

# Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

A Commentary

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## Preface

### Overview of the Commentary

Each section of this commentary will open with an introduction titled *Context and Message*. This piece will initially retain the comments under discussion within Paul's discussion of the Corinthian issue and briefly describe the flow of thought Paul develops in this section.

I will be using the *Revised Standard Version* as the basic translation in the commentary with reference to other major translations such as the *English Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, as necessary.

As a basic Greek text, I will be using the Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, 27<sup>th</sup> edition, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993.

The Bibliography will list the various Greek-English Lections, Bible Encyclopedias, and Dictionaries I will reference.

As to the study outline, we will follow the structure below delineating the many issues Paul addressed.

### Dedication

I am dedicating this study to the many churches that find themselves caught up in the daily pressure of an increasingly worldly secular culture that although it rejects the nomenclature "pagan" is nevertheless moving away from a theocentric worldview to a radical secular mindset. This movement is not new and has been present for many years.

When in 1963 John A. T. Robinson published his *Honest to God* and *But that I Can't Believe*, and Harvey Cox in 1965 published *The Secular City*, the impact of these minor secularizing shock waves was felt mostly on the campuses of seminaries and universities and only marginally in the life of the local churches. This movement in 1963 was not prominent enough to shake the foundations of a Christian worldview.

I recall one of my professors in the graduate seminary of University of Natal, an Anglican Priest, claiming that John A. T. Robinson was the "theologian of the people of the street"! I challenged him with the statement that the people on the street had never even heard of Robinson, but everyone knew who Billy Graham was!

How times have changed! No-one today cares about John A. T. Robinson or Harvey Cox, but everyone in the USA knows about the Supreme Court and Roe versus Wade, and you can get into an argument with little effort on the discussion of abortion and same sex marriage! Current socio-sexual mores are the deciding factor in most current social issues, and increasingly in church issues.

On a world-wide front of political theory, secular educational principles, and common cultural sexual mores, the foundation of the traditional Christian framework of society is being challenged. Churches concerned with the decline of religious interest and church attendance are exploring a "secular modernization" of church doctrine and worship liturgy. Calls for being "in touch" with the secular and sexual trends in society are being heard across a broad church and denominational front.

As I write this study, Americans are being barraged with fervent calls for political protest for, or against, same sex marriage and the right for abortion, and even the USA Congress and Senate are debating changes in the traditional marriage laws in the USA.

Christians and churches are being encouraged to rethink the so called “out of step with modern sexuality” mindset that has been the standard for sexuality for generations.

However, personal, church cultural, and religious challenges today are little different from those faced by Christians living in first century CE Roman pagan Corinth.

So, we dedicate this study to an examination of the substantial challenges of a secular culture to a theocentric Christocentric framework of faith as seen in the first century Corinthian world and Paul’s apostolic response.

### **The focus or intended readership of this commentary**

This study might at first appear to be an exegetical commentary on Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians, ca. the first century, CE. The focus may appear to be a discussion of words, grammar, text, doctrine, and theological concepts. That is what commentaries usually are! In many ways that is what this commentary is! However, I would like to shift the focus from an exegetical and theological discussion of texts to a discussion of people, the Christians living in Corinth in the early days of the church in Achaia, Greece, and the challenges they faced.

What was happening among the Corinthian Christians is so relevant to what is happening in our day in many churches. So, I want to focus on people struggling with life’s problems as we engage Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians.

I am writing this commentary for the serious bible student, elders, missionaries, ministers, and Bible class teachers. Since it discusses two or three issues of considerable interest to contemporary Churches of Christ, I have included a bibliography that discusses in some detail issues such as the role of women in the church, divorce, and remarriage, and acapella singing in the worship service.

### **The Church of Christ, yesterday, today, and tomorrow**

In relation to doctrinal interests for Churches of Christ today we find some parallel discussions about being a Church of Christ in Corinth that parallel Churches of Christ today!

You will already have gathered that I am a member of a church that is commonly known as The Church of Christ.

am a staunch<sup>1</sup> “Church of Christ”! By that I mean I am committed to being member of the church that Jesus said *he would build* and that *belongs to him and that I read about in the New Testament!* Matt 16:16-19. I believe that the fellowship with which I find myself is seriously seeking to be as faithful to the teachings of Scripture as possible, and to identify with the spirit of the church Jesus established and which we read about in the New Testament, and specifically in the book of Acts.

In Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, he greeted the Roman Christians with a greeting *from all the churches of Christ*, Rom 16:16. In this text, the description *churches of Christ* merely implies that these churches *belonged to Christ*, not the apostles, or anyone else.

