Antioch, he surely must have meant the Septuagint.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Here, in addition to the verb *παραδίδωμι*, Paul also uses the verb *παραλαμβάνω* (*paralambanō* = to take to oneself, to receive in fixed form), cf. G. Dellling, *TDNT* (1967) IV.13.

<sup>16</sup> There is no clear precedent for this allusion in the four gospels, but Paul's reference may be to an unrecorded saying of Jesus more-or-less on the order of Ac. 20:35.

<sup>17</sup> Hellenist synagogues existed even in Jerusalem (Ac. 6:1, 9), but of the synagogues scattered throughout the

In Paul's letters, he frequently cites or alludes to the Hebrew Scriptures (which Christians came to call the Old Testament).<sup>18</sup> There is no doubt that he fully accepted their authority and expected his converts to do the same, as is apparent from his introductory clause, "It is written." To be sure, he does not use the Old Testament as the interpreter of Christ, but rather, uses Christ as the key to understanding the Old Testament.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Paul had no hesitancy in appealing to Scripture as an authoritative voice for the Gentiles, and the way he cited it suggests that he could assume their familiarity with it.

While it is true that Paul seems familiar both with the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament as well as the Septuagint, in all but a few cases his citations of the Old Testament agree with the Septuagint renderings.<sup>20</sup> Hence, alongside the oral Christian traditions and orally preserved dominical sayings stands the Old Testament as a primary source for authority.

### **The Ongoing Role of Cultural Conditioning**

All people are subject to cultural conditioning, and the Corinthians were no exception. While Paul may have appealed to the sayings of Jesus, the Christian traditions and the Old Testament, the Corinthians would not easily lay aside their own mores drawn from Greco-Roman culture and Roman law. This tendency would be even more pronounced in situations where none of Paul's favored sources of authority contained a ruling or a clear principle. The fact that they wrote to him about their uncertainty in several behavioral matters shows that they wanted clarity. If their letter to Paul substantially represented the sentiments of the whole church, which probably can be assumed, it is not a long leap also to assume that there was a certain amount of congregational discussion before the letter was sent off (7:1). The one thing about which there seemed to be consensus was that Paul was the appropriate

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empire, most were Greek-speaking and used the Septuagint as their basic scriptural text. At Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, the crowd in the temple courtyard was surprised that this Hellenist Jew was conversant in Aramaic (Ac. 21:40--22:2).

<sup>18</sup> A listing of Paul's OT citations can be found in M. Silva, "Old Testament in Paul," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Hawthorne and Martin (Leicester, England: IVP, 1993), p. 631. In 1 Corinthians, his citations include Ps. 94:11 (1 Co. 3:20), Dt. 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7 (1 Co. 5:13), Ex. 32:6 (1 Co. 10:7), Ps. 24:1 (1 Co. 10:26), Ps. 8:6 (1 Co. 15:27), Is. 22:13 (1 Co. 15:32), and Ge. 2:7 (1 Co. 15:45).

<sup>19</sup> M. Thompson, "Tradition," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Hawthorne and Martin (Leicester, England: IVP, 1993), p. 944.

<sup>20</sup> In many cases, there was no substantial disagreement between the LXX and the Hebrew in the texts Paul cited. Where there were differences, Paul more often cited the LXX sense of the passage, though in a few cases his citations agree with the Hebrew over against the LXX and in quite a few cases his citations do not precisely agree with either the LXX or the Hebrew, cf. Thompson, pp. 631-632. Possible reasons for this unevenness is beyond the scope of this study, but suffice it to say that the LXX clearly seems to be close at hand when Paul wishes to cite Scripture.

person to whom they should turn for an apostolic ruling. Hence, not only a letter carried by carefully chosen couriers came to Paul, but also, some members from one of the house churches (1:11; 16:17-18).

As in all New Testament letters, the reader must learn to "read between the lines" to decipher the circumstances behind this letter. Several clues in 1 Corinthians suggest that a substantial part of the problem lay in the Corinthians' tendency to fall back upon their Greco-Roman culture and Roman legal traditions as sources of authority for behavioral norms. For instance, Paul accuses them of being "worldly" (3:1, 3) and living like "mere men" (3:5). This language suggests secularism.<sup>21</sup> The accepted manners of behavior in Roman Corinth, inculcated from childhood, preconditioned the Corinthian believers toward maintaining their secular norms.

This preconditioning seems especially evident in the initiative of some members of the church to defend their "rights" (8:9). Both here and in the ensuing discussion, the word Paul uses is ἐξουσία (*exousia* = authority, right). Paul probably is not simply talking about freedoms in the broadly human sense when he speaks of "this right of yours,"<sup>22</sup> but rather, rights in the much narrower sense of that which is permitted for Roman citizens under Roman law. (In this sense, the common translations of ἐξουσία by the English equivalent "freedom" or "liberty" may be misleading.<sup>23</sup>) In their tendency to fall back on cultural ethics, some Corinthians were justifying their behaviors because such behaviors were specifically permitted them as Roman citizens.

Paul began the letter with a discussion about the Corinthian factions which were a product of "human wisdom" (1:17, 20, 22, 27-28). Again and again in the first two chapters, Paul contrasts the secular wisdom of the culture with the divine wisdom of God in Christ. These two sources of wisdom were fundamentally incompatible. Secular wisdom simply would not do as an authority for Christian behavior. In fact, secular wisdom would strip the cross of its very power and meaning (1:17). By contrast, Christian wisdom was foolishness to outsiders (1:18). Secular wise men, scholars and philosophers all had been summarily rejected in the death of Jesus (1:20), and they were equally rejected in the preaching of the gospel (1:21-23). Christian wisdom, on the other hand, was absolutely other than the wisdom of the age and of the secular rulers of the age (2:6).

Thus, Paul sets forth his case for establishing Christian behavioral norms on grounds other than cultural conditioning. He ends the letter by urging first loyalty to

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<sup>21</sup> The actual Greek term is σαρκικός (*sarkikos* = fleshly, carnal), but Bruce Winter is probably right in understanding this with the nuance of meaning secular, cf. Winter, p.4.

<sup>22</sup> Lit., ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὐτή (= this right of yours)

<sup>23</sup> Winter, pp. 280-281.

Christ alone. If anyone does not love the Lord--a curse be on him!

## Secular Wisdom and Christian Ethics

Paul's letters follow a generally stereotypical format along the lines of what was culturally acceptable in the Greco-Roman world. Though he adjusted some elements of form in the interests of the Christian faith, the basic style remained intact.<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians follows closely this format.

<i>Opening and Thanksgiving</i>	1:1-9
<i>Body</i>	
<i>The Report from Chloe's household</i>	
Wisdom, Teachers and Disciples	1:10--4:21
<i>Further Reports</i>	
Litigation and Christian Morality	5-6
<i>Answers to the Corinthians' Letter</i>	
Marriage and the Present Crisis	7
Ethics and Freedom	8-10
Public Decorum	11:1-16
The Lord's Table and Private Dinners	11:17-34
Spiritual Gifts and Elitist Ecstasy	12-14
Resurrection	15
The Collection	16:1-4
<i>Closing</i>	16:5-24

Structurally, the letter contains several markers that assist in its subdivision. First Paul acknowledges that his information concerning congregational partisanship came via representatives from the household of Chloe (1:11). About Chloe herself we know almost nothing, though generally it is assumed that she lived in Corinth (though she might have lived in Ephesus), that she was a Christian, that she was wealthy (the expression τῶν γλῶης = "the [ones] of Chloe" implies that she was the master of a household), and that she was trustworthy (Paul took seriously the report

<sup>24</sup> This letter style is as follows, cf. W. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973):

*Opening* (sender, addressee, greeting)

*Thanksgiving or blessing* (often with intercession and/or an eschatological climax)

*Body* (introductory formulae; often having an eschatological conclusion and/or an indication of future plans)

*Paraenesis* (ethical exhortations)

*Closing* (benedictions, greetings, sometimes a mention of the writing process)

from her people).<sup>25</sup>

Second, in 5:1 Paul says, "It is actually reported..." The fact that this statement is in the passive voice<sup>26</sup> leaves unclear whether this report also was from Chloe's people or some other source. Some interpreters, due to the abruptness with which Paul broaches the subject and the fact that he uses a present tense verb (is reported as opposed to was reported), conclude that this was a new report that possibly reached Paul while he was in the process of composing 1 Corinthians.<sup>27</sup>

In 7:1 Paul acknowledges receiving a letter from the Corinthians. From this point on, he takes the Corinthian issues and questions in turn, using their own terms to introduce his various answers and prefacing each with the introductory clause "now about":

*Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry (7:1)*

*Now about virgins (7:25)*

*Now about food sacrificed to idols (8:1)*

*Now about spiritual gifts (12:1)*

*Now about the collection for God's people (16:1)*

*Now about our brother Apollos (16:12)*

In the opening of the letter, Paul identifies himself, his readers and a companion evidently known to the Corinthians, a Sosthenes, possibly the former synagogue ruler who was beaten before Gallio but who now presumably was converted to Christianity and traveling with Paul (cf., Ac. 18:17). Paul affirms the connection between the Corinthians and the Christian fellowship across the Roman world (1:2). In typical Pauline fashion, he states both the indicative and imperative aspects of their calling--they have been made holy, yet they are called to be holy.<sup>28</sup>

In his thanksgiving (1:4-9), he acknowledges their rich expression of spiritual gifts (though later he also will frankly accuse them of immaturity and secularism (cf.

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<sup>25</sup> There are substantial reasons for translating Paul's later statement, "I hear...and to some extent I believe it" (11:18), as "I hear...and I am convinced of a certain report". Far from suggesting that Paul was uncertain about the report, he firmly accepted its truth, cf. Winter, pp. 159-163.

<sup>26</sup> Third person, singular, present, indicative, passive of ἀκούω

<sup>27</sup> F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 53; F. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> First, he uses the perfect passive participle of ἀγιάζω (*hagiazō* = to make holy) and then κλητοῖς ἁγίοις (*klētois hagiois* = called [to be] saints).

3:1, 3) and lament that their congregational services were more harmful than beneficial, cf. 11:17). For the moment, however, he maintains a positive stance, acknowledging their anticipation of Christ's epiphany and his confidence that God will preserve them to the end through his divine faithfulness.

### **Secular Wisdom, Teachers and Disciples (1-4)**

The immediate threat to the congregation quickly becomes clear. Chloe's people have reported that the Christians in Corinth have become partisan. Various groups--possibly even various house churches--were championing different leaders (1:10-12). Paul urgently appeals to them to come to unity. It is apparent in the ensuing discussion that differing notions of wisdom are at the heart of this partyism. Paul describes a sharp polarity. On the one hand there is:

Human wisdom (1:17)

The wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent (1:19)

The wise man, scholar, philosopher of this age (1:20)

The wisdom of the world (1:20-21)

Jewish signs, Greek wisdom (1:22)

Human wisdom, human strength (1:25)

Wisdom by human standards among the influential and the noble (1:26)

Eloquence and superior wisdom (2:1)

Human wisdom expressed in persuasive arguments (2:4)

The wisdom of this age and the rulers of this age (2:6)

The spirit of the world (2:12)

Wisdom by the standards of the age (3:18)

On the other hand, there is:

The gospel, the message of the cross (1:17-18)

The wisdom of God in the 'foolishness' of preaching (1:21)

Christ crucified, the power and wisdom of God (1:24; 2:2, 5)

The foolish, weak, lowly and despised things of the world (1:27-28)

Christ as wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption (1:30)

Weakness, fear, trembling (2:3)

God's secret wisdom, foreordained before time began (2:7; 4:1)

Words taught by the Spirit (2:13)



The mind of Christ (2:16)

Weakness, hunger, dishonor, thirst, rags, mistreatment, homelessness, hard work, cursing, persecution, slander (4:10b-13)

#### SECULAR TEACHERS AND THEIR DISCIPLES

Culturally, the ancient world had long followed a style of education that featured a pupil/teacher relationship going back at least as far as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and the Sophists. That this was a current feature of Corinthian life is confirmed by contemporary secular writings of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Students ("disciples") from well-to-do families enrolled their children in exclusive schools headed by well-known teachers. The students imitated their teachers in oratory, dress, and even in the way they walked. Rhetoric, especially, was valued in political and cultural affairs. Parents were naturally concerned to find the best Sophists for their sons, and as might be expected, professional teachers were highly competitive in the effort to gain more and better students.

In addition to the word "disciple," the word "zealot" was used to describe pupils in the academy, a clear sign of their loyalty to their teachers. Such zeal was encouraged, and strife between zealots and teachers of the different schools was predictable, not to mention the acrimony between the teachers themselves. Verbal battles were common. One's own teacher was extolled and promoted, while other teachers were criticized and belittled.

Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*

Some features of Corinthian partisanship is more than clear than others. Since Paul was the founder of the church, it is not surprising that there were some who remained deeply loyal to him. Apollos, the orator turned Christian, had traveled to Corinth with letters of recommendation (Ac. 18:27-28). Doubtless, his intellectual brilliance and rhetorical skills endeared him to those who valued such cosmopolitan sophistication. Kephas, who was so nicknamed by Jesus (cf. Jn. 1:42), is more difficult, however. Did Peter actually travel to Corinth? We simply do not know, though the later mention of Peter traveling with his wife might suggest that he did (cf. 9:5). And what about those who claimed to follow only Christ? Certainly Jesus of Nazareth never went to Corinth! Perhaps the "Christ party" prided themselves on being above the need for human leaders.

It is hard not to think that the partisanship in Corinth was to a large measure a derivative of the cultural patterns of sophistry. Furthermore, by the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century, marketplace philosophers had spilled out into the streets of major cities like Corinth, competing with each other, advertising themselves, and each attempting to demonstrate his superiority.<sup>29</sup> Koester's observation is instructive: "It was difficult to know whether a man offering his wisdom in the street was a god, a magician, the

<sup>29</sup> H. Koester, *History, Culture and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), pp. 355-358.

apostle of a new religion, or a true philosopher."<sup>30</sup> That Paul could accuse his readers of operating in a secular fashion and acting as mere men (3:3-4) probably means that they were thinking and acting like the other Corinthians by championing either Paul, Apollos, Kephas or Christ. As in the popular culture, they declared loyalty to a single teacher to the disparagement of any others. They took pride in one teacher over against another (4:6).

### **Secular Wisdom versus the Message of the Cross (1:13--2:16)**

To combat this divisiveness, Paul developed several arguments. First, he urged that Christ was not divided; hence, any teachers of the Christian message stood in unity because they had a single message, the message of the cross (1:13-17). Paul candidly confessed he was glad to have delegated the ritual of baptism to his subordinates, so that anyone's claims of special loyalty to himself could be diffused.

Second, Paul urged that the message of the cross in all its weakness and shame was hardly the stuff of sophistry! In his preaching of the gospel, he avoided the very things that both Jews and Greeks eagerly sought--wonders and wisdom (1:22). Jewish itinerant preachers, Neopythagorean philosophers, and an army of other self-acclaimed physicians, magicians and teachers roamed the ancient world hawking their magical tricks, deeds of power, prognostications about the future and cures for various diseases and maladies.<sup>31</sup> Paul was emphatically not one of them! Rather, in the eyes of popular culture, his message of a crucified messiah was abject foolishness--albeit a divine foolishness that was wiser than human wisdom and a divine weakness that was stronger than human strength (1:18-25)! God deliberately chose what was despicable in the popular viewpoint, including many of the Corinthian converts themselves, who came from the lower classes, in order to demonstrate that true faith rests not on human wisdom but on God's power (1:26--2:5). Paul's rhetorical skills were limited (2:1, 4), a fact not lost upon the Corinthians with their cultural expectations (cf. 2 Co. 10:10). He did not come to Corinth with a show of strength, but rather, in fearfulness and powerlessness (2:3). Yet, this seeming weakness was precisely in order that the Corinthians would respond to the message, not the messenger. In the end, any boasting must necessarily point to Christ Jesus himself, not the messenger who brought the good news (1:29-31).

In explaining this alternative wisdom--the divine wisdom of God that was so different than the secular wisdom of sophisticated Corinth--Paul reminded his readers that God's wisdom was simply not recognized or understood by the cultural movers

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<sup>30</sup> Koester, p. 356; Ferguson, pp. 305-308; D. Cartlidge and D. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 151-159.

<sup>31</sup> Koester, p. 357.

and shakers (2:6). Though divinely determined before the universe began, it had been hidden in God's mind (2:7). The secular rulers of the age had missed entirely the significance of Jesus of Nazareth, and they ended up crucifying him in ignorance (2:8). Nevertheless, what was unrecognized by secular wisdom had been revealed by the Holy Spirit to those God had called (2:9-10). Real wisdom, then, is not the secular stuff that was proudly touted in Corinth. Rather, true wisdom was what the Holy Spirit revealed from the mind of God in the proclamation of the Christian gospel (2:11-13). Outsiders, who were "soulish" and not filled with the Spirit,<sup>32</sup> could not perceive such wisdom (2:14). Believers on the other hand, who had the Spirit, were equipped to make wise evaluations while at the same time dismissing the assessments of the secular Corinthians, whose judgments on the basis of popular wisdom were worthless (2:15). Christians were in a privileged position: they had the mind of Christ!

In his emphasis on the Christian message over against secular wisdom, Paul repeatedly refers to the crucifixion of Jesus (1:13, 17, 18, 23; 2:2, 8). Such an emphasis was more than just an answer to the question, "Why did Jesus die?" but more to the point of Paul's argument here, "Why did Jesus die the way he died?" Crucifixion as a method of death was well-known in the Roman world as the means of eliminating undesirables with maximum degradation and humiliation.<sup>33</sup> It was not only death, but shameful death in the worst possible way. Paul's repeated allusions to Jesus' death by crucifixion was intended to shock his Corinthian sophisticates into realizing that they could not have it both ways: they could not embrace the wisdom of the world and at the same time claim to follow a shamefully crucified Christ. The ideals of secular wisdom and Christian salvation by crucifixion were mutually exclusive.

### **The Call to Christian Maturity (3:1--4:21)**

In decrying the Corinthians' penchant for embracing cultural wisdom, Paul rebuked them for their immaturity. They were behaving in a secular way, just like all the others in Corinth (3:1-4).<sup>34</sup> What they needed to realize was that Christian teachers were not competitors peddling their own assumed superiority, but rather,

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<sup>32</sup> Lit., "But the soulish man..." The NIV and TEV offer a dynamic equivalency as "the man without the Spirit." Other translations have "the natural man" (KJV, NAB, NASB) or "the unspiritual man" (RSV, NEB, Weymouth, Phillips, Williams, JB). In using the term *ψυχικός* (*psychikos* = pertaining to life in the natural world), cf. *BAG* (1979), p. 894, Paul refers to the person controlled by the soul, that is, the natural self. Later, Paul contrasts the *psychikos* (soulish) and the *pneumatikos* (spiritual) as what is earthly and temporal as opposed to what is heavenly and eternal (15:44, 46).

<sup>33</sup> N. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 543.

<sup>34</sup> See footnote 21.

servants under a single Lord (3:5). Each servant, as a fellow-worker in God's field or on God's building, had his assigned task, but under God, their ultimate purpose was single (3:6-9). God, alone, stood behind any success.

Paul extended the metaphor of the church as God's building. As the founder of the church, Paul laid the foundation as a master craftsman. That foundation was Christ Jesus (3:10-11). Other workers, each with their own gifts, added to the structure. Final evaluation of their work was reserved for the last judgment, for each Christian teacher's work would be tested by fire. Certainly it was altogether inappropriate for the Corinthians' to begin assessing the value of each teacher's work along the lines of secular values! Each leader's contribution would be assessed by God for its enduring value (3:12-15). As God's building, the church was being built up as a temple for the Holy Spirit (3:16). To destroy God's sacred temple by partisanship was to invite divine judgment (3:17)!<sup>35</sup> Secular standards, which led to championing individual teachers, was deceptive and foolish (3:18-20). Instead, Christians should value all their teachers, because all were part of God's gracious provision to his church (3:21-23). Rather than champion individual teachers over against each other, the Corinthians ought to regard them all as Christ's servants entrusted with God's wisdom (4:1). To be sure, all Christian teachers must be careful stewards of God's wisdom, but God himself, not the Corinthians, was the final arbiter of what was worthy of commendation (4:2-5). Any judgment on the Corinthians' part was premature and incomplete, for they could never fully assess internal factors, such as, motives.

Apparently, a well-known aphorism was familiar to the Corinthians: "Not beyond what is written" (4:6)! The source of this aphorism is unknown, whether from the Roman, Greek or Jewish worlds, but Paul used it in reference to Scripture. The Hebrew Scriptures certainly did not allow arrogant human promotion, since all humans were equally fallen and all gifts came from God (4:7). With biting sarcasm, Paul chided the Corinthians' self-aggrandizing attitudes--already full, already rich, already kings--and all without the help of their founder (4:8)! By contrast, the missionaries were like prisoners of war bringing up the rear of a Roman military procession, under sentence of death in the amphitheater and shamefully displayed before all of heaven and earth (4:9)! Paul piled up the ironies between the Corinthians' self-exaltation and his own suffering (4:10-13). Though he said he did not write to shame them,<sup>36</sup> there is no doubt that his deep sarcasm was precisely intended to shock them into realizing how far they had missed the mark of proper

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<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that the temple metaphor refers to the corporate body of the church. While it is common for Christians to use this metaphor in an individualistic way, usually on the basis of 6:19, Paul does not do so here.

<sup>36</sup> Later, he will deliberately attempt to shame them, cf. 6:5; 15:34.

imitation (4:14-16). The sophists of Corinth might be bitterly contending with each other, but that had never been true of Paul and Apollos or any of the other leaders!

In seeking to reestablish his tattered reputation and authority in Corinth, Paul appealed to his role as the founder of the church. In the purest sense, he was the guardian and father of the Corinthian Christians, and as his personal representative, he was sending Timothy to reinforce what he said in the letter (4:17). Paul seemed to have some misgivings about how Timothy might be received (cf. 16:10-11), but Timothy was well-known to the Corinthians, since he had been there with Paul when the church was established. Also, Paul hoped to follow up Timothy's visit with a visit of his own, though some Corinthians already had given up that Paul would ever return (4:18). Paul concluded this section by contrasting *logos* and *dynamis*, rhetorical speech and godly power. It is not difficult to see that by *logos* he referred to the secular value of arrogant speech-making, while by *dynamis* he referred to the spiritual power of changing lives (cf. 2:4-5). When he came, the Corinthians themselves would set the tone for whether his visit would be more on the order of a whipping or a confrontation expressed in love and a gentle spirit (4:19-21).

### **Church Discipline for Incest (5)**

It is traditional in commentaries on 1 Corinthians to separate the subject matter in chapters 5 and 6 as though they addressed two unrelated issues, sexual immorality and lawsuits. However, these two issues may not be as widely disconnected as popularly assumed, as will be shown. What is clear is that a report came to Paul regarding a particularly flagrant immoral behavior by a man in the church who was living conjugally with his father's wife, a sin specifically forbidden in the law of Moses (Lv. 18:8) and generally recognized as morally reprehensible even in the Greco-Roman world. It is obvious from Paul's ruling that the man claimed Christian faith and was part of the Corinthian Christian community (5:4-5, 11). The status of the father is less certain, since Paul does not address him directly. One probably should assume he was not a Christian. One should assume two things about the woman, first that she was not a Christian, and second, that she was not the son's mother. Since all Paul's injunctions are against the son, not the woman (5:2-3, 5), and since he stated that Christians have no jurisdiction against "outsiders" (5:12-13), the woman must have been an unbeliever. That she was not the man's mother seems evident in that Paul called her "his father's wife" and not "his mother" (5:1b), though it is unstated whether or not the father was still living. It is likely, however, that the father was still living, given the fact that Paul says this incest was of the sort that even the Romans did not leave unpunished (5:1).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The Greek text of the phrase "such fornication which [] not among the Gentiles" (5:1) has no verb, hence it must be supplied by the translator. A common translation is that this sin "is not named" or "is not found" even among the

## ROMAN CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS

Criminal prosecutions all were private under Roman law (i.e., there was no public prosecutor). The difference between the administration of criminal and civil cases consisted largely of the official who presided, the governor in criminal cases and a local magistrate in civil cases. It should be observed, however, that Roman law gave a distinct advantage to the upper classes in all prosecutions. If the defendant were a person of higher rank (parent, patron, magistrate, etc.), the plaintiff could not be a son, freedman, private citizen or person of lower rank.

Since the incest in the Corinthian church was a criminal offense (listed in Roman law along with treason, embezzlement of state property, election bribery, extortion, murder, forgery, etc.), the legal prosecution of the crime required a formal accusation in an official petition to be heard by the governor. Legal prosecution of the crime could only be initiated by the father for the first two months after the offense, but later, by any legitimate citizen. In the Corinthian situation, such a prosecution had not been initiated (or at least had not been completed), else the guilty man and woman already would have been sentenced to exile and Paul's requirement that the guilty man be disfellowshipped would have been superfluous. Since this was not done, it raises the question, "Why?"

Two reasons, at least, are possible. First, if the woman was of a higher social rank than her husband, he could not legally prosecute her. Second, the potential loss of dignity for the father resulting from such a prosecution might have been a mitigating factor. Of course, if the husband did not prosecute, he stood the risk of being prosecuted himself, but documents from the period indicated that the risk was minimal and sometimes deemed better than the shame of public exposure.

Bruce Winter

*After Paul Left Corinth*

Both adultery and incest were covered under Roman law as criminally prosecutable offenses.<sup>38</sup> Adultery could be prosecuted by a husband against his wife provided that he divorce her first. (Actually, if he did not divorce and prosecute her, he could be prosecuted himself.) For those guilty of both adultery and incest, both the man and the woman were to be banished, lose their citizenship and forfeit their property. If a son married a widowed stepmother, more leniency attended the prosecution, since marriage was preferable to an extramarital offense. However, if the father was still living, no leniency was allowed.

The report that there was incest by a member of the church had to be shocking

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pagans (so KJV, RSV, ASV, NASB, NAB, JB, TEV, Weymouth). However, such a supplied verb must be rejected, since early Roman sources verify that such incest not only was known, but was specifically legislated against in Roman law, cf. Winter, pp. 47-48. Rather, what Paul has in mind is a level of incest that was not tolerated under Roman law. Hence, a better rendering is "immorality such as even pagans do not tolerate" (NEB, cf. Phillips).

<sup>38</sup> W. Kunkel, *An Introduction to Roman Legal and Constitutional History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), p. 66; O. Robinson, *The Criminal Law of Ancient Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1995), as cited in Winter, p. 46.

to Paul (5:1).<sup>39</sup> Worse, the Corinthians seemed to have prided themselves in the offender's social status in spite of what he had done (5:2a, 6).<sup>40</sup> Perhaps some in the church were the man's clients, but even if not, social relationships were central to Roman society, and the Corinthians seemed reluctant to do anything confrontational. It would have gone against their cultural mores for lower class church members to discipline an upper class member. Paul was nothing if not decisive. The man's sin was cause for profound grief, and he must be expelled from the Christian community immediately (5:2b-5)! If the Corinthian church was made up of several house churches, as most interpreters think, then such discipline would require the joint action of the several groups.

The language of "handing the man over to Satan" suggests that under normal conditions Satan's access to the believer is limited. The act of disfellowship was not Paul's alone but was to be taken by the whole community. The man was to be put back into Satan's sphere, now stripped of the spiritual protection afforded to all in the body of Christ and vulnerable to the diabolical agent whose goal is to destroy all he can (cf. 1 Ti. 1:20). This extreme disciplinary measure probably meant that Satan would be able to physically attack the person, though Paul is careful to point out that his expulsion from the church had a remedial goal--that in the end the man might be saved. The Corinthians' boast that they had an upper class member was paltry beside the risk they were taking in allowing this man's immorality a foothold in the church (5:6). Like yeast, toleration of this sort of sin would open the door to further evil. Christians were to observe the true Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread by extracting from their midst all remnants of corruption (5:7). In fact, in Christ they already had become a new "lump" totally free from yeast. They certainly must not reintroduce into their community that from which Christ had purged them! Rather, for them the true celebration of the Festival of Unleavened Bread was a perpetual life of sincerity and truth (5:8).

Continuing to press his point,<sup>41</sup> Paul recalls his injunction in a previous letter

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<sup>39</sup> For the possibility that this report came from a source other than Chloe's people, see the discussion under structure in the introduction.

<sup>40</sup> It seems unlikely that, given the criminal nature of the man's conduct, the church could have been proud of what he did. Other suggestions range from punctuating the clause as a question, "Are you proud?", cf. R. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), p. 208 to the idea that they were "puffed up" against Paul in spite of the shame of this situation, cf. G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 201, to the conclusion that they were proud of their Christian "tolerance", cf. H. Mare, "1 Corinthians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 10.217. Better is the idea that in spite of the man's flagrant sin, the church members continued to take pride in the culprit's social status. Since not many of the Corinthians were people of the upper classes (cf. 1:26), they felt obliged to show deference to the few who were, and consequently, they were reluctant to enforce church discipline, cf. Winter, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> Some commentators treat 5:9-13 as introducing a new theme, but Fee is certainly correct in demonstrating that this section is a continuation, cf. pp. 220-221.

that Christians must not associate with pornois (= fornicators). Here, he clarifies that this requirement did not have in view outsiders, else the Christian community would have to isolate itself entirely from society (5:9-10). Rather, he intended this injunction to apply to anyone who claimed the name of Christian brother, and particularly, he intended to apply it to the incestuous man (5:11). Could the Corinthians have understood Paul to mean anything else? Possibly, especially if some had tried to press Paul's previous words to an unwarranted extreme in the attempt to neutralize his ruling. Now, however, Paul now makes his intended meaning beyond dispute. Outsiders, in any case, will be left for God to judge. Insiders must take care to discipline themselves (5:12-13). They have no choice: they must expel the incestuous man, regardless of his social status, as also says the law of Moses in the repeating phrase, "You must purge the evil [one] from among you" (Dt. 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7).<sup>42</sup> Favoritism toward the cultured elite might be expected in Roman society, but the elite held no advantage in the kingdom of God!

### **Vexatious Litigation (6:1-8)**

Prosecutions, as mentioned before, were restricted to social equals or to superiors prosecuting inferiors, not vice versa. While the case of incest was a matter of Roman criminal law, personal lawsuits were matters under civil law. Such lawsuits were prosecuted by a formal charge, a subpoena to the defendant, a decision as to whether the case should be handled by a single judge or before a jury of peers, and the actual court trial with a decision in favor of the plaintiff or defendant.<sup>43</sup> Apparently, some Corinthian Christians who had differences with each other were filing lawsuits in the civil courts, and given the fact that Paul says in doing so they "cheated" their brothers, it seems apparent that some cases had been settled and damages had been awarded (6:8).

Judges and juries in civil cases were notoriously unjust, especially since they favored the societal elite, who had several advantages. Juries, for instance, had to be selected from among those who were financially wealthy. Hence, the lower class person had less chance of a fair hearing. If the defendant were a powerful person with considerable influence, juries could not be trusted to be impartial. Witnesses were assessed partly on the basis of their social status, not merely on the clarity of their testimony. Juries sometimes were bribed. Cicero's observation is well taken that three major factors hindered justice--favoritism, power and bribery.<sup>44</sup> Hence, Paul's statement about litigation "before the ungodly" may be more than simply an irony or

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<sup>42</sup> The quotation is from the LXX.

<sup>43</sup> Winter, pp. 58-60.

<sup>44</sup> Winter, pp. 62-64.



a figure of speech referring to unbelievers (6:1).

Furthermore, civil lawsuits were not always prosecuted for reasons of legitimate personal injury. With their hostile speech and personal vilification of the defendant in public, they also became a means of pursuing vendettas to settle old scores, to shame opponents publicly, or to retaliate on behalf of offended family members. Prosecutors were not limited to factual information. They were permitted unrestrained language with which to blacken their opponents' names in public. Of course, charges had to be proved, but sometimes the threat was greater than the execution. Hence, many persons resorted to private arbitrators in seeking to avoid public vexatious litigation.<sup>45</sup> Such lawsuits may be what Paul had in mind when he spoke of them as "trivial cases" (6:2). It is certainly possible that these "trivial cases" were the result of the enmity already evident in the partyism of the various groups who took "pride in one man over against another" (cf. 4:6). Already, Paul has accused them of jealousy, quarreling and secularism (cf. 3:3). They were acting like "mere [Corinthian] men" (cf. 3:4). Could not the Corinthians find any fellow Christians who were competent to work toward resolution between offended parties (6:1b-3)? After all, if Christians would participate in the judgment of angels in the eschaton, should they not be able to hand the matters of every day life?<sup>46</sup>

Already, Paul has identified himself and many of the Corinthians with the "lowly" and "despised things" of Corinthian society (cf. 1:28). Using this same language, Paul now asks why those in dispute could not find wisdom for resolution among these same "men of little account in the church" (6:4). His language is thoroughly ironic! Christians from the lower classes, who by the elite would be judged of "little account", were certainly competent to arbitrate! The idea that deference should be shown to a system that favored the elite because of their birth, money or status was patently against the values of the kingdom of God. Here, Paul intended to shame his readers for their violation of unity in the family of God (6:5-6)! Though successful litigants were admired in Roman society at large, they should not be esteemed in the family of God. Far from "winning", the very fact that litigation was happening at all meant that the church was "defeated" (6:7). Better to suffer the wrong! In any case, vexatious litigation between Christians using the Roman court system was certainly wrong (6:8)!

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<sup>45</sup> Winter, pp. 66-67.

<sup>46</sup> This passage stands alone in its assertion that Christians will judge angels. In the Jewish Pseudepigrapha, a final judgment is envisioned for the angels who fell by marrying human women (1 Enoch 10:11-14; 54:6; cf. Ge. 6:1-2), but here the judgment is assigned to the archangels.