Paul picks up this point early in 1 Cor 1:10ff where he observes that some Christians were favoring certain evangelists such as Peter/Cephas, Apollos, or Paul himself who may have baptized them. Paul’s point is that they had been baptized into Christ, not into Cephas, Paul, or Apollos! The Corinthians *belonged to Christ*, not Cephas or Paul! Paul’s concluding point was that it was Christ who had been crucified for them, not any human religious leader!

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<sup>1</sup> A euphemism for loyal, unwavering in one's commitment, extremely loyal: "A dyed-in-the-wool, true-blue patriot".

In the Greek expression “*the churches ... of Christ*,” αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ... τοῦ Χριστοῦ at Rom 16:16, the words *of Christ* are a *descriptive genitive expression* with τοῦ Χριστοῦ implying *ownership, belonging to, or origin*. Paul was sending greetings to the Roman Christian house churches from *churches* he knew who *belonged to Christ and identified with Christ*, hence, *of Christ*.

It is common today for churches to name themselves, or “denominate”<sup>2</sup> themselves, after some religious leader or movement such as the Presbyterian Church, the Church of England, the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Church, or the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

However, I am not a member of a church that belongs to a Roman Pope, a king of a country as in the Church of England, or of a great human religious teacher as in the Lutheran church. I am a member of a church *that aims to be a congregation of saints that belongs to Christ!* I say this with no disrespect for adherents of other churches, only to explain why I am so committed to the expression *of Christ, belonging to Christ!*

Some years ago in South Africa, I was attending a scholarly conference at the University of Natal when I was introduced to a visiting Church of England minister who was also a professor at a university. He took some umbrage at my calling myself a minister of *the Church of Christ*. His question was, “who gave you permission to call yourself *the church of Christ?*” I was stunned! I responded, “Christ in the New Testament gave me that permission!” I asked him in return had he not read Rom 16:16, who allowed him to call himself the Church of England. He responded, “the Queen of England, the head of the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury”! Somewhat aggressively and piqued, I told him I preferred Christ to the King of England! He was not pleased with my response!

Paul gives an interesting quirk to this discussion by referring to the church at Corinth *as the church of God which is at Corinth*, those who had been *sanctified in Christ Jesus*, who were called saints together with all those who in every place *call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, both their Lord and ours, 1 Cor 1:2. We find the similar expression at 1 Thess 1:1, “*To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*”. In both cases it is apparent that the expressions *point to God and Christ as the origin and ownership of the church or congregation*.

As I have said, I seek only to be I am a member of the Church of that belongs to Christ. Not that we are perfect, for none of us are, but I want to be found in a church that belongs to Christ, or God, who honor God and Christ first and not some king or great church leader. I want you, the reader, to know the *origins and sources of my faith that point to the source and glory of my God and Saviour, Christ!*

Our primary roots in Churches of Christ lie in the apostolic gospel of Christ, the New Testament church founded by Christ, and proclaimed by the rapid global apostolic spread of the church in the first century.

However, we find ourselves in a more recent church heritage or movement, hopefully honoring Christ and not any church heritage or movement!

By this, I imply that in the eighteenth-century CE there were groups of disciples of Christ in the modern era in Scotland and Ireland toward the close of the eighteenth century that called for a restoration of the principles of church life grounded in the New Testament rather than in denominational creeds and synods. This mood took root in the United States of America in the

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<sup>2</sup> Check and good dictionary! *Denominate, to name something or someone to define their nature or being.*

early nineteenth century and then spread out to Australia, Africa, Europe, and the orient because of missionary activity.

This so-called “restoration movement” was committed to restoring the church to its original roots in the New Testament, not based on human creeds or denominational synods.

It is the claim of most Churches of Christ today that their historical and biblical roots lie primarily in the statement of Jesus to build his church, and not in human creeds and synods. Churches of Christ draw their church roots from the teachings of Jesus as in Matt 16:18:

*“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

Churches of Christ believe that this was inaugurated by Jesus’ death and resurrection, and carried forward through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:1ff, ca 30/33 CE.

Jesus’ great commission stimulated the early disciple’s attention. They began to spread Jesus’ evangelistic message and church into all the world. Matthew describes this in his account of the great commission, Matt 28:16-20:

*“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”*

Luke records in more practical terms Jesus’ commission in Acts 1:8,

*“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”*

After the martyrdom of Stephen, in Acts 7, the Apostles of Jesus and the early disciples carried the gospel message out into all the world just as Jesus had instructed.