## Sexual Permissiveness (6:9-20)

If God would judge the outsiders, the Corinthians could be sure that the wicked would be excluded from God's kingdom in the consummation (6:9a). The list Paul gives as representative of wicked behaviors includes a variety of sexual deviations as well as other sins, some of which he mentioned earlier in connection with his previous letter (cf. 5:10-11):

πόρνος (**pornos**) = fornicator, one who practices sexual immorality

εἰδωλολάτρης (**eidōlōlatrēs**) = idolater<sup>47</sup>

μοιχός (**moichos**) = adulterer, a married person who has sexual relations outside of marriage

μαλακός (**malakos**) = catamite, an effeminate male, passive homosexual partner

ἀρσενοκοιτης (**arsenokoitēs**) = pederast, active homosexual partner<sup>48</sup>

κλέπτης (**kleptēs**) = thief

πλεονέκτης (**pleonektēs**) = a greedy or covetous person

μέθυσος (**methusos**) = drunkard

λοιδόρος (**loidoros**) = reviler, abusive person

ἄρπαξ (**arpax**) = swindler, rapacious person

Though these behaviors were known among the Corinthian Christians before their conversion, they had been cleansed, made holy and declared righteous before God (6:11).<sup>49</sup> Why, then, should they allow such behaviors a foothold back into their lives by tolerating a blatant case of incest in the church? Paul's list of wicked behaviors is especially appropriate in light of sexual sin and vexatious litigation.

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<sup>47</sup> The mention of idolatry both here and earlier (cf. 5:10-11) may reflect on the fact of the recent establishment of the federal imperial cult in the Roman Colony of Corinth. The federal cult, which recognized the Caesar as a deity, was initiated by the Province of Achaia and approved by the emperor and Roman Senate. It demonstrated loyalty and support to Roman culture and was an issue fraught with political, social and financial significance, cf. Winter, pp. 269-276.

<sup>48</sup> Paul uses both the active and passive words for homosexual, since this distinction was well-known in Roman society and literature. Homosexuals assumed one role or the other, and both roles were sinful. Homosexual behavior came under Roman law in that it was illegal for Roman citizens to play the role of the passive partner, which was relegated to slaves and non-citizens, cf. Winter, pp. 110-120. The attempt to reduce these meanings to something less in the effort to remove the stigma from the gay lifestyle, see J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), fails to do justice to the linguistic evidence in the ancient literature.

<sup>49</sup> Most interpreters agree that the term "washed" alludes to Christian baptism.

### COMING OF AGE, PRIVATE DINNERS AND THE ISTHMIAN GAMES

At about the age of 18, young men of citizenship were awarded the Roman *toga virilis*, a symbol of adulthood and sexual maturity. Especially, it meant that they were old enough to "recline" at banquets. Invitations to private dinners usually included the opportunity for sexual advances to courtesans as well as heavy eating and drinking. At 18, promiscuity became a "right," and "all things were permissible." Cicero, for instance, indicated that such promiscuity was the common practice. It was a rite of passage. The connection between sexual promiscuity, gorging oneself on food, and drinking heavily was justified on the basis of satisfying physical appetites. Nature had created the body with senses, and these senses should be satisfied.

In addition to private banquets with their "after dinner" activities, Roman citizens were privileged to attend the feasts associated with the Isthmian Games. Traveling brothels were brought in for the entertainment of the guests. Non-citizens, of course, were not privileged to attend, but citizens prided themselves on their "rights" to such invitations.

Bruce Winter

*After Paul Left Corinth*

Elitist Corinthians, of course, might respond out of their cultural conditioning, a conditioning that had the appearance of wisdom but, in fact, was only the pseudo-wisdom of the world (cf. 1:19ff.; 3:18-20). The aphorism, "Everything is permissible for me," was long-established conventional wisdom for the societal elite. The development of Platonic anthropology, which described the body as the "house" of the soul, viewed the senses as guards and allies, not enemies. The "house" must be cared for and its physical appetites satisfied. Hence, the "wise" were free to indulge their senses and could act as they wished as a corollary to their social status. Such permissiveness was not for everyone, but only for those with social power. The ignorant and slaves were restricted.<sup>50</sup> Gluttony, drunkenness and sexual indulgence were the prerogatives of Roman citizens, especially during the Isthmian Games, where entertainment for the elite was the norm.

In addition to the elitist aphorism "everything is permissible for me," the upper class Corinthians parroted yet another maxim expressing the conventional Corinthian viewpoint of satisfying physical appetites: food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both (6:13a).<sup>51</sup> It is hardly to be doubted that what this

<sup>50</sup> Winter, pp. 76-82.

<sup>51</sup> There is some ambiguity as to whether the subsequent phrase "and God will destroy both" was part of the original slogan or was a counterpoint offered by Paul. Here, I take it in the former sense, that is, that the Corinthian elitists argued that since both the stomach and food would be destroyed anyway, the indulgence of physical appetites was of no consequence. Though unclear in the English text, the first two conjunctions "*but* not everything is beneficial" and "*but* I will not be mastered by anything" are strong adversative particles (αλλὰ = rather, but, nevertheless). In the third phrase, "*but* [and] God will destroy both" the conjunction is much softer (δε = and, but). Paul's counter to this

jingle implied about food carried over to over bodily appetites as well. In response, Paul offered three fundamental Christian ethical norms against these aphorisms.

*Not everything is beneficial.*

*I will not be mastered by anything.*

*The body is meant for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*

While Paul does not debate the fact that Roman citizens had certain "rights," he insisted that the authority to act in certain ways, based on Roman citizenship, was not the only factor to be considered, and indeed, it was not the most important factor. The Christian ethic must be based on the promotion of well-being. Addiction to food, drink and sexual pleasure was no more than slavery to the senses, while the Christian was created to be free. True, the physical senses will come to an end, but the Greek notion of spirit-body dualism was patently anti-Christian. The body was not an evil dispensable shell to be destroyed while the spirit lived on alone. The body was created for the Lord, and the Christian belief in resurrection meant that the human body, which had been redeemed and now belonged to Christ, had an eternal future (6:13b-14). The Corinthians wanted to say, "The body is for sex." Paul urged, "Absolutely not! The body is for the Lord" (6:15)! Again appealing to the Torah, Paul reminded his readers that sexual union was not merely a matter of physical sensation. It created a much deeper bond (6:16; cf. Ge. 2:24, LXX). Similarly, the believer's union with Christ was a spiritual bond, since in this union the Christian was filled with the Spirit of Christ (6:17; cf. Ro. 8:9-11).

The upshot of Paul's argument, then, is that Christians must "run from fornication" (6:18a; cf. Ge. 39:12). Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus (cf. Mk. 7:14-23) that fornication is a defiling sin that proceeds from within (6:18b).<sup>52</sup> In sinning against one's own body, one sins against that which has been purchased by Christ. The Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19).<sup>53</sup> It was purchased by Christ and no longer belongs merely to the individual to do with as he or she sees fit (6:20a). The imagery, of course, is drawn from the slave/master relationship. The

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aphorism, then, begins with his statement, "The body is not meant for fornication, but for the Lord," cf. Fee, pp. 253-255.

<sup>52</sup> As before, it is not entirely clear how to take the phrase "Every sin that a man may do is outside the body." Is this another Corinthian slogan aimed at taking the moral sting out of sexual misconduct, or is this a theological conclusion of Paul himself? The NIV's addition of the word "other" (not supported by the Greek text) takes it in the latter sense, but other scholars prefer the former, cf. L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* [TNTC] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 103; Fee, p. 261-262.

<sup>53</sup> Unlike 3:16-17, where Paul uses the temple metaphor to refer to the corporate body of the church, here he abstracts the same idea and applies it to the individual.

language of "bought" and "at a price" clearly presupposes the slave market, as Paul later will argue more directly (cf. 7:22). Corinthians who were Roman citizens might have legal "rights," but they also must remember that as slaves of Christ they no longer belonged to themselves. The responsibility of Christians is to honor God with their bodies (6:20b).

## The Corinthians' Questions

### About Marriage (7:1-40)

Chapter 7 marks a shift in that here Paul begins to take up the questions the Corinthians posed to him in their letter (see introductory comments on "structure"). Paul, of course, already had written to them (cf. 5:9). Given the combativeness of the Corinthians that is evident elsewhere in the letter (and also in 2 Corinthians), it may well be that they took exception to his instructions and posed their questions entirely because they disagreed with his rulings. This first issue naturally follows hard on the heels of the previous discussion of sexual immorality. Two issues, especially, were posed by the Corinthians concerning sexuality and marriage (7:1, 25).

One thing is clear. In Paul's instructions, his fundamental advice, which he repeats several times, is that men and women should not seek to change their marital status. This is the burden of the lengthy excursus in 7:17-24, and in one form or another, Paul stressed this principle in each particular situation:

*To the married--stay married and continue normal sexual relations (7:1-7)*

*To the "unmarried" and widows--it is good to stay unmarried (7:8-9)*

*To married believers--stay married (7:10-11)*

*To a believer with an unbelieving spouse--stay married (7:12-16)*

*To those never married--it is good to stay unmarried (7:25-38)*

*To widows--it is good to stay unmarried (7:39-40)*

Furthermore, in at least one place Paul offers his advice in view of "the present crisis" (7:26) so that his advice, at least to some degree, was framed within a given historical context. This "present crisis" may well have been a series of grain shortages and the resulting famine that are known to have occurred in Corinth in the 50s AD.<sup>54</sup> Whether or not Paul would have offered the same advice in a more neutral circumstance is moot.

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<sup>54</sup> Winter, pp. 216-225.

### To Those Already Married (7:1-7)

Paul's opening statement, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (7:1b), is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. More than likely, this statement is not so much a conclusion of Paul's as it is a quotation of sentiments from the Corinthians' letter.<sup>55</sup> In their opposition to the libertinism of those Paul addressed in chapter 6, some Corinthians had adopted the opposite extreme of advocating a suspension of all sexual relations, even within marriage itself.<sup>56</sup> Paul rebutted this approach, especially since sexual promiscuity was so rampant in Corinth (7:2-3). Married couples not only should remain married, they should realize that in marriage they each belonged to the other sexually (7:4).<sup>57</sup> To abstain from conjugal relations within marriage was to defraud one's partner and to subject him or her to significant temptation. Paul was willing to permit temporary abstinence from sexual relations in the interests of prayer, but only by mutual consent (7:5), and even here, his permission was a concession, not a demand (7:6).<sup>58</sup> Hence, it is not as though a spouse could demand sexual abstinence in the interests of prayer; rather, only if both partners fully agreed to such abstinence was such a temporary suspension of conjugal relations in order. Possibly the Corinthians themselves had appealed to Paul's singleness in support of their argument, but even if at a personal level Paul could wish that all Christians were single, realistically he knew that singleness was a special gift and not the common experience (7:7; cf. Mt. 19:11-12). The more common gift was marriage.

### To Those Who Are Unmarried (7:8-9)

Altogether, Paul uses three different expressions to refer to unmarried people:

ἀγαμος (**agamos** = unmarried), 7:8, 11, 32, 34

χήρα (**chēra** = widow), 7:8

παρθενος (**parthenos** = virgin), 7:25, 28, 34, 36, 37

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<sup>55</sup> The interpretation that this sentence is an excerpt from the Corinthians' letter goes back at least as far as Origen (3<sup>rd</sup> century), cf. Bruce, p. 66.

<sup>56</sup> While there is debate as to whether the translation of 7:1b should be rendered, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman," or "It is good for a husband not to have sexual relations with [his] wife" (both are possible), the larger context of 7:1-7 certainly concerns husbands and wives. Though both translations are possible, the latter is to be preferred. The NIV's, "It is good for a man not to marry," follows interpretive translations like the TEV. However, this translation is a questionable dynamic equivalency, does not represent the Greek text directly, and may be unduly tendentious.

<sup>57</sup> Paul uses the verb ἐξουσιάζω (**exousiazō**= to have authority over) to express the mutual rights between husbands and wives (each has "authority" over the other's body).

<sup>58</sup> For the view that Paul's concession refers to singleness as described in 7:7 and not temporary abstinence as described in 7:5, see Winter, pp. 233-238.

To what does the term "the unmarried" refer, which is used only here in the New Testament? It is the most general of the three words, and includes all unmarried people, whether bachelors, virgins, widows, widowers or divorced persons.<sup>59</sup> However, Paul distinguishes between the unmarried and widows (7:8) and between the unmarried and virgins (7:27-28). Interpreters and translators have struggled to narrow the field for this term, including the options that it might refer especially to widowers or to divorced persons. Divorce was frequently and easily obtained by Roman citizens, requiring only a simple oral or written notice by one or both parties.<sup>60</sup> Commentators have been reluctant to grant divorced persons the privilege of remarriage on the basis of this passage, but it may well be the category that Paul has in mind. Nevertheless, even if this is who Paul has in mind, the proper goal of divorced persons is not remarriage but first of all reconciliation to the former spouse (cf. 7:10-11).

Paul's advice, as before, is that unmarried persons and widows should not attempt to change their marital status. It would be advantageous for them to remain single, just as Paul was single (7:8). Still, if they were not practicing continence, that is, if they are doing like the others--going to prostitutes--then they should marry. Marriage certainly was preferable to promiscuity (7:9)!<sup>61</sup>

### **To Those Who are Married but Not Content (7:10-11)**

Every pastor has been confronted by a husband or wife who contemplates divorce because one or both of them say, "I am not happy." Here Paul is much more emphatic than previously. Earlier, he conceded temporary suspension of sexual relations under limited conditions, and he has just advised singleness but does not require it. Here he is unambiguous and gives his ruling as a command directly from the Lord Jesus himself: Don't divorce (7:10; cf. Mk. 10:2-12)!<sup>62</sup> Neither the husband nor the wife are to seek a divorce.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, if a divorce occurs, the partners

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<sup>59</sup> C. Brown, "Separate, Divide," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3.536.

<sup>60</sup> Ferguson, pp. 56-57.

<sup>61</sup> The expression "to burn" probably is a metaphor for sexual passion, cf. W. Orr and J. Walther, *I Corinthians [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 210.

<sup>62</sup> In 7:10 the verb Paul uses means to divide or separate ( $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$  = separate oneself, go away), and in 7:11 he uses a near synonym that means to loose ( $\acute{\alpha}\phi\acute{\iota}\eta\mu\iota$  = let go, send away), or in a legal sense, to divorce. Some interpreters understand this passage to refer to estrangement, not formal divorce, but in Roman culture the modern distinction would be lost. Divorce for Romans could be either formal or informal, either with documentation or without it, cf. Fee, pp. 293-294. What is not in doubt is that Jesus' command, to which Paul refers, refers to a broken marriage through divorce. Paul must surely have had the same action in mind.

<sup>63</sup> In Roman society, either a man or a woman could take divorce action, unlike Jewish society where men only could do so.

should either remain unmarried or seek reconciliation (7:11).

### **To Those with Non-Christian Spouses (7:12-16)**

It was bound to be the case that some Corinthians accepted the Christian faith while their spouses did not (cf. 1 Pe. 3:1ff.). In a later correspondence, Paul will forbid believers to marry unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), but it is likely that he already had given this instruction previously. What about those who already were "unequally yoked", whose marriage began before one of them became a Christian? Paul can appeal to no ruling from Christ on the matter, but he offers his judgment that they should remain married if at all possible (7:12-13). The union was "sanctified" and any children produced by the union were "holy" (7:14).<sup>64</sup>

Of course, the pagan spouse might wish to terminate the marriage, and in that case the Christian has no alternative. Christians were not bound to the marriage in such a case (7:15). Still, maintaining the marriage if at all possible might mean the eventual conversion of the unbelieving spouse (7:16)!

The question naturally arises: if the pagan spouse divorces the Christian, is the Christian permitted to remarry? Paul does not address this question, unless it falls under his earlier statement "to the unmarried", where he advises that they remain unmarried. Only if they do not control their sexual impulse should they marry (cf. 7:8-9). His basic premise all along has been to maintain one's current marital status. If married, stay married. If unmarried, don't seek marriage. Christians who are unmarried should take seriously Paul's advice to consider whether or not they have the gift of singleness before they rush into finding a spouse (cf. 7:7).

### **The Excursus (7:17-24)**

Paul's theological response throughout has been consistent: the Christian should not seek to change his or her marital status as a condition for living out the Christian calling. Here, Paul goes further afield with this principle, applying it to the Jewish/Gentile question of circumcision and the slave/free question of manumission. The excursus intends to reinforce the basis point, a rule that Paul says he voices in all the congregations, that is, that each one should retain the place in life assigned to him when he was called to follow Christ (7:17, 20, 24). Jews should remain Jews. Gentiles should not become proselyte Jews (7:18). Slaves should be content (7:21a). Freedmen, in fact, have become the slaves of Christ and are not free to indulge

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<sup>64</sup> By saying that the unbelieving spouse was "sanctified", Paul could hardly mean that they were saved, else what he says in 7:16 would be nonsense. Rather, Paul appeals to the Jewish levitical sense of holiness, that is, that rather than the Christian being defiled by sexual relations with a pagan spouse, the pagan spouse has been sanctified in the relationship with the believer, cf. Fee, pp. 299-301. Children, in the same way, are members of the covenant community (cf., Mal. 2:15).



themselves in the vices afforded by their free status (7:22-23). In all these cases, believers can remain in whatever social condition they were in when called by Christ without it hindering their Christian calling. Paul implies that changing status carries no spiritual advantage, since what counts is obedience to God's calling (7:19).

Of course, change is not impossible, and Paul concedes as much with his exemption to slaves. In fact, his instruction to slaves is not strictly "stay as you are," but rather, "don't let it trouble you--although if you can gain your freedom, do so" (7:21b).<sup>65</sup> Paul's point is not so much that change is impossible for Christians as that present circumstances, whatever they are, do not prevent one from living out the Christian calling. What is true for Jews, Greeks, slaves and free persons is equally true for married and unmarried persons. Obedience to God's will is possible in all these circumstances.

### **To Those Who Are Unmarried but Considering Marriage (7:25-38)**

Here, Paul designated two classes, those who were virgins and those who were "loosed" from a marriage. Paul's address to virgins probably refers to those who had never been married but either were betrothed or at least considering marriage. Once again, Paul has no precedent from the oral traditions of Jesus' teachings, but he offers his own judgment (7:25). Here, he specifically frames his response with reference to "the present crisis" (7:26a), possibly a reference to the grain shortage and resulting famine in Corinth at about the time Paul wrote. A series of inscriptions honoring Tiberius Claudius Dinippus of Corinth as the curator annonae (= curator of the grain supply), a public office filled only in times of famine, demonstrate the extremity to which the Corinthians were pressed in the early 50s AD.<sup>66</sup> In view of this crisis, Paul advises against changing marital status (7:26b-27). Marriage is not a sin, of course, and if a young woman decides to consummate her betrothal in marriage, she has not sinned, or if an unmarried person decides to marry, he or she has not sinned (7:28a).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Translators are divided over whether this ambiguous sentence of Paul means, "Even if you can gain your freedom, make the most of your present condition instead" (Goodspeed, NAB, KJV, ASV), or "But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity" (RSV, NEB, TEV, JB, ESV, Weymouth, Phillips). While few modern translators follow the former option, there is a long tradition in support of it going back as far as John Chrysostom, cf. Bruce, p. 72. Nevertheless, the latter option is better on linguistic, cultural and historical grounds, cf. Fee, pp. 316-318.

<sup>66</sup> Winter, pp. 216-225. While it is not uncommon to interpret Paul's reference to "the present crisis" in eschatological terms, that is, the impending woes of messiah preceding the second return of Christ, such an interpretation hardly does justice to the language of *διὰ τὴν ἐνεστῶσαν ἀνάγκην* (because of the present calamity). While he does not say precisely what it was, Paul's language seems to imply a clearly understood threat in Corinth.

<sup>67</sup> To what does Paul refer when speaking of being "loosed" from a wife? Some translations make it tantamount to a divorced person ("Has your marriage been dissolved?", NEB), and others that it refers to the unmarried state in a more general way. If the former, then while Paul clearly forbids seeking a divorce, and while he advises against marriage for one who already is divorced, he permits remarriage nevertheless and says it is not sin. This seems to

It is only that marriage would complicate the domestic life of newlyweds during such a crisis (7:28b).

Furthermore, the depth of the crisis was at hand (7:29a).<sup>68</sup> All earthly values would be transformed in view of the severe distress, whether marriage, grief, joy, buying power, or the ordinary pursuits of life (7:29b-31a).<sup>69</sup> As Christians, the Corinthians must maintain a detachment from secular pursuits in order to focus on Christ.<sup>70</sup> All worldly values are transient and unstable by nature (7:31b). Here, then, is the advantage of remaining unmarried, for the married person necessarily must focus considerable time and energy on the secular pursuits of life, while the unmarried person is more unencumbered and can be more fully devoted to Christ (7:32-34). In offering this advice, Paul does not intend to restrict Christian freedom. Corinthian Christians were still free to make their own choices to marry or not to marry (7:35). His counsel is, as he says, "for their own good." Still, the decision to marry or to remain single was up to the individual. If an engaged couple<sup>71</sup> felt the pressure of sexual passion and was in danger of succumbing to intercourse without marriage, the man should "do what he wants," that is, he should marry his betrothed (7:36).<sup>72</sup> It is

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agree with what he says earlier in 7:8 to the *agamos*: he advises against marriage, but he also permits it if a person does not control sexual passion.

<sup>68</sup> For those who follow the eschatological interpretation, Paul's statement that "the time is short" refers to the impending return of Christ. However, in the context of "the present crisis" it seems better to take Paul's statement to mean that the severity of the grain shortage would soon reach frightening proportions.

<sup>69</sup> Morris, pp. 117-118.

<sup>70</sup> The verb *ᾠσιν* (3<sup>rd</sup> person plural present subjunctive of "to be") should be translated "may be" to capture the subjunctive mood. The NIV's "should live as" too easily is interpreted as an imperative.

<sup>71</sup> There are two major options regarding the male in 7:36-38. Is it the young woman's father (so ASV, NASB, JB, TCNT, Weymouth, Conybeare) or her fiance (so RSV, NIV, TEV, Phillips, Goodspeed)? Some translations remain neutral (so KJV, NAB), while the NEB offers the unusual "a partner in celibacy". Germane to this issue is whether or not 7:36-38 are a continuation of the previous discussion or a special case beyond the previous discussion. Those who take the verses to be a continuation of the previous discussion understand the male to be a fiance. Those who take the verses to be a special case take the male to be the father of the engaged woman. On the whole, it seems better to take the term virgin as referring to the same case, both in 7:32-35 and also in 7:36-38. Hence, the discussion throughout refers to an engaged couple.

<sup>72</sup> Three translational difficulties arise in 7:36. The first is the word *ἀσχημονεῖν* (= acting improperly), which probably is a euphemism for inappropriate sexual behavior, i.e., sexual intimacy or intercourse. The same expression appears numerous times in the literature of the period with precisely this meaning, cf. Winter, pp. 243-246. Second, it is unclear whether the subjunctive verb *ἦ* refers to the man or the woman (either is possible grammatically), though most translators take it to refer to the woman (RSV, NEB, TEV and Goodspeed are exceptions). The whole phrase, *εἰάν ἦ ὑπέρακμος* (= if she/he might be in the prime of development), is even more difficult. Some scholars suggest that for women it means "past one's prime", i.e., past child-bearing years or menopause, cf. BAG (1979), p. 839. This definition is followed by the NIV, KJV, TCNT, JB, NASB, ASV, Phillips, Williams, Weymouth. For men, it might mean "with strong passions", cf. F. Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965), p. 224. This definition is followed by the RSV, NEB, TEV and Goodspeed. On the other hand, the expression also can refer to puberty in a woman or a woman who is sexually active, and there is considerable doubt as to whether this expression was ever used of menopause in the *koine* period, cf. Winter, p. 246-249. Hence, it seems better to take the expression as referring to mature sexual passion, not advanced age.

no sin for them to marry. On the other hand, if they are able to remain celibate, the decision not to marry is good also (7:37). Marriage is good, and celibacy, with its opportunity to serve the Lord more fully, is even better (7:38).

### **To Widows (7:39-40)**

The last category Paul addresses is widows. Should widows consider remarriage? Certainly the marriage bond was intended "til death do us part" (7:39a), but if one partner dies, must the remaining person remain unmarried? Again, Paul respects Christian freedom in this matter. Widows are free to remarry so long as they marry Christians (7:39b). Paul's personal opinion remains unchanged that there are distinct advantages to singleness (7:40a), but he does not demand the single life. As a final note, he adds that while what he has expressed is his own opinion, he also is a man of the Spirit (7:40b). His insights should be taken seriously!

### **About Kosher Food (8-10)**

#### **The Issue of Dedicated Food (8)**

The range of questions posed to Paul by the Corinthian church imply that after he departed Corinth several circumstances surfaced to confront the church with moral issues about which Paul had left no directives.<sup>73</sup> One possible circumstance behind the initial question was the severe grain shortage and consequent famine and social distress, a situation that Paul may have alluded to in his reference to "the present crisis" (7:26a). Another external event contributing to a changed situation was the establishment of the imperial cult (emperor worship), initiated by the city of Corinth itself and approved by the emperor and Senate in about AD 54. Such action, initiated by the province, was part of the process of upward mobility in the Roman system with political, social and financial benefits. Roman citizens in Corinth would have been expected to be supportive. It may well be that the question about eating food sacrificed to idols has the imperial cult as its primary background.

Local pagan cults often featured sacred meals in which the food was dedicated to the deity before being eaten by the religious community. It was customary for an animal, bread, meal, oil or wine to be offered to the god or goddess. Part of the offering belonged to the deity, part to the priest and part to the worshipper. Some

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<sup>73</sup> Traditionally, interpreters of 1 Corinthians have sought the solution to these questions by alleging some deep misunderstanding of Paul's teachings on the part of the Corinthians, the entry of some theological perversion of the pure Christian faith, such as Gnosticism, or a disparity between the oral traditions about Jesus' teaching and Paul's theology. Though arguable, none of these suggestions has been particularly compelling. Bruce Winter recently has offered a more compelling analysis suggesting that external situations arising in Roman Corinth after Paul's departure account for these issues.

temples had adjoining rooms for cultic meals, but sometimes the worshipper might take home the portion allotted to him.<sup>74</sup> With this, the worshipper held a feast, inviting neighbors and friends, and it was assumed that the god or goddess would be spiritually present as a guest. Of the food dedicated to deities, the pagan worshipper was allowed to use a third for sacred banquets.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to private sacrificial meals, the state offered public sacrifices. From the public sacrifices, some portions of the meat went to the priests, some to magistrates and others, and some to the open markets and shops for sale to the public. Thus, even when a Christian bought meat in the *agora* (= market) of his city, he had no guarantee that it was free of pagan contamination. Further, it was a popular superstition that demons and evil spirits gained entrance into humans by sitting on their food. For this reason, most animals were dedicated to pagan deities before slaughter as a measure of protection against evil spirits, and the meat was blessed in the name of the god or goddess before being eaten. Sickness and disease were often attributed to such spiritual influences, and spirits were believed to be everywhere—in the water, the trees, the mountains, the rocks, empty houses, crumbs on the floor and the air.<sup>76</sup> With respect to sacred meals, there was a link between the Isthmian Games and the imperial cult. The President of the Games entertained Roman citizens from Corinth who were invited to dine at Isthmia in the temple of Poseidon, the deity in whose honor the games were held, and it was a "right" for citizens to attend.<sup>77</sup>

Against this practice, the testimony of the early Christians was clear. Conversion to Christianity meant turning "from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Th. 1:9). In Greco-Roman culture, there was no shortage of gods, goddesses and lords, but for Christians there was "one God, the Father...and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Co. 8:5-6). While there were many mother deities elevated as supreme, the only notable mother figure in Christianity was the mother of Christ, and she was firmly reminded by no less than her own son that she was not in control (Jn. 2:3-4; Mt. 12:46-50//Mk. 3:31-35//Lk. 8:19-21; 11:27-28). Pagan gods were no gods at all (Ac. 19:26); they were "worthless things" (Ac. 14:15; cf. 17:16) and "nothing at all" (1 Co. 8:4). Worse, they were fronts for demons (1 Co. 10:19-20). Caesar was not Lord; Jesus was Lord (Ac. 17:7). The paraphernalia and literature of paganism was fit to be burned (Ac. 19:18-20). The whole world was under the sway of the evil one,

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<sup>74</sup> E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds to Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) pp. 144-148.

<sup>75</sup> A typical invitation to such a sacred meal might read like the following actual invitation from a papyrus scroll: *Antonius, son of Ptolemaeus, invites you to dine with him at the table of our Lord Serapis*, cf. W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians [DSB]*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> Barclay, pp. 72-73, 91-92.

<sup>77</sup> Winter, pp. 276-278.

so the charge for Christians, in view of their faith in the one true God, was to "keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jn. 5:19-21). The Jerusalem encyclical that Paul and Silas carried to the churches specifically required the Gentile Christians to "abstain from food sacrificed to idols" (Ac. 15:29). Paul and his team delivered this letter to all the established churches (Ac. 16:4), and it is hardly to be doubted that they must have done the same in Corinth. Furthermore, the Corinthian Christians had the advantage that in the eyes of the Romans, going back to Gallio's ruling (Ac. 18:14-16), they were a sect of Judaism. Many cities maintained official food concessions for their resident Jews, and market officials were required to have suitable food (i.e., kosher) available. There is little reason to doubt that it was the same in Corinth.<sup>78</sup> Corinthian Christians under Gallio's ruling would have had access to such food.

So, how came the Corinthians to be confused about this matter and why did they feel they had to write to Paul (8:1a)? For one thing, we know that the tide of opinion was turning against the Jews. Claudius Caesar had expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, an official letter was published stating that Jews from Palestine should not be invited into Alexandria, Egypt, since they were "fomenting a general plague throughout the world."<sup>80</sup> Given this changing attitude, it may well be that the special consideration concerning kosher food for the Jews had been withdrawn from the Corinthian agora.<sup>81</sup> If so, the Corinthian Christians, who formerly had been privileged to buy kosher meat in the market, now would be forced to buy meat that might well have been dedicated to a pagan deity. In defending their right to buy such meat, the "strong" Corinthians argued that since idols were nothing anyway and since there was only one true God, such knowledge should be sufficient to permit them to buy meat without regard for pagan associations (8:1-6).

Paul conceded the basic truth of their argument, but he contended that there was another factor that must not be neglected--the love of Christians who were concerned not to cause another brother or sister to stumble in faith. Not everyone was "strong", and eating such meat would be a serious moral challenge for some Christians (8:7-8). Not everyone had the same level of intellectual sophistication (8:1b-2). To exercise one's "rights" based on superior knowledge could be spiritually dangerous for the person who might be less mature. It might even destroy his faith (8:9-12). To act on the basis of knowledge rather than on the basis of love would end up being a sin against one for whom Christ died! Christian freedom was real and

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<sup>78</sup> Winter, pp. 288-295.

<sup>79</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, 25.4 (cf. Ac. 18:2).

<sup>80</sup> F. Bruce, *Paul*, p. 225.

<sup>81</sup> We know, for instance, that these privileges were withdrawn from Sardis, though later restored, cf. Winter, pp. 288-293.

must not be discounted, but responsible Christian freedom meant that moral decisions were not made for personal benefit alone. The effect of one's decisions on others must be considered, too.

Paul's language of "this right (ἐξουσία)<sup>82</sup> of yours" (8:9) makes the above reconstruction plausible. Especially in the excursus of chapter 9, Paul repeatedly uses the term ἐξουσία (**exousia** = right, authority). To exercise one's "rights" at the cost of causing a Christian brother or sister to fall into sin was itself a sin, and it would be better to be a vegetarian than to follow such a course (8:12-13).

### Excursus on "Rights" (9)

If as suggested above the crux of the issue for the Corinthians was their tendency to defend their "rights" (ἐξουσία), Paul launches into a long aside on the Christian responsibility to give up rights in the interests of others. He begins with his office of apostleship, validated both by his vision of the risen Christ and by his missionary work among the Corinthians (9:1-2; cf. Ac. 22:14-15; 26:16-16; Ro. 15:15-19). As a Christian missionary-apostle, he had certain rights, including the freedom to eat and drink whatever he chose, to be married or single, and to receive financial support for his ministry (9:3-6). This latter right, especially, was based firmly on the Torah and the teachings of Jesus (cf. Lk. 10:7), not to mention common convention (9:7-14). Nevertheless, Paul had given up such rights in order to demonstrate that the gospel of grace was "free of charge" (9:15-18). Even though "free", Paul chose to become a slave to everyone for the sake of his evangelistic mission (9:29), to Jews, to those under the Torah, to those outside the covenant of Torah, and to the weak (9:20-22a). His motivation in giving up such rights was that "by all possible means" some might be saved (9:22b-23).

Furthermore, self sacrifice was common even among the athletes who competed in the Isthmian games of which the Corinthians were so proud. Runners, competitors, boxers--all of them make sacrifices for the sake of training and the hope of winning (9:24-26). Paul did the same in his missionary work, sacrificing comfort for the sake of his goal so that he would not be disqualified for failing to keep his commission (9:27).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Traditionally, translators have rendered this word as "freedom" or "liberty". However, it should be noted that this is not the same as the word ἐλευθερία (**eleutheria**), which is more generally translated as liberty or freedom. Rather, it carries the nuance of official authority or right, O. Betz, *NTDNTT* (1976) II.606-611.

<sup>83</sup> Considerably discussion has been waged between Calvinists and Arminians over Paul's statement about disqualification. Arminians, of course, hold this passage as a primary text indicating that it is possible to lose one's salvation. Calvinists contend that either this means one was never a true Christian in the first place, or else, it refers to disqualification from the reward for missionary service, not the loss of basic salvation (e.g., the Calvinist translation in the Geneva Bible, "lest I my self shulde be reproved", cf. Fee, p. 440). However, Paul is not answering a post-Reformation debate, and to try to force this passage one way or another is doubtful.

The upshot of Paul's excursus, then, is that the Corinthians should view Paul's life of self-sacrifice as a model for themselves. They should be willing to give up some of their "rights" in the interests of a higher cause. Personal rights must always be balanced against a concern for others. One must be willing to give up freedom as an expression of Christian deference toward others who may be less sophisticated.

### **The Lesson from Israelite History (10:1-13)**

To further drive home his point, Paul raises the example of ancient Israel, who also fell prey to idolatry and sexual promiscuity. The Israelite sojourn in the desert forms an analogy of the Christian life, for which Jesus' temptations in the desert were a precedent.<sup>84</sup> The analogy includes several specific parallels (10:1-4):

#### **The Israelite Desert Sojourn**

*Baptism into Moses*

*In the cloud*

*In the sea*

*Spiritual food (manna)*

*Spiritual drink (water from the rock)*

*Yahweh, the Rock (Dt. 32:4, 15, 18, 30-31)*

#### **The Christian Pilgrimage**

*Baptism into Christ*

*The presence of the Spirit*

*Water baptism*

*Eucharistic bread*

*Eucharistic wine*

*Christ, the Rock*

The point, of course, is that in spite of all these spiritual credentials, God's judgment prevented the first generation from entering the land of promise (10:5).