The disciples scattered widely preaching the gospel message. Luke recounts these events, in Acts 8:1-8,

*“And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*

*<sup>4</sup> Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. <sup>6</sup> And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did.”*

Shortly after the martyrdom of Stephen, Saul, a devout Jew from Tarsus, a prominent defender of the Law, and resident in Jerusalem, received authority from the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin to pursue, imprison, and even kill Christian believers in Damascus.

Saul’s remarkable and dramatic “confrontation” with Jesus while on the road to Damascus is recorded in Acts 9. In

Damascus, the now blind Saul, was taught and baptized by Ananias, a Christian believer in Damascus.

Saul of Tarsus, soon to be identified as Paul, an Apostle chosen by God and Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit, began preaching the gospel of Jesus. In a short time, Paul became one of the most energetic apostolic evangelists who carried the gospel message into Galatia, Asia, and Achaia (Greece) in three great mission journeys recorded by Luke, his oft accompanied disciple, in the book of Acts.

Thus, grounded in the apostolic teaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus, churches were established throughout the middle eastern Roman world. Scripture identifies these churches as “*churches of Christ,*” Rom 16:16, or “*churches of God,*” 1 and 2 Cor, 1:2, or *the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,* 1 Thess 1:1, 2 Thess 1:1.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to Corinth

This chapter will introduce the reader to the geographic region surrounding of the city of Corinth, its strategic, maritime, and economic importance, and the ethnic makeup of the city.

We will follow the establishment of the church in Corinth, the cultural and religious character of the church and general religious items of significance to the Corinthians Epistle.

Regarding introductions and long bibliographies, I share Anthony Thiselton's comment: "With Schleiermacher I lament that too often Introductions" are dull and academic when they should fire a vision for reading the text. I hope that those who seek practical help will not ignore the Introduction. It is designed to transport readers into the "worlds" of Corinth and of Paul, and to explain why this church and this apostle think, feel, act, and write as they do ..."

Some of you may find the extensive Bibliography of works cited unduly intimidating. But I have cited only those authors whose work is so much a part of my thinking on a passage that it would suggest a lack of professional integrity not to acknowledge their influence."<sup>1</sup>

I trust that the bibliographical information provided in this commentary will introduce the reader to the vast literary resources available for this challenging study. The mere size of most of the major commentaries will prepare the student for the challenge and discipline involved in researching and writing a commentary on the Corinthian correspondence. Fee's commentary has 982 pages, Garland has 870 pages, and Thiselton has over 1350 pages!

### The City of Corinth

Corinth by the time of Paul, ca 51 CE, was already an ancient city with archaeological ruins dating as early as the neolithic age, ca 6500 BCE.

According to Corinthian mythology, Corinth had a spectacular early history. A Corinthian myth reported by Pausanias, a Greek historian of the first century CE, said that the city was founded by *Corinthos*, a descendant of the Greek god Helios. Others trace *Corinthos* to the Greek god Zeus. Other myths suggest that Corinth was founded by the goddess Ephyra, a daughter of Oceanus, the god of the oceans. The point is that one finds in Corinth an ancient civilization with roots in Greek mythology.<sup>2</sup>

There is some archaeological evidence that the city was destroyed around 2000 BC, and rebuilt by succeeding Greek/Hellenistic settlements.<sup>3</sup>

Although Corinth was a Greek-speaking city located in in the province of Achaia/Greece, it is misleading to assume that the citizens were of a Greek ethnic makeup or culture. Although the citizens spoke many dialects, Greek was the common language of the city. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city with people moving from all over the world, settling there because of its economic and business connections, and being on a major trade route from the East to the West would also see many people moving through its two seaports, Lechem and Cenchreae.

Thiselton observes:

"In 44 BC Julius Caesar refounded the city mainly from three sources of the *Roman* populace: (1) freedmen, (2) his own veterans, and (3) urban trades persons and laborers. The geographical position of Corinth ensured that they would prosper. Caesar took care to provide a setting and resources that would ensure a loyal strategic center for the advance of

<sup>1</sup> Thiselton. *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, Kindle Locations, 95 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 22; Cf. also <https://greekgodsandgoddesses.net/myths/corinth/>; [www.greekmythology.com](http://www.greekmythology.com/); *Wikipedia, Ancient Corinth*.