The example of the ancient people of God served as a warning to the Corinthian Christians that they must not set their hearts on evil (10:6), particularly idolatry and sexual promiscuity (10:7-8). The quotation of Ex. 32:6b in the debacle of the golden calf,<sup>85</sup> "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to play" (10:7b), was especially appropriate in light of the link between pagan sacred meals and the promiscuous "after dinners," which followed exactly this pattern--gorging on food, heavy drinking and after-dinner sexual encounters (see discussion under 6:9-20). The seduction at Ba'al Peor, when Moab seduced the Israelites, produced a heavy toll, for God executed 23,000 in a single judgment (cf. Nu. 25:9).<sup>86</sup> The

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<sup>84</sup> The story of Christ's temptations during the 40 days in the desert paralleling the 40 years of the Israelite sojourn as well as Jesus' quotations to Satan from Moses' review of the sojourn mark the experience of Israel as a particularly apt analogy for the Christian pilgrimage prior to entering heaven.

<sup>85</sup> As before, Paul cites the passage from the LXX.

<sup>86</sup> The discrepancy between the 24,000 in Numbers (both in the MT and LXX as well as Philo and Josephus) and the 23,000 in Paul has no completely satisfactory explanation. Some suggest that Paul intentionally omitted those leaders of the rebellion executed at a different time (cf. Nu. 25:4), while others suggest that both in Numbers and in Paul the numbers are rounded (i.e., more than 23,000 but something less than 24,000). Historical-critical scholars, of course, simply attribute the discrepancy to a Pauline memory lapse, a solution that evangelicals find incompatible

people's accusations against God that resulted in the plague of venomous serpents (cf. Nu. 21:4-6) and their recurring complaints against God and Moses<sup>87</sup> all combine to produce a battery of dire warnings about the seriousness of trivializing God.

Such accounts from the Hebrew Bible serve as instruction and warning for Christians to whom has been fulfilled the promises of the ancient prophets.<sup>88</sup> The Corinthian Christians must not be over-confident. If the ancient people of Israel, who experienced such divine power in their redemptive experience, still fell into sin and judgment, the Corinthian Christians could do the same (10:12)! At the same time, the temptations in Roman Corinth were not substantially different than those faced by all humans everywhere, and the Corinthians could depend upon the faithfulness of God to strengthen and sustain them. God would not allow a level of temptation that was unbearable, since he also would empower them to stand true (10:13).

### **The Koinonia of the Sacred Meals (10:14-22)**

The idea of *κοινωνία* (**koinōnia** = sharing, fellowship, close relationship) is central in the discussion of sacred meals. In the first place, the presence of the deity was presumed in the pagan sacred meals with which the Corinthians were already culturally familiar. In pagan temples, the god's presence was symbolized by his statue, and Roman language reinforced this belief.<sup>89</sup> For Paul, of course, the ancient myths of gods and goddesses were so much poppycock (cf. 8:4b-6), but that did not mean that participation in a pagan temple was innocuous, since he also believed that the cults of the gods and goddesses were fronts for demons--entities with a real spiritual presence that were arraigned against the one true God (10:20). Hence, he urges, "Run from idolatry!" (10:14)!

For Christians, participation in the sacred meal of the Eucharist was every bit as much a "sharing" of the real presence of Christ as was popularly believed among the pagans about their false deities and was actually true of the pagans who trafficked with demons.<sup>90</sup> Christians shared in the cup of thanksgiving, a *κοινωνία* of the blood

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with the integrity of Scripture.

<sup>87</sup> There are several accounts of grumbling (e.g., Nu. 11:1; 14:1-4; 16:1-3), and in none of them is there mention of a destroying angel. Paul may be assuming the action of the destroyer based on Ex. 12:23.

<sup>88</sup> The expression, "...to whom the ends of the ages have arrived", is typical New Testament language that the kingdom of God, anticipated by the prophets, has been inaugurated in the coming of Jesus the Messiah, cf. D. Lewis, *3 Crucial Questions About the Last Days* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 50-61, 64-68.

<sup>89</sup> The Latin term *lectisternium* referred to the presence of the male deity, while *sellisternium* referred to the presence of the female deity, cf. Ferguson, p. 146. An extant invitation to such a banquet from the period reads: "the god invites you to a banquet being held in the Thoereion tomorrow from the 9<sup>th</sup> hour", cf. Fee, p. 467, note #22.

<sup>90</sup> The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist has been generally believed in the Christian church, though under different models. Roman Catholics, of course, hold to transubstantiation (the literal transformation of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ), Lutherans to consubstantiation (the real presence of Christ "in, with



of Christ, and they shared in the one loaf, a *κοινωνία* in the body of Christ (10:15-17). Such sharing was true for ancient Israel as well, since the worshippers were partners in the altar, eating the portions stipulated by the Torah (10:18; cf. Lv. 7:15-16; 10:12-15; Nu. 18:8-13, 18-19; Dt. 12:7, 17-18, 27; 18:3-5). Pagans, in their sacred meals, shared in the spiritual presence of demons (10:20). To be sure, the real presence of demons was not to be taken as inferring the reality of the gods and goddesses of the Greco-Roman pantheon (10:19). Nevertheless, the fact that idolatry was a front for demons meant that Christians must not eat at both tables, the Lord's table and the demons' table (10:21). It would be defiant madness to flaunt one's "rights" in the face of God in such a way (10:22).

### **Final Exhortation about Dedicated Food (10:23--11:1)**

Once more addressing the Corinthian aphorisms raised earlier as a defense of their rights (cf. 6:12-13), Paul urges the Christian ethic with a slightly different emphasis (10:23-24).

*Not everything is beneficial (as in 6:13).*

*Not everything is constructive.*

*Nobody should seek his own good but the good of others (cf. Ro. 15:2; Phil. 2:4).*

The Corinthian Christians might have to voluntarily to set aside their legal rights as Roman citizens in order to follow this Christian ethic.

On the basis of such principles, Paul offers his concluding advice in view of the new circumstances in Corinth. First, they were free to purchase meat in the Corinthian market without compunctions, since all things, food included, belonged to the Lord (10:25-26; cf. Ps. 24:1). Such meat, even if eaten by Christians, would be eaten innocently at home and not in connection with pagan worship or a pagan temple. Paul's ruling, obviously, is much more lenient than traditional Jewish kosher practice. Second, they were free to attend meals prepared by non-Christians without compunction (10:27), again a much more lenient ruling than traditional for Jews who would not eat in a Gentile home for fear of transgressing kosher laws. We should assume, of course, that this permission did not extend to eating in a pagan temple (cf. 8:10-12), and certainly not in the temple of Poseidon with its promiscuous "after dinners", but referred to meals in a private home. No embarrassing questions needed to be asked, though if it was specifically pointed out that the food had been dedicated

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and under" the bread and wine) and John Calvin to the mystery of Christ's spiritual presence. Only the more radical reformers, such as Carlstadt and Zwingli, held to the symbolic nature of the Eucharist without emphasizing the real presence of Christ, cf. V. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 88-89 and M. Thurian, *The Mystery of the Eucharist*, trans. E. Chisholm (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

to a pagan deity, the Christian should refrain from eating it out of concern for any other person present who might be misled (10:28-29a). Still, Paul urges a final word about Christian freedom.<sup>91</sup> Christians are not to be constrained by the petty judgmentalism of others! Especially if they bless their food (and the traditional Jewish blessing was Psalm 24:1), there was no justification for others to be critical! Hence, Paul does not demand the restriction of freedom as a necessity but urges it as a voluntary concession out of love (10:29b).

Finally, the overarching ethic that applies to all Christian behavior is that God may be glorified (10:31). Christian love prompts one to act in ways that will not hinder the faith of others, whether Jews or Gentiles or Christians (10:32). Paul offers himself as a model, and in turn, he offers Christ as the supreme model (10:33--11:1).

## About Worship (11-14)

### Appropriate Decorum in Worship (11:2-16)

The next section of Paul's letter is the most extensive, and in it he addresses three issues, all of them concerned with the Christian worship service. First comes public decorum (11:2-16), next are the Corinthian abuses of the Eucharistic meal (11:17-34), and finally there is a lengthy address about the use and misuse of spiritual gifts in public meetings. Only the third of these issues begins with the *περὶ δὲ* (= now about), so the reader probably should assume that the first two items were not questions posed by the Corinthians, and further, that Paul was aware of them via other sources than the list of questions sent to him, presumably by one or more of the members of the church who had visited him in Ephesus (cf. 1:11; 16:17). He takes them up here because they form a topical unity with the question the Corinthians' posed about spiritual gifts.

Either through their letter or the verbal reports of Corinthian visitors, Paul is aware and appreciative that the Corinthian Christians have maintained the traditions he passed on to them (11:2).<sup>92</sup> Still, a further word was needed about public decorum, and Paul begins with a theological premise about headship, moving from the metaphorical (11:3) to the literal (11:4ff.). Metaphorically, headship works in the following way:

*The man's head (source of life) is Christ.*

*The wife's head (source of life) is the man.*

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<sup>91</sup> Here, significantly, Paul's word is *ἐλευθερία* (= freedom), not *ἐξουσία* (= rights)!

<sup>92</sup> See further discussion in the introduction under "The Christian Traditions".

*Christ's head (source of life) is God.*

Several translation problems attend this passage, the first two of which are contained in Paul's theological statement. First, how should one translate *γυνή* (*gynē* = woman, wife)? Since the subject matter clearly refers to veiled women, and since the common expression in Latin for a woman's marriage was "I veil myself" and the comparable expression in Greek for the marriage ceremony was "veiling the bride", the context seems to suggest that "wife" rather than "woman" is what Paul has in mind throughout the discussion (so NAB, TEV, JNT, Weymouth, Taylor, Williams).<sup>93</sup> Second, though the term *κεφαλή* (*kephalē* = head) is obviously metaphorical, it is not immediately clear how the metaphor works (most translations leave this issue up to the interpreter). If one follows the idea that headship is based on the brain as the control center of the body, then the metaphor refers to authority or rule. This is a common conclusion and especially attractive for those already committed to a male/female hierarchy, though it begs the question as to whether or not 1<sup>st</sup> century folk would have understood the human brain in such a way.<sup>94</sup> Contextually, there is much against this interpretation. For instance, if Paul meant "rule" the more natural word to use in Greek would have been *αρχων* (*archōn* = ruler). Also, the term *ἐξουσία* (authority) does not surface at all with regard to the male, but only with regard to the female, who "has authority on her head" (cf. 11:10). Furthermore, in view of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is theologically doubtful whether one would want to say that God is the "authority over" Christ.

Alternatively, if one follows the idea that headship is based on source, such as the headwaters of a river, then the metaphor refers to origin or source of life. This metaphorical usage has clear precedent in the language of the times and is to be preferred.<sup>95</sup>

Theologically, then, Paul's statement means that in the creation, based on Genesis 1-2, man's source of life is Christ, by whom God created all things (cf. Col. 1:16). In created life, again on the basis of the Genesis record, the woman's source of life is Adam, since she was taken from the man (cf. 2:20b-24). With respect to Christ as the incarnation of God, God is the source of Christ. Upon this theological

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<sup>93</sup> Winter, pp. 126-127. It is more common for translators to use the English word "woman" (so KJV, RSV, NEB, JB, NASB, ASV, Phillips), but this is probably too general.

<sup>94</sup> In Paul's letters, for instance, other organs, such as the heart and bowels, not to mention the mind, spirit and conscience, all have functions that modern humans might attribute to the brain. Yet, Paul does not talk about the brain at all!

<sup>95</sup> Bruce, p. 103; S. Bedale, "The Meaning of *κεφαλή* in the Pauline Epistles," *JTS* (1954), pp. 211-215. Wayne Grudem, in "Does *κεφαλή* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *TrinJ* n.s. 6 (1985), pp. 38-59, has sought to overthrow this evidence, but as Fee points out, his research is tendentious and his conclusions misleading, cf. Fee, p. 502-503.

foundation Paul will offer his directions for public decorum in worship. Worship should reflect these relationships, and proper decorum should illustrate them.

To most readers who are familiar with Jewish culture, the idea that it is objectionable for men to pray with a covered head might come as a surprise (11:4). However, in Roman culture it was traditional for males taking a leading part in local pagan rituals to pray or offer libations to the gods while having their togas drawn up over their heads.<sup>96</sup> Hence, Paul says that the men in the Corinthian church should not pray in such a pagan manner. To do so would be to dishonor Christ, their source of life.

Wives, for their part, dishonored their husbands if they prayed or prophesied with their heads uncovered,<sup>97</sup> since to do so would be to discard the traditional sign of their marriage (11:5). They might as well shave their heads, an unthinkable act (11:6)!<sup>98</sup> To pray or prophesy in such a manner would be to identify oneself with the new, liberated wives of Roman society who were promiscuous.<sup>99</sup> Men, by contrast, should not pull their togas over their heads to pray, since their prayers were not pagan, but rather, expressions of their relationship to the one true God. The symbolism in their attire should reflect the truth that they were made in God's image to display God's glory (11:7a).<sup>100</sup> Wives, similarly, should reflect the truth that in their marriages they displayed their husbands' glory (11:7b) and the fact that the first woman was created from the side of the first man (11:8-9). Wives who spoke publicly were obliged to wear the veil, the sign of their marriage and the symbol of their authority to speak and not to be confused with the promiscuous elements of society (11:10).

A special word should be said about Paul's phrase, "...because of the messengers" (11:10a). A plethora of interpretations have accompanied this oblique reference, ranging from the more sensible explanation that it refers to angels as guardians of the created order or as those heavenly beings before whom God displays his glory in the church (cf. Ep. 3:10-11) to the truly bizarre notion that every time a woman cuts her hair an angel dies.<sup>101</sup> Most of the difficulty has come by translating

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<sup>96</sup> Winter, pp. 121-123.

<sup>97</sup> The actual term here is ἀκατακάλυπτος (*akatakalyptos* = uncovered, unveiled), which some take to refer to unbound hair rather than an external covering (cf. NIVmg). On the whole, however, the fact that the contrast is with men's external covering makes it more likely that Paul has the same thing in mind with respect to women.

<sup>98</sup> Some scholars suggest that a woman's shaved head was a sign of prostitution, cf. Grosheide, p. 254, but period evidence is lacking, cf. Fee, p. 511.

<sup>99</sup> Winter, pp. 127-130.

<sup>100</sup> Here Paul uses the verb expressing obligation, cf. Winter, pp. 130-131.

<sup>101</sup> This latter absurdity comes from a Oneness Pentecostal sub-culture that tries to make the passage a restriction on women cutting their hair.

αγγελος (**angelos** = angel, messenger) as "angel" (so in virtually all English translations). Another alternative, and perhaps better, is that the term should be rendered as "messenger", referring not to a supernatural being, but instead, to one of the human information-gatherers who reported on unusual activities that might be construed to have political significance. Winter remarks, "In the case of a colony with special loyalty to Rome, watching strange or foreign religions was all the more important."<sup>102</sup> As such, the decorum of Christian women in congregational meetings should be such that their public speaking would arouse no suspicion of fomenting anti-Roman sentiment.

Of course, Paul is at pains to maintain the creative tension between the created order with its special relationships and Christian freedom. Hence, he makes clear that he is not advocating some sort of gender hierarchy, since as Christians "in the Lord" neither men nor women were independent of the other (11:11-12; cf. Ga. 3:28). God, only, has true independence, and all other things are derived for both men and women. Still, the Corinthians should be able to determine for themselves that married women ought not jettison the sign of their marriage in the interests of secular freedom (11:13-14). Men, for their part, should conform to the current cultural conventions of short hair.<sup>103</sup> Women, after the same manner, should follow the current conventions of long hair which, by analogy, is like the external veil as the sign of married life (11:15).<sup>104</sup>

Paul concludes the discussion by addressing the contentiousness among the Corinthians over whether or not men or women should be veiled for public prayer or speech (11:16). If men drew up their togas to pray, they emphasized their social status and mimicked what was done in pagan temples. If women threw off their married veils, they were signaling that they embraced the value system of the "new" and liberated women in Roman society. Both actions would be particularly misleading to outsiders. They sent the wrong signals! Certainly there was no apostolic precedent in any of the churches for sending such signals. In all the churches, men prayed or spoke publicly without drawing up the toga; wives prayed or spoke publicly when wearing the authoritative sign of their marriage.

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<sup>102</sup> Winter, p. 138.

<sup>103</sup> The term "nature" probably means no more than Roman culture. In Roman society it was considered effeminate for men to wear long hair. Long hair on males suggested that they were passive homosexuals and/or that they wished to deny their masculinity, cf. Winter, pp. 131-132.

<sup>104</sup> The difficulty of the question "how long is long" or "how short is short", which arises for the most part within American fundamentalism, is quite outside Paul's concern. Maximum rigidity is to be found in those who contend that "long" must mean "uncut", cf. D. Seagraves, *Women's Hair: The Long and Short of It* (Duplo, Illinois: The Good Word, 1979), a position that simply cannot be substantiated either exegetically or historically. Paul's argument from culture (nature) is fluid by definition, since cultures change from era to era.

### The Lord's Table and Private Dinners (11:17-34)

The second issue regarding public worship concerned the eucharistic meal instituted by Christ at the Last Supper and memorialized in the ritual of the churches. Paul uses the language of passing on tradition to describe how the meal was inaugurated in Corinth (11:23).<sup>105</sup> The manner in which the Corinthians conducted the meal betrayed further their partisanship and class discrimination, so much so, that Paul frankly charged that their gatherings were more harmful than beneficial (11:17-18a). The report he had heard about their conduct was infamous, and he accepted the report as true (11:18b).<sup>106</sup> Such factions<sup>107</sup> only served to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, such conduct at the Lord's Supper was a terrible distortion of Christ's intent, and what they were doing, in fact, was not a faithful practice of the Christian tradition (11:20). Some were devouring their food and refusing to share it with others.<sup>109</sup> Others were drinking wine to the point of inebriation (11:21).<sup>110</sup> Clearly, the Corinthian assembly of Christians was polarized between the "haves" and the "have nots". Such behavior was a capitulation to the existing class divisions in Corinth and typical of secular manners at private dinners, where "finger-fighting" for food was common.<sup>111</sup>

Paul's question, "Don't you have homes to eat and drink in?" (11:22a), and his later advice, "If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home" (11:34), assumes that the Corinthians should have known the celebration of the Lord's table was not for the purpose of satisfying hunger. Their actions were reprehensible, demonstrating a devaluation of the whole church, not to mention the humiliation of the "have nots" (11:22b).

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<sup>105</sup> For further discussion on the passing of Christian traditions, see "The Christian Traditions" in the Introduction.

<sup>106</sup> For the translation, "I am convinced of a certain report," rather than the NIV's, "to some extent I believe it", see Winter, pp. 159-163.

<sup>107</sup> The Greek αἵρεσις (**haireisis** = faction, division) should not be taken in the sense of doctrinal heresies (so KJV). This older English rendering has been corrected in the NKJV.

<sup>108</sup> It is curious that a similar saying of Jesus, unrecorded in the canonical gospels, is found in early Christian literature, where a traditional saying of Christ is *There will be schisms and factions*, cf. Justin Martyr (2<sup>nd</sup> century), *Dialogue with Trypho*, xxxv.3.

<sup>109</sup> The verb προλαμβάνω (**prolambanō**) can be rendered either as "to take beforehand", cf. *BAG* (1979), p. 708 or "to devour", cf. J. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930), p. 542. If one translates it as the former (so KJV, RSV, NIV), then the scenario would be that the wealthy came early, ate all the food, and left the latecomers (i.e., slaves, the poor) with nothing. If one translates it as the latter (so JB, Williams, Conybeare), then the scenario would be that the upper class, following Corinthian social convention, ate their food in the presence of the lower classes without sharing. Winter makes a strong case for the latter, cf. Winter, pp. 144-148.

<sup>110</sup> It is worth mentioning in passing that the use of wine in the eucharistic meal is assumed without comment. (One could hardly expect drunkenness from the overuse of grape juice!)

<sup>111</sup> Winter, p. 148.

Once more, in the earliest written account in the New Testament, Paul sets forth the basic pattern for observing the eucharistic meal. As before, he presents it in the language of tradition, both "received" and "passed on" (11:23a). When he says he "received [the tradition] from the Lord", it need not be presumed that this was by direction revelation, but rather, that all true Christian tradition has Christ Jesus as its source (even though it may be passed on through the medium of other Christians). In all likelihood, he first received it at Damascus or at Antioch.<sup>112</sup>

Paul's first clause, "On the night the Lord was betrayed," reminds his readers that even at the original institution of the supper, the hand of Judas was with the hand of Christ on the table (11:23b). This opening clause is a solemn reminder to all Christians of all times that the truest meaning of the meal is not merely in the actions performed, but in the faith that underlies them. The meal follows a prescribed set of actions and words (11:24-25).

#### **ACTIONS**

Took bread

Gave thanks<sup>113</sup>

Broke it<sup>114</sup>

In the same way (i.e., with thanks)

Took the cup

#### **WORDS**

*This is my body, which is for you;*

*do this in remembrance of me.*

*This cup is the new covenant in my*

*blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.*

There is no specificity about how often this meal was celebrated in the Corinthian church (the word "whenever" is too broad to be precise), though the tradition in many churches is weekly on the Lord's Day. The church since the beginning has retained the metaphorical language, "This is my body; this is my blood." The term "new covenant" recalls Jeremiah's prediction of a new covenant of forgiveness (cf. Je. 31:31-34). The reenactment of Christ's memorial meal, with its actions and words, was a visible and audible proclamation of the gospel of the Lord's death (11:26). The repeating ceremony would continue until the return of Christ. The flagrant distortion of the meal's meaning by Corinthian abuses was a far cry from remembering anything at all about the mission and message of Jesus!

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<sup>112</sup> Bruce, *Paul*, p. 283.

<sup>113</sup> It is from the Greek verb εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō* = to give thanks) and the noun εὐχαριστία (*eucharistia* = thanksgiving) that we derive the transliteration *eucharist* (= the thanksgiving).

<sup>114</sup> It is from the act of breaking the bread that the eucharistic meal came to be known as "breaking bread" (cf. Ac. 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11).

On the basis of the sacred actions and words of Jesus repeated by the churches, Paul now issues a series of pointed conclusions about the meaning of the supper. To participate in the meal in an unworthy manner<sup>115</sup> was to be guilty of the body and blood of Christ (11:27).<sup>116</sup> Any Christian who participates in the eucharistic meal is obliged to perform a serious and thorough inward examination beforehand (11:28). To participate in an irreverent manner, that is, with selfish motives, contentious actions, resentment and dissension, was to call down on oneself the discipline of God, a discipline that could even result in sickness or death (11:29-30)! Paul was convinced that a recent outbreak of sickness and death among the Corinthians was a direct cause and effect of their abuse of the eucharistic meal! Paul's use of the expression "without recognizing the body" probably refers to the corporate body of Christians, that is, the church. Earlier, he introduced this metaphor for the church when he first addressed the eucharistic meal (cf. 10:17).<sup>117</sup> If Christians "judged themselves", that is, if they took the precaution of careful self-examination, they would not need to be disciplined by God (11:31-32).

Hence, Paul's final word on the issue is that when the Corinthian church came together for the eucharistic meal, the members should be hospitable with each other, sharing their food (11:33).<sup>118</sup> People who are hungry should eat at home rather than use the eucharistic meal as a time to satisfy their hunger (11:34a). Otherwise, they risked God's discipline. Since Paul intended to visit Corinth in the relatively near future (cf. 4:18-19; 16:2, 5-9), any further instructions about the Lord's supper could wait until then.

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<sup>115</sup> The adverb ἀναξίως (**anaxios** = careless) refers to the way in which the Corinthians observed the supper. The older KJV rendering, "unworthily", created considerable needless anxiety about whether or not a person was worthy of participating. In fact, no person is worthy, since all persons are sinners. Rather, even "unworthy" persons can participate in a worthy manner so long as they recognize by faith the meaning of the meal and live out God's gift of forgiveness by treating their fellow members of Christ's church in an appropriate way.

<sup>116</sup> The Greek text does not have the word "profaning" (RSV) or "sinning against" (NIV); rather, it simply reads, "Guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." As such, those who desecrated the Lord's table as the Corinthians were taking their place with those who crucified the Lord.

<sup>117</sup> None of the earliest witnesses to the text (p46, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus) has the exegetical genitive phrase "of the Lord," though the NIV has included it from later manuscripts. (The NIV stands in the minority, however, in this textual decision, cf. RSV, NEB, NASB, JB, NB, ASV, etc.) Still, as Metzger states, "there appears to be no good reason to account for the omission if the word(s) had been present originally," cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), pp. 562-563. If one follows the reading "body of the Lord", then the meaning is that the communicant has not properly reflected on the death of Christ before eating the meal. If one follows the shorter and earlier reading "the body", then the meaning is that the communicant has not properly recognized the nature and meaning of the church itself. The latter reading seems compelling both in terms of textual criticism and the logic of Paul's argument, cf. Fee, pp. 563-564.

<sup>118</sup> The term ἐκδέχομαι (**ekdechomai**) can mean "to wait for" or "to receive (in the sense of hospitality)". Context decides. If as discussed in connection with 11:21 the situation is reconstructed as some arriving earlier than others, then "to wait for" makes exegetical sense. On the other hand, if the situation is reconstructed as the upper classes refusing to share their food with the poorer classes, then "to receive" makes the best sense, cf. Winter, pp. 151-152.



### **Spiritual Gifts and Elitist Ecstasy (12-14)**

The third of the issues regarding public worship concerned the public exercise of spiritual gifts, which in Corinth had become one more way of exacerbating the divisions in the church. Already, they were divided by partisan loyalties, litigation, an infamous case of incest, varying opinions on marriage and sexual behavior and selfishness in observing the Lord's table. Now, the one-up-man-ship in the expression of the Spirit added to their fragmentation. In their letter to Paul, the Corinthians had asked about the use of spiritual gifts, and the ensuing discussion suggests that some in Corinth were promoting the idea that the surest sign of the presence of the Spirit was speaking with tongues. Paul, in opposing this unwarranted elevation of the gift of tongues, argues that the surest sign of the presence of the Spirit is not speaking in tongues but expressing Christian love.

#### *Curses in Jesus' Name (12:1-3)*

Paul's initial comment concerns the **ΑΝΑΘΕΜΑ ΙΗΣΟΥΣ** (**anathema Iēsous** = curse Jesus). Whether this means "Jesus [be] cursed" or "Jesus [grants] a curse" is unclear,<sup>119</sup> but in either case, Paul seems confident that the saying has its roots in pagan culture. If the former, then Paul is saying that since the Corinthians at one time were influenced by powerful spiritual forces that led them in allegiance to voiceless idols, they must not assume that all subjective impulses are prompted by the Holy Spirit. Earlier, Paul described idolatry as a front for demons (cf. 10:20). So, if anyone were subjectively prompted to announce something so absurd as "Jesus [be] cursed," it was definitely not the prompting of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, if one translates the phrase "Jesus [grants] a curse," Paul is saying that the Corinthian Christians, in their partisanship and enmity, must not use the name of Christ as a curse formula against those whom they oppose. Such curses could never be prompted by the Holy Spirit. Religious curses in pagan Corinth generally involved invoking a deity to grant some evil against a rival in sport, romance, politics, litigation or business. It should not be so among Christians, however. The most basic confession prompted by the Spirit is that "Jesus [is] Lord!"

#### *Diverse Gifts, One Source (12:4-11)*

If there was any tendency among the Corinthians to elevate one gift above others, and thereby to elevate some Christians above others, they must know that all spiritual gifts have a common source (12:4-6). The expressions of the Holy Spirit aim

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<sup>119</sup> Since in the Greek text there is no verb in the statement, translators are left to supply the verb. Most supply the simple "to be" verb, "Jesus [be] a curse" or "Jesus [be] cursed". This form parallels the contrasting statement "Jesus [is] Lord". However, based on various extant Corinthian curses recovered in inscriptions, it is also possible to translate it "Jesus [grants] a curse," cf. Winter, pp. 164-183.

at edifying the whole congregation, not puffing up some individual who is used by God (12:7). Though Paul offers one of his several gift lists (12:8-10),<sup>120</sup> his primary point is that all gifts come from the same Holy Spirit and are given to each Christian as the Spirit determines (12:11). They are not merited, and they do not mark off any Christian as superior to others. With this introduction, Paul presses to the heart of the issue.

*One Body, Many Parts (12:12--13:1)*

The crux of the problem concerning their exercise of spiritual gifts was the Corinthians' motives of competition and one-up-man-ship. This attitude is sharply defined by the hypothetical words that Paul puts into the mouths of some who said to their fellow Christians, "I don't need you" (12:21), and the consequent sense of devaluation felt by those who lamented, "Because I am not a hand or an eye I am not a part of the body" (12:15-16)! This competition and pride had to be stopped!

To combat such spiritual narcissism, Paul begins with the metaphor he earlier introduced in conjunction with the Lord's table, that is, that all Christians belong to the body of Christ (cf. 10:16-17; 11:29). The church is a single organism, just as is the human body, and all the parts are important (12:12). Every member of Christ's body has the basic gift of the Holy Spirit (12:13). Everyone may not have the same spiritual gift, but everyone has the same Holy Spirit, regardless of ethnic background or social standing!<sup>121</sup> There is not some elite group who has been baptized in the Spirit; rather, every Christian has been baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ and has drunk from the same supernatural source.

Nevertheless, the body is diverse because the expressions of the Spirit are diverse (12:14; cf. 12:4-6). No Christian, on the basis of any particular spiritual gift, should view him or herself as superior, and no Christian, due to the absence of any particular spiritual gift, should view him or herself as inferior (12:15-16). No single spiritual gift is universal in the community of Christians, just as no human body is composed of a single part. A huge eye is not a body; a huge ear is not a body (12:17, 19). Every spiritual gift is the gift of God, and he gives these gifts according to his own divine wisdom (12:18). Hence, no one should depreciate the gift of another or even his own gift. The body has many parts, and they all belong (12:20)! The notion that some parts are inferior or dispensable is wrong headed (12:21). Even those bodily parts that seem weaker or less honorable or unpresentable are granted special

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<sup>120</sup> Other gift lists with a different mix of gifts may be found in Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11.

<sup>121</sup> It is precisely here that Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians make a serious mistake in adopting a theology that leaves the church divided between the "haves" and the "have nots." There is not a hint of such a polarization in the New Testament, and if there were, it would have crippled so seriously Paul's argument as to make this passage nonsensical.

dignity (12:22-24). This equalization of the value of all spiritual gifts aims at one primary concern: there should be no competition among Christians over gifts. Rather, all Christians should have equal concern for each other, whether in moments of suffering or times of rejoicing (12:25-26). The whole community of Christians is the body of Christ in the world, and all Christians, whatever their gift, are members with equal status (12:27).

A few gifts are foundational, of course. These include apostles, prophets and teachers.<sup>122</sup> Such ministries, because they express the actual gospel which is the center of Christianity itself, are the only ones that can be properly ranked. The other ministries are not ranked (12:28). Certainly there is no gift that everyone has.<sup>123</sup> It was most important for Christians to seek those gifts that build up the church--the gifts that were "greater."<sup>124</sup> What was appropriate at any given time must be determined by the motivation of love, which is "the most excellent way" (13:1).

### *The Most Excellent Way (13)*

It is not until the beginning of chapter 13 that Paul's particular concern about the exercise of spiritual gifts emerges. With his phrase, "If I speak in...tongues...but have not love," the discussion becomes intensely focused. Two gifts, tongues and prophecy, will dominate the rest of the apostle's instructions, and of them, the gift of tongues is obviously his primary concern. Some of the general language he already has used takes on new meaning in this context. Already, he has stated that the body is made up of many parts, not one. It is probable that some in the Corinthian church urged that all the members should have the gift of tongues--or at least if they did not have this gift they were relegated to the status of second class Christians. Paul wants to diffuse such a notion. Furthermore, he has said that some parts of the body need to be treated with special modesty. Given the controls he will issue for the public use of tongues, it seems likely that Paul considers tongues-speaking to be a bodily part that needs special treatment. Finally, in his gift lists (12:8-10, 28-30), tongues appear last, not so much because this gift is inferior but because this gift is the problem in the Corinthian church.

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<sup>122</sup> The fact that Paul clearly ranks them, "First...second...third", presupposes that they have special status, because they are the foundation upon which the entire community depends.

<sup>123</sup> The series of rhetorical questions in 12:29-30, all of which use the μή construction, are posed so that a negative answer is expected. A good translation capturing this is the NASB's, "All are not apostles, are they?", and etc.

<sup>124</sup> The word μείζων (*maizōn* = greater) probably sets the tone for what will follow in chapters 13-14, that is, that the "greater" gifts must be evaluated, not in terms of sensationalism, but rather in terms of what truly expresses love and edifies the congregation. It is not that some particular gift is more important than the others, but rather, that the gift most needed for building up the congregation in love is greater in its given context. At one time, it might be one gift, and at another time it might be another.

Several larger theological issues have emerged out of Paul's discussion since the rise of Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, because Pentecostals urge that all believers may speak in tongues (and many urge that all believers ought to speak in tongues), they have concluded that what Paul says about tongues in 1 Corinthians must be differentiated from what Luke says about tongues in Acts. The point, of course, is that Paul says all believers do not speak in tongues (12:30). Pentecostals argue that this refers only to the spiritual gift of tongues, not to the phenomena of tongues as a sign of the baptism in the Spirit. Hence, they urge that all believers should seek to speak in tongues as a sign of Spirit-baptism regardless of the fact that Paul clearly says not all believers speak in tongues. Such a conclusion is self-serving and without significant exegetical support. Second, Pentecostal-Charismatics generally assume that the prominence of tongues-speaking in Corinth was typical of all the Christian communities throughout the world. This conclusion is at least debatable, since the topic does not arise in any of Paul's other letters nor in any of the letters by other New Testament writers. Luke describes three occasions in the Book of Acts (2:1-4; 10:46; 19:6) and possibly infers a fourth (8:14-19), but the evidence is too scant to generalize about all the churches. Finally, a considerable discussion has emerged concerning how to define the phenomena of speaking in tongues. Does the biblical description refer exclusively to known human languages (such as at Pentecost, cf. Acts 2:5-11), does it refer to a sort of pseudo-language without a known human equivalent (such as "tongues of angels", cf. 13:1), or could it include both?<sup>125</sup> In the early decades of Pentecostalism, the consistent claim was that tongues-speaking was known human languages. The implications of this question have sharpened with the more recent criticism that, in spite of numerous tape recordings of glossolalia, linguists to date have found none that can be identified as known human languages.<sup>126</sup> Nay-sayers contend that biblical tongues-speaking was always a known human language, while modern tongues-speaking is bogus.<sup>127</sup> Supporters argue that "tongues of angels" would not approximate a human language

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<sup>125</sup> Among the Jews, the *merkavah* sect claimed transcendental experiences in which they believed they were caught up into the fiery chariot of Elijah and associated with angels and sang with them, cf. Ferguson, p. 432; P. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," *The Old Testament Pseudepigraph*, ed., J. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), I.223ff. Paul may have derived the idea of "angels' tongues" from this sect.