<sup>3</sup> Cartwright, Mark, "Corinth," *World History Encyclopedia*. <https://www.worldhistory.org/corinth/>.

future eastern campaigns ... The formal name of the Roman colony was Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis, that is, the colony of Corinth in Honor of Julius. As a Roman *colonia* (Gk. πολιτεύμα) Corinth's government was organized on a tripartite basis of an assembly of citizen voters, a city council, and annual magistrates."<sup>4</sup>

"All of these factors underline three fundamental points for our understanding of the epistle: (1) *the city community and city culture of Corinth were formed after a Roman model*, not a Greek one, even if many immigrants came from Achaëa, Macedonia, and the East to constitute an equally cosmopolitan superstructure; (2) *the city community and the city culture felt themselves to be prosperous and self-sufficient*, even if there were many "have nots" who were socially vulnerable or dependent on others; (3) *the core community and core tradition of the city culture were those of trade, business, and entrepreneurial pragmatism in the pursuit of success*, even if some paid a heavy price for business failures or for the lack of the right contacts or the right opportunities."<sup>5</sup>

As part of its citizen-building program, Rome relocated many older civil servants and retired military personnel to Corinth. Although there were many wealthy citizens because of its economic prosperity, most of the citizens were what have been identified as "freedmen" or blue-collar citizens.

Regarding the "cosmopolitan" character of the religions of Corinth" Garland observes:

"As a cosmopolitan city, Corinth was a melting pot with older and newer religions flourishing side by side. De Vos (1999, 192) identifies the gods and cults celebrated by the Corinthians as "Apollos, Aphrodite/Venus, Asclepius Athena, Chalinitus, Demeter, and Kore, Dionysus, Ephesian Artemis, Hera Acraea, Hermes/Mercury, Jupiter Capitolinus, Poseidon/Neptune, Tyche, Fortuna, Zeus. Egyptian mystery cults, such as the worship of Isis, also were practiced. Never to be forgotten were the ubiquitous attraction of magic. The imperial cult ... forged by Augustus, was virulent and expansive during this time and was extremely influential in a roman colony ... Most persons could accommodate all gods and goddesses into their religious behavior, and could choose from a cafeteria line of religious practices."<sup>6</sup>

From other sources, we also learn that there was a large community of Jews in Corinth. The business prosperity of the city would draw Jewish business families to Corinth.

We learn from Luke's comments in Acts 18:1ff that there was an influential Synagogue in Corinth:

*"<sup>1</sup>After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup>And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; <sup>3</sup>and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers. <sup>4</sup>And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks.*

*<sup>5</sup>When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup>And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." <sup>7</sup>And he left there and went to the house of a man*

<sup>4</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Thiselton, *1 Corinthians, Greek Commentary*, p.4. Cf also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Garland, *1 Corinthians*, and Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, on the ethnic, cultural, and religious makeup of the citizenry of Corinth.

<sup>6</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p.9.

*named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue.* <sup>8</sup> *Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.* <sup>9</sup> *And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city”.* <sup>11</sup> *And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

<sup>12</sup> *But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack upon Paul and brought him before the tribunal,* <sup>13</sup> *saying, “This man is persuading men to worship God contrary to the law.”* <sup>14</sup> *But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, I should have reason to bear with you, O Jews; <sup>15</sup> but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I refuse to be a judge of these things.”* <sup>16</sup> *And he drove them from the tribunal.* <sup>17</sup> *And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to this.”*

In spite of the cosmopolitan nature of Corinth when Paul established the church there and when he wrote his several letters Thiselton and Murphy-O’Connor with Fitzmyer and Fee emphasize that the city was primarily Roman in its cultural nature with Roman law determining how the city should function. This must be considered when following Paul’s discussion of the cultural nature of the community and its complicated social behavior. One can never ignore the Greek heritage of that area of Achaia, but one must remember that Corinth=was not a Greek city, but a Roman city, governed by the Romans, and influenced by a predominant wealthy citizenship.<sup>7</sup>

### **The geographic location of Corinth**

Corinth was situated in an ideal location favoring political governance, commercial trade, and economic transport to both the East and West. The city was located on an isthmus connecting the Peloponnese peninsula and the mainland of Greece, and lying between the Saronic Gulf and the Gulf of Corinth.

Initially, a “road” called the *diolkos* connected the two ports of Cenchreae and Lechaem for the transport of cargo from one port to the other.

Plans began in 336–283 BC to construct a canal to improve cargo transportation. These plans failed with further plans made to dig a canal in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman likewise failing. A canal was completed in 1893 under the Greek government after 11 years of excavation.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *passim*; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *passim*; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, *passim*. Consequently, most of the better commentaries on *First Corinthians* refer to Corinth as *Roman Corinth*.