<sup>126</sup> Linguists who analyze tongues-speaking say that it is not a real human language, since it reveals no grammar or syntax, no means for distinguishing verblike actions from nounlike entities, and no ability to specify singular versus plural agents and objects. Instead, while modern tongues-speaking seems to bear phonological characteristics of ordinary language, it lacks the structure, intricacy and nuance of ordinary language, cf. G. Wacker, *Heaven Below* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2001), pp. 51-57.

<sup>127</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., for instance, a well-known radio preacher, suggests that modern tongues-speaking is simply a learned behavior, psychologically induced and possibly Satanically inspired, cf. *The Charismatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 159-162, 174-179.

in any case.

Whatever the modern debate, Paul, at least, had no reservations about the legitimacy of tongues-speaking as a genuine spiritual gift. He practiced it himself (cf. 14:18). Nevertheless, he urged that all gifts must function out of the underlying motivation of love. Tongues without love is only noise (13:1). The exercise of any gift, apart from love, is empty (13:2-3). The love of which Paul speaks, by definition, always seeks the good of others (13:4-7). Gifts, in themselves, might fail--and in the larger scheme of things--gifts will cease to have any relevance after the return of the Lord (13:8-10, 12).<sup>128</sup> Love, on the other hand, never fails! To insist on tongues-speaking outside the framework of love was childish (13:11). The spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge would pass away, but the abiding graces of Christianity that always endure are faith, hope and love--and love is the greatest of all (13:13)! Hence, Paul urges the Corinthians to follow the way of love (14:1a).

#### *Tongues and Prophecy (14)*

Paul's direct comments about tongues and prophecy derive from his premise that all gifts are "for the common good" (12:7), that it is God, not humans, who decides what gifts are given (12:6, 18), and that altruistic love must be the motivation and context for the exercise of gifts (13). Hence, the value of tongues and prophecy must be assessed to the extent that they edify the congregation. Paul will assume throughout that edification of the congregation is impossible without congregational comprehension.

First, he distinguishes between the gifts of tongues-speaking and prophecy. Tongues-speaking is addressed to God (14:2); prophecy is addressed to other Christians for their edification (14:3).<sup>129</sup> Tongues-speaking is a form of self-edification--a type of personal thanksgiving toward God (cf. 14:16). Prophecy, as a message of comfort, encouragement and strength (cf. Ac. 15:32), edifies the whole congregation (14:4). The point, of course, is that prophecy is understandable to the whole congregation, while tongues-speaking is not. Prophecy takes precedence over tongues-speaking unless the tongues-speaking can be interpreted (14:5).<sup>130</sup> Tongues-

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<sup>128</sup> The dispensational contention that tongues "ceased" with the canon of the New Testament must be rejected as tendentious. With terms like "perfection" and "face to face", Paul clearly has in mind the end of the age when Christ shall return, not the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century when the last of the New Testament documents were composed.

<sup>129</sup> The Pentecostal-Charismatic vocabulary of a "message in tongues", that is, a message in other tongues from God to the church, is entirely absent in the New Testament. This is precisely what Paul says tongues-speaking is not.

<sup>130</sup> Carson is quite correct to point out that when Paul says, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues," he simply is saying that this gift is good and he wants his converts to enjoy as many good things as possible. However, already he has made clear that not all Christians speak in tongues (cf. 12:30). His desire that all speak in tongues is akin to his desire that all Christians were celibate (cf. 7:7), but of course, not all Christians remain unmarried. Paul is hardly offering a considered theological stance that in the ideal church everyone would be a tongues-speaker any more than that everyone would be celibate, cf. D. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1*

speaking has no congregational value in and of itself, but only consists of unintelligible sounds (14:6-12). Edification requires understandable content, which tongues does not offer. Consequently, any tongues-speaking in a congregational setting should be accompanied by interpretation (14:13-14). Even then, the role of tongues-speaking is different than prophecy, for tongues-speaking is a form of thanks to God, not a congregational call to action. The appropriate response to someone else's praise is "Amen," but one cannot even offer the "Amen" if what is being said is unintelligible (14:15-17). Paul concedes that he frequently speaks in tongues, but he does not do so in a congregational setting (14:18-19). To value tongues-speaking for its own sake is to operate on the level of children (14:20).

Next, Paul appeals to the Torah and Prophets. Strange languages were a sign of judgment upon the Israelites. As a result of their broken covenant, the Deuteronomic curse was that Israel would be invaded by foreigners who spoke other tongues (Dt. 28:49). Isaiah, anticipating the Assyrian invasions, declared that this curse certainly would come to pass (Is. 28:7-11). The Israelites would succumb. Even though God had promised them the land of Canaan as a place of rest, they would be injured, snared and captured by foreign invaders as a divine discipline for their covenant disobedience (Is. 28:12-13). Hence, tongues-speaking, in itself, was not necessarily a sign of blessing. In the case of ancient Israel, it served as an indication of God's displeasure, a negative sign pointing to the unbelieving hearts of the people (14:21-22a). Prophecy, by contrast, is for believers who can hear, understand and accept the prophetic message (14:22b). Paul does not intend to say that tongues-speaking always is a sign of divine displeasure. Rather, he wants to point out that tongues-speaking should not automatically be taken as a sign of God's approval. If unbelievers attend a Christian service, tongues-speaking will not encourage them to confess their sins but will prompt them to dismiss Christians as insane (14:23). Only a clearly worded and understandable message would serve to bring an unbeliever to repentance and the knowledge that God was truly at work among Christians (14:24-25).

In the end, then, all spiritual gifts must function publicly for the building up of the church (14:26). What is not understandable cannot be edifying. Hence, tongues-speaking should be exercised in public only if there is an interpretation (14:27-28). Otherwise, it should be reserved for private devotional time.

Prophetic messages, similarly, must proceed in sequence, not simultaneously, and the listeners must assess what has been said (14:29-31). Paul does not allow more than one person speaking at a time, since such a practice leads to confusion and disorder (14:32-33). No spiritual gift is compelling to the point that the person

exercising it is seized beyond self-control. The basic principle of not having more than one person speak at a time is extended to wives, who apparently were interrupting the service to inquire of their husbands (14:34-36).<sup>131</sup> Certainly there is no reason to suppose that Paul is countermanding what he said earlier, that is, that women may pray or prophesy publicly (cf. 11:5ff.). Rather, this command for wives is part of a triple series in which silence is enjoined: tongues-speakers are to be silent if there is no interpreter (14:28). Prophecies are to be suspended if necessary to ensure that no more than one person is speaking at a given time (14:30-32). Wives are not to interrupt the service to call out to their husbands (14:34-35).<sup>132</sup> As with both tongues-speakers and prophets, these women are to be in submission,<sup>133</sup> presumably to the whole church.<sup>134</sup> It was disgraceful for wives to behave in this way publicly, especially in light of Paul's earlier concern about public decorum (cf. 11:3ff.).

As a final word, Paul concludes that any genuine prophet would concur with his instructions (14:37-38). Prophecy in public meetings is preferred because of its intelligibility, though Paul will not forbid tongues-speaking, even though he applies careful rulings for its exercise (14:39). His highest concern is that Christian worship be conducted in an appropriate and orderly manner (14:40).

Given Paul's teaching and the modern polarization between Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians on the one hand and non-Pentecostal, non-Charismatic Christians on the other, it would seem that speaking in tongues is not nearly as prominent as the one side urges nor as deviant as the other side sometimes makes out. It is one gift among many which has value for the individual, and within the limitations imposed by Paul, value for the whole congregation. Somewhere between the side that urges every Christian to speak in tongues and the other side that suggests the phenomenon came to a screeching halt in about AD 100 lies Paul's advice: seek eagerly the best gifts, especially prophecy, and do not forbid tongues-speaking.

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<sup>131</sup> As in 1 Corinthians 11:2ff., the word *γυνή* (*gynē* = woman, wife) probably should be rendered "wives" rather than "women." This is to assume, of course, that the verses are authentic, though their authenticity has been debated because of dislocations of these verses in many early manuscripts, and the case against their authenticity is substantial, cf. Fee, pp. 699ff.

<sup>132</sup> This interpretation makes more sense than the use of this passage to restrict women from pulpit activities or ordination. The prohibition is absolute, whereas the restriction of women's roles to something lesser than pastoral ministry is merely relative and does not suit Paul's language at all.

<sup>133</sup> The addendum "as the Law says" is difficult to place, since there is no passage that clearly states such a rule in this way. It may be that Paul is making a general reference to the law with its combined testimony that no one person can become a law to themselves. This certainly is demonstrated by a whole series of rebellious incidents in the ancient community (cf. Nu. 11:1ff., 12:1ff., 14:1ff., 15:32ff., 16:1ff., etc.).

<sup>134</sup> It is not immediately clear whether Paul has in mind submission to their husbands or submission to the whole church. What he says in 14:36, however, tilts the balance in favor of the latter.

## About the Resurrection of the Dead (15)

The careful reader will notice that Paul does not begin his discussion of resurrection with the *περὶ δὲ* (= Now about...). Perhaps this next subject was not in the list of questions posed by the Corinthians, but came from some other source, likely one of the Corinthian visitors he received in Ephesus. In any case he was aware that some church members were denying the resurrection (15:12b).

Resurrection always was a challenge for those thoroughly imbued with the Greek metaphysical world view. While they may have believed in the immortality of the soul, Hellenists had no notion of resurrection, since it was assumed that in the afterlife only the soul survived death. The Greeks may have believed in the elevation of some humans after death to live among the gods, but certainly there was no concept of the mass of humans rising from the dead. Even among those who accepted the transmigration of souls, the soul entered a new body about to be born. The dead body had no continuing significance.<sup>135</sup> Epicureans, who embraced the atomic theory of Democritus, believed that both soul and body would dissolve at death into the atoms that composed them, and therefore, there was no afterlife at all to dread or hope for.<sup>136</sup> Later, a particular form of dualism, called Gnosticism, advocated that the body was in itself evil due to its materiality, and only the spirit was good. The body would decay, but the spirit would live on. Whether or not an incipient form of Gnostic thought existed as early as the mid-50s AD is debated, but certainly within the Gentile world, the resurrection of the body was not taught. When Paul broached the subject at Athens, the cultured despisers merely sneered (Ac. 17:32a).

Given the Corinthians' penchant for relying on the cultural wisdom of the Greco-Roman world, their reluctance to accept the resurrection of the dead is plausible. It was not that they denied the resurrection of Jesus, but that the resurrection of all the decayed bodies in the world seemed absurd. Paul, by contrast, was a Pharisee, a sect of Judaism that long had embraced whole-heartedly the idea of resurrection (cf. Ac. 23:6-8). More to the point, the doctrine of the resurrection was at the very core of Christian belief, first the resurrection of Jesus on Easter, and finally, at the end of the age, the resurrection of the whole human race (cf. Jn. 5:28-29). In setting forth this central Christian teaching, Paul appeals to apostolic tradition, both "received" and "passed on" (15:1-3). This Christian "good news" was the foundation of salvation itself, provided that it was firmly believed and continually upheld.<sup>137</sup> Here

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<sup>135</sup> H. Kee, F. Young and K. Froehlich, *Understanding the New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 199-200.

<sup>136</sup> F. Beare, *IDB* (1962) II.122-123.

<sup>137</sup> Whether or not Paul envisioned as a realistic possibility that a believing Christian could give up the faith is debated. Calvinists say that this statement is hypothetical only, and Arminians that it was a real threat. It can at least be said that Paul had no doubts about the genuineness of the Corinthians' faith, since the clause is a first class



Paul uses the language of progressive salvation, that is, "By this gospel you are being saved..."<sup>138</sup> There is a sense in which the gospel is past ("preached" and "received"), and there is yet another sense in which the gospel is continually appropriated into life ("you are being saved"). This salvation was inextricably linked to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead--what Paul regards as of "first importance" among the Christian traditions (15:3).

Many scholars regard 15:3b-5 as an early form of a Christian creed, and it may well be so.<sup>139</sup> Certainly it is creedal in character, set out in the form of synthetic parallelism as four major points: died, buried, raised and appeared.

*Christ died for our sins,<sup>140</sup> according to the Scriptures;  
He was buried;  
He was raised on the third day,<sup>141</sup> according to the Scriptures;<sup>142</sup>  
He appeared to Kephias, then to the Twelve.*

This core statement of belief was the message of the twelve apostles as well as of Paul, for as he said: Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed (15:11). Beyond the basic Christian confession, Paul also adds corroborating witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus, including some 500 on one occasion, James (presumably the half-brother of the Lord), the whole group of the apostles (including Thomas, probably assuming the presence of Matthias, and possibly other Christian missionaries other than the Twelve), and Paul himself (15:6-8a).<sup>143</sup> That Paul includes himself in this privileged number is remarkable, not only

condition (i.e., the protasis appears in the present indicative as opposed to second class conditions where the protasis is always in the past tense). Hence, the word "if" carries the nuance of "since."

<sup>138</sup> σὺν ἡμῶν (sōzesthe), present, indicative, passive

<sup>139</sup> It may even be that this section is a translation into Greek from an earlier Aramaic original, a possibility based upon several internal semitisms, the Aramaic name Kephias, and the Hebraic poetic form of synthetic parallelism, cf. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. N. Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), pp. 101-103.

<sup>140</sup> Given the whole tenor of the Old Testament's sacrificial system, it is hard to believe that Paul had anything other in mind but that Jesus' death was a form of substitutionary atonement.

<sup>141</sup> Though there is debate as to the actual date of the crucifixion, Friday remains the most tenable solution, largely because of this phrase "on the third day". Such a phrase could never mean "on the fourth day", so the expression "three days and three nights" (Mt. 12:40) must be interpreted idiomatically, cf. H. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 65-74.

<sup>142</sup> The double presence of this phrase "according to the Scriptures" probably goes back to Jesus' own interpretation of his death and resurrection (cf. Lk. 24:25-27).

<sup>143</sup> The continued use of the number Twelve for the apostles presumes the inclusion of Matthias after the suicide of Judas Iscariot (cf. Ac. 1:15-26). At the same time, it excludes Paul who, though he is an apostle-missionary, is never numbered with "the Twelve."

for the fact that he considers his experience on the Damascus Road (Act. 9:3-5; cf. 1 Co. 9:1) to be on a par with the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus before his ascension, but also, that he considers this appearance to be the last in the series. Paul apparently knows of no other appearances, nor does he expect any others.<sup>144</sup> Even his own experience was abnormal, since it fell outside the sequence of post-resurrection appearances, all others of which occurred prior to the ascension of the Lord (15:8a). Paul's call to apostleship was clearly an act of divine grace, since he had served as the arch inquisitor of the church (15:9-10; cf. Ac. 7:57-58; 8:1; 9:1-2; Ga. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:6; 1 Ti. 1:13-14).

With the apostolic testimony of Christ's resurrection firmly in place, Paul now proceeds to demonstrate the incompatibility of trying to confess at one and the same time that Jesus arose but that believers will not be resurrected (15:12). His argument explores two hypothetical lines, first the implications if Christ HAS NOT been raised, and second, the implications if Christ HAS been raised. If the entire category of resurrection is denied, then it applies to Christ, not merely to others, and the whole evangelistic endeavor became pointless (15:13-19). Faith, proclamation, the message of Christ's resurrection, the remission of sins and hope for the future were all linked. One could not reject one without rejecting all the others. To reject the resurrection of Christ meant to reject everything else. Of course, the resurrection of Christ was not what the Corinthians had rejected, but rather, a general resurrection of the dead, but Paul wants to make clear that the whole complex of Christian beliefs is seamless. They hang together or not at all.

On the other hand, if Christ HAS been raised, something the Corinthians had accepted as true from the beginning, then he serves as the forerunner of all Christians who die (15:20). The resurrection of Christ set in motion a new reality, since it reversed the curse of death begun in Adam's judgment (15:21-22; cf. Ge. 2:17; 3:19, 22-24). This reversal follows a certain order, first Christ, then those who belong to him (15:23). The image of Christ as firstfruits (15:20, 23) has its precedent in the Passover week, when the firstfruits of the barley harvest were waved before Yahweh as a celebration and thanksgiving for the coming bounty (cf. Lv. 23:9-14). Christ's resurrection is a sign of his full authority over death, which will be consummated at the end after all the enemies of God have been put down and Christ's kingdom, preserved intact, has been offered up to God (15:24-25). The final enemy to be destroyed is death itself (15:26). Just as the Psalms promise (Ps. 8:6; 110:1), the Father has put everything under his Son's authority, and insofar as believers are in Christ, everything under their authority as well!<sup>145</sup> (Hence, as Paul says earlier,

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<sup>144</sup> To be sure, Paul had other visionary experiences of Jesus (cf. Ac. 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 2 Co. 12:1-6), but he seems to imply that the Damascus Road experience was a distinctly different category.

<sup>145</sup> Psalm 8:6 speaks of human dominion over the world, recalling the dominion ordinance in Genesis 1:26-28. Paul,

believers will even judge angels, cf. 6:2-3). The Father's action of putting "everything" under his Son's feet, of course, does not mean that the Father himself is under the Son's feet (15:27). Rather, the voluntary subordination of the Son to the Father is always maintained, even in the age to come, though the final clause, "...that God may be all in all," suggests that the Father and Son are really one in this activity.<sup>146</sup> So, in the end, Paul argues for a chain of events set in motion by Christ's resurrection:

1. *Christ rose on Easter, the first-fruits of all who die*
2. *He presently reigns until all his enemies are subdued*
3. *Those who belong to Christ also will be resurrected, and death will be destroyed*
4. *The Son will hand over the kingdom intact to the heavenly Father*
5. *The Son will continue his functional submission to the Father so that through their unity God is all in all*

To deny the resurrection at the end would be to surrender the whole sequence and make the Christian message void of meaning.

Now Paul presses the practical side of the issue in a series of rhetorical points. His questions have as their background the general Greco-Roman assumption that bodily appetites were to be indulged.

*What will those do who are baptized for the dead?*

*Why do we endanger ourselves every hour?*

*If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what have I gained?*

*If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'*

*Bad company corrupts good character!*

*Sober up!*

At first glance, this rhetorical language seems unconnected. However, there is an underlying theme based on Corinthian conventional wisdom that bodily appetites were temporal, and therefore, unrelated to immortality.<sup>147</sup>

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however, applies this passage directly to Christ as the new Adam. The first Adam failed in his commission, but the new Adam, who is Christ, is completely faithful. As such, Christ becomes the true prototype human, replacing the ancient Adam who sinned. As such, Paul is entirely within the boundaries of appropriate Christology to use such a passage with reference to Christ.

<sup>146</sup> O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. S. Guthrie and C. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), p. 293.

<sup>147</sup> Winter, pp. 96-105.

The practice of baptism for the dead has long puzzled interpreters (15:29).<sup>148</sup> Proxy baptism has never had any standing in the Christian church,<sup>149</sup> and Paul offers no comment either positive or negative about the practice. It is barely possible that Paul's words might mean that normal Christian baptism is conducted in the hopes that the candidate would be reunited with deceased love ones in the afterlife, and if so, then it would not be a proxy baptism after all.<sup>150</sup> Yet another suggestion is that "the dead ones" refers to the future certainty of death itself for Paul's readers, that is, that the Corinthians themselves would someday be "dead ones." Here again, no proxy baptism is envisioned.<sup>151</sup> Still, the more natural intent of Paul's words seem to suggest a form of proxy baptism. The meaning of his statement is still unresolved, though the main thrust of his argument is clear enough. If the Corinthians denied the resurrection in preference for the Greco-Roman belief in the immortality of the soul, why was baptism practiced in behalf of the dead? Such baptisms would be logically inconsistent.

Paul's other rhetorical statements are less obscure. If there is no resurrection, why would Paul put himself in jeopardy by his continual conflict with Greco-Roman religious and political authorities, not to mention danger from his own Jewish constituency (15:30; cf. Ac. 19:23-41). Every day his life was in danger (15:31; cf. 2 Co. 1:8-11)! Would it not be better to avoid such dangers so as to live as long as possible? What did he gain by struggling with the "wild beasts at Ephesus" (15:32), here not so much a reference to the arena,<sup>152</sup> but a metaphor for conflict (possibly the internal struggle against sin).<sup>153</sup> Would not he simply capitulate to the popular aphorism of the day, "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die?"

The Corinthians must not be deceived into thinking that their bodily behavior had no consequences, precisely because the resurrection of the body was a real hope (15:33)! In citing Menander's *Thais*, Paul probably is alluding to the Corinthian cultural standard that it was their "right" to attend the banquets with the promiscuous after-dinners. The "bad company" in *Thais* refers to prostitutes.<sup>154</sup> Hence, he

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<sup>148</sup> In the first place, the term νεκροί (**nekroi** = the dead ones) is a plural, so it cannot refer obliquely to the death of Jesus.

<sup>149</sup> Mormons, of course, practice proxy baptism based on this verse. In the early church, only heretical sects, such as, the Marcionites and some gnostics, practiced proxy baptism, cf. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians*, p. 148; Chrysostom, *Homily XL [I Corinthians]*, 1.

<sup>150</sup> Bruce, p. 149.

<sup>151</sup> Winter, p. 104.

<sup>152</sup> Roman citizens were exempt from sentences of animal baiting in the arena.

<sup>153</sup> There is ample precedent in Greco-Roman literature for using the metaphor of "wild beasts" to describe the struggle against human passion and pleasures of the flesh, cf. Winter, p. 102.

<sup>154</sup> Winter, pp. 98-99. Menander's *Thais* was an iambic trimeter comedy. Whether Paul actually had read it or simply

concludes this section with the imperative, "Sober up! Stop sinning!" Both the promiscuity so common in Corinth and the secular pleasures of gorging oneself at the banquets were sins against a physical body that one day would be resurrected to live forever (cf. 6:18)! In such behaviors, the Corinthians, who claimed so much "in the Spirit," were actually ignorant of God (15:34).

The final section of Paul's comments on resurrection concern the actual nature of the event. Given the Greco-Roman commitment to the immortality of the soul and the temporal decay of the body, Paul poses the question as it would be broached by the secular Greco-Roman citizen: "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" The whole idea of a resurrected body seemed absurd by conventional wisdom, since such wisdom envisioned nothing more than resuscitation. Since everyone knew bodies decayed, was not the notion of reanimation nonsense (15:35)?

Paul, however, was not put off by such objections. In the first place, resurrection is not merely resuscitation, but a kind of rebirth. Using the analogy of seeds, Paul argues that resurrection is bodily, but it also has both continuity and discontinuity with the former life, just as God gives planted seeds a new "body" in germination (15:36-38).<sup>155</sup> Humans, animals and fish do not all have the same physical form. Similarly, terrestrial bodies do not have the same form as celestial bodies like the sun, moon and stars (15:39-41). The idea that in resurrection God is limited to a single bodily form is itself a foolish notion, which is why Paul begins his response with the sharp rebuke, "You ignoramus" (15:36a)!

This analogy holds true for resurrection life. There will be a bodily resurrection, but the resurrected body is not precisely the same as the body in which one dies. For one thing, the resurrected body is not temporal but enduring (15:42). The body in which one dies is marked by an absence of glory, by temporal weakness and by all the limitations of natural life (15:43-44). By contrast, the resurrection body displays glory, power and the spiritual quality of the supernatural. In short, resurrection will be transformation, not merely resuscitation. Paul deliberately falls short of describing the composition or matter of the resurrected body, but he certainly emphasizes the superior characteristics of this new life. His contrast between "soul-body" (the earthly body in which one dies) and "spirit-body" (the body in which one is resurrected) clearly demarcates between the present age and the age to come. Paul's terms *σῶμα ψυχικόν* (*sōma psychikon* = soul-body) and *σῶμα πνευματικόν*

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was quoting it as a popular aphorism is not certain, but he may well have known the context of that quotation and its suitability to the Corinthian situation.

<sup>155</sup> Here Paul disagrees not only with Greco-Roman convention but also some strands of Jewish thought, which held that the resurrection body would be identical to the earthly, mortal body, cf. 2 Maccabees. 14:46; 2 Baruch 50:2.

(*sōma pneumatikon* = spirit-body) contrasts the body of the first Adam, who was made a "living soul" (Ge. 2:7), and the body of the second Adam, who as the living Christ was resurrected with new and eternal life especially appropriate for the age to come (15:45). These two Adams are the heads of two families, the family of the human race on the earth and the family of Christian believers destined for the heavens. One is made from dust, while the other bears the likeness of the risen Christ (15:46-49).<sup>156</sup> So, what Paul said earlier, is quite true: In Adam all die; in Christ all will be made alive (cf. 15:21-22).

Pressing to a conclusion, Paul urges that transformation through resurrection is not simply incidental but necessary, since mortal life cannot subsist in the redeemed order of the age to come (15:50). In fact, since some believers still will be living on the earth when Christ returns, they, too, must be transformed in order to subsist in the new order, even though they will not die naturally (15:51).<sup>157</sup> This mystery--this truth hidden in God's wisdom but now revealed through Paul--is that the transformation of the living will occur in a split moment at the end of time (15:52). Paul refers to this as "the last trumpet" heralding the resurrection and transformation of deceased believers (cf. 1 Th. 4:16). His language "the last trumpet" may be stock apocalyptic language in which a great trumpet symbolizes the close of an eschatological era (cf. Is. 27:13; Zec. 9:14; Mt. 24:31).<sup>158</sup> At this eschatological moment, all believers will be transformed, whether living or dead. The old order of existence that is perishable and mortal will cease; a new order of existence that is imperishable and immortal will begin so that, as the poet John Donne reflected, "Death, thou shalt die" (15:53-54).<sup>159</sup> Paul quotes from Isaiah's Song of the Redeemed as the prophetic announcement of victory. Death, the shroud that comes to all people everywhere, will be lifted and destroyed forever (Is. 25:7-8a). God's people will be redeemed from death, and the

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<sup>156</sup> G. Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 117-118.

<sup>157</sup> There is remarkable diversity in the earliest manuscripts at this point:

*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed* (Vaticanus, 4<sup>th</sup> century)

*We shall all sleep, but we shall not all be changed* (Sinaiticus, 4<sup>th</sup> century)

*We shall not all sleep, and we shall not all be changed* (Chester Beatty Papyri, 3<sup>rd</sup> century)

*We shall all sleep, and we shall all be changed* (Alexandrinus, 5<sup>th</sup> century)

*We shall all be raised, but we shall not all be changed* (Bezae Cantabrigiensis, 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century)

The first reading best explains all the variants, cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: United Bible Society, 1975), p. 569, and virtually all English translations follow it.

<sup>158</sup> It seems unlikely that Paul could be referring to the seventh in the series of trumpets in John's Apocalypse (11:15), as held by some mid-tribulation theorists, without introducing a severe anachronism.

<sup>159</sup> Holy sonnet (X), A. Clements, ed. *John Donne's Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), pp. 84-85.

rhetorical questions from Hosea defy death to do its worst (15:55; cf. Ho. 13:14)!<sup>160</sup> The power of death depended upon the entrance of sin into the world. God had declared to the first Adam, "If you eat...you will certainly die!" The Torah played an additional role in that it defined sin and pronounced punishment (15:56; cf. Ro. 5:13; 7:7-13). Through Christ Jesus, however, both the sentence of death and the condemnation of sin were satisfied so that true victory was possible (15:57; cf. Ro. 8:2)! On this truth, the Corinthians could be firm, working together as fellow Christians with their goal and reward always in view (15:58).

### **About the Collection (16:1-4)**

Only two questions remain of the list sent to Paul by the Corinthians, and both of them required relatively short answers, which Paul offered at the end of the letter amidst his travel plans and greetings. The first concerned a charitable project Paul originated in behalf of the Jerusalem church. Some years earlier, Paul had visited Jerusalem from Antioch as member of a relief delegation responding to a severe famine (Ac. 11:27-30). Subsequently, when Paul and the Jerusalem leaders reached an agreement about their respective spheres of evangelism and influence (Paul to the Gentiles; James, Peter and John to the Jews), the one request of the Jerusalem elders was that Paul continue to "remember the poor", something Paul was eager to do (cf. Ga. 2:9-10). Consequently, as the famine bit hard on the Christians in Palestine, Paul began to collect funds from the Gentile Christians for relief of the distress among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, an act he believed was actually "owed" the Jewish Christians because of their spiritual heritage (cf. Ro. 15:25-27). Later, Paul would urge the Corinthians to complete their pledge to this same work (2 Co. 8-9).

Whether Paul already had briefly introduced the relief mission to the Corinthians or whether they heard of it from others, Paul now instructs them to set aside weekly contributions to the fund (16:1-2).<sup>161</sup> All the collections would have been made before Paul's next visit, and he would provide introductory letters to an approved delegation to Jerusalem, even accompanying them himself if this seemed warranted (16:3-4).

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<sup>160</sup> Both the passages in Isaiah and Hosea appear in a context about the surviving remnant of Israel, redeemed from exile and reestablished in the land. However, Paul sees in these passages a *sensus plenior*, in which a "fuller sense" than the historical survival of the Jews is envisioned.

<sup>161</sup> Two things are apparent here: first, the Corinthians Christians enjoyed the privilege of meeting once each week, a relatively rare permission in the Roman Empire. This concession was due to Gallio's ruling that the Christians, in Rome's view, were perceived to be connected to Judaism (cf. Ac. 18:14-16). While other groups were restricted to meeting no more than once per month, the Jews were given a concession for sabbatical meetings. The Christians were able to take advantage of this permission for themselves, cf. Winter, pp. 134-135. Second, the Christians did not meet on Saturday, but on Sunday, the day of the Lord's resurrection (cf. Ac. 20:7; Rv. 1:10).

## Travel Plans and Additional Instructions (16:5-18)

Paul now sets forth his travel plans. He hoped to return to Macedonia, after which he would come southward to Corinth, possibly even staying the winter (16:5-7).<sup>162</sup> His artful suggestion that the Corinthians might "help" him on his journey almost certainly refers to food, money or traveling companions.<sup>163</sup> In the meantime, he intended to stay at Ephesus until Pentecost (the Jewish Feast of Weeks usually fell in late May), since there was an open door for evangelism, in spite of opposition (16:8-9). As it turned out, Paul was forced to change his plans (cf. 2 Co. 1:15ff.), but in any case, he does not offer an itinerary set in stone, but rather in terms of "if the Lord permits." Timothy intended to come,<sup>164</sup> so they should show proper respect to this Pauline representative (16:10-11).

Paul's final *περὶ δὲ* (= now about) concerned Apollos. Presumably, the Corinthians requested Apollos' return, and Paul urged him to do so, though Apollos himself was not willing to return to Corinth at the present (16:12). Perhaps he felt it would not be to the health of the church,<sup>165</sup> given the polarization over personalities.

Paul urged the church members to guard themselves, to be stable in their faith, to show courage and strength, and to behave themselves in Christian love (16:13-14). Among them were the respected household of Stephanas, whose members had set their resources for the service of the other Christians. Presumably, Stephanas was a Corinthian citizen of some means, and the decision by his entire household to give themselves to the service of others, especially during a grain famine, would have been worthy of special mention (16:15-16). It is an irony of Christianity that the members of the community should voluntarily submit themselves<sup>166</sup> to such servants, especially those who work and labor at servanthood! How different from mainstream Corinthian culture, where submission was to superiors, not servants, and where the elite were marked by the fact that they did not have to work! This same Stephanas, along with two others,<sup>167</sup> were the Corinthian members who visited Paul in Ephesus. It is likely that they were the ones who brought with them the letter from the Corinthians that posed the various questions Paul answered. In addition to their

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<sup>162</sup> September 14 to November 11 was considered the dangerous season for travel in the Mediterranean. After November 11, sea travel ceased altogether for the balance of the winter, cf. Vegetius, *De re militari*, iv.39 as cited in Bruce, *Paul*, p. 370.

<sup>163</sup> Fee, p. 819.

<sup>164</sup> The "if" should have the nuance of "since". Paul already has said that he dispatched Timothy (cf. 4:17), so any question is not about whether he would come but when he would arrive.

<sup>165</sup> The Greek text is ambiguous in the phrase οὐκ ἦν θέλημα (ouk ēn thelēma = it was not [?] will). Whether it was not Apollos' will or it was not God's will is unclear.

<sup>166</sup> The verb ὑποτασσησθε (hypotassēsthe = to be submitted) is a middle voice subjunctive

<sup>167</sup> Fortunatus had the intriguing name "Lucky" (the meaning of his name in Latin).



spiritual encouragement, they brought financial aid to Paul (16:17-18).

### **Final Words (16:19-24)**

For final greetings, Paul sends salutations from the believers in Ephesus and Asia, especially naming his close friends Aquila and Priscilla, who once lived in Corinth and once risked their lives for Paul (cf. Ac. 18:2; Ro. 16:4). Now they were leaders of a house church in Ephesus (16:19). The holy kiss Paul mentions soon became part of the regular liturgy of the church (cf. Ro. 16:16; 1 Th. 5:26).<sup>168</sup> At the close, Paul took pen in hand to add the final words in his own handwriting, the sign of authenticity in all his letters (cf. 2 Th. 3:17). Presumably, then, 1 Corinthians was dictated through an amanuensis. A curse, anathema, rested on those who did not love Christ, while the constant prayer of Christians was the Aramaic maranatha (= O Lord, come!). The final definitive Christian words are "grace" and "love."

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<sup>168</sup> By the time of Justin Martyr (d. 140), the kiss had become a regular part of the Eucharistic service, just after prayers and just before the serving of the bread and wine, cf. *First Apology*, lxv.2.