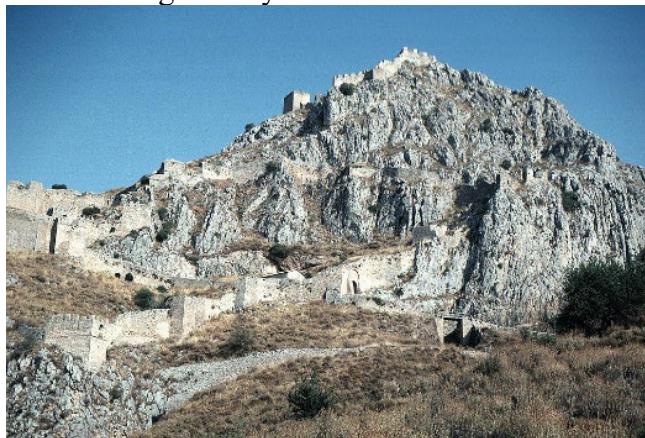


### The Acrocorinth

In addition to being ideally found on the narrow isthmus between Achaia and the Peloponnese “island,” the city was located at the foot of a relatively high mountain or monolith known as the Acrocorinth, or the “mountain” of Corinth. The acropolis was a fortified “city” refuge built on a high hill or mountain near a major city in ancient times.

The Acropolis of Athens is famous for its magnificent Parthenon, Temple to Athene, and surrounding buildings.

Corinth, like most ancient Greek cities, was also protected by an acropolis which we know as the Acrocorinth. A Temple to Aphrodite was also located on the Acropolis within a small “escape” city surrounded by a fortified wall. The Acrocorinth provided the ancient city with a 360% “defensive” view surrounding the city of Corinth.



The Acrocorinth

The view of ancient Corinth from the Acrocorinth is spectacular, Archaeologists have done magnificent work of restoring ancient Corinth with its many spectacular temples, marketplace, roads, and buildings.

### **The establishment of the church in Corinth**

Paul arrived in Corinth on his second great missionary journey which mission Luke recorded in Acts 16-18.

It was while on this second great mission tour Paul had moved from a successful mission to Galatia and Antioch, and a successful trip to Asia, Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, and Galatia. At Troas, on his way to Asia, he experienced a Holy Spirit-inspired Macedonian call, Acts 16. Immediately he set sail from Troas for Macedonia, making entry to Europe at Samothrace, and moving on to establish churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, Acts 17. His experience at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea although successful in planting churches led to considerable Jewish opposition and personal persecution, Acts 17. He moved on to Achaia and Athens spending some time in Athens where he preached his famous great sermon to some philosophers at the Areopagus, Acts 17:22. Not receiving great support in Athens he moved on to Corinth, arriving in Corinth ca 51/52 CE. Luke recounts these events in Acts 18:1-20.

*“<sup>1</sup>After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup>And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; <sup>3</sup>and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers. <sup>4</sup>And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks. <sup>5</sup>When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup>And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” <sup>7</sup>And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. <sup>8</sup>Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. <sup>9</sup>And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; <sup>10</sup>for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city.” <sup>11</sup>And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”*

### **The church in Corinth and churches of Christ today**

And so, we come to what Paul refers to at 1 Cor 1:2 as “*the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours*”!

The date of the probable establishment of the church must have been ca 49/51 CE with Paul’s arrival in Corinth. Luke describes this at Acts 18:1-4:

*“After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup>And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; <sup>3</sup>and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers. <sup>4</sup>And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks.”*

In his first chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul discussed the doctrinal teachings that he believed should shape the church in Corinth. *He argues that the foundation to the Christian faith is not*

*human wisdom as debated by the Corinthians philosophers, but the divine power of God as seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus.*

He argues that *the power of the cross in the death and resurrection of Jesus was the core of his evangelistic message.* This point is interesting since this message profoundly forms a model for Churches of Christ today who trace their origins primarily to the same gospel trajectory as expressed by Paul to the church in Corinth.

Unfortunately, some churches of Christ today find themselves, like the Corinthian church, taking their stand on secular cultural standards or preferences as they define their Christian purpose, notably in the practice of benevolent mission outreach, and Sunday worship services.

Traditionally, most Churches of Christ have claimed to follow the same primary gospel trajectory of *Jesus' death and resurrection* and its impact on their faith. They hold that through faith and obedience to the gospel of Jesus, and by being baptized into Christ they become members of the church that Jesus founded ca 30 CE; they claim to have their doctrinal roots in the same teachings of the New Testament proclaimed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, notably in chapters one and two.

Christians today might be separated by almost two thousand years of church history from the church Corinth, but they claim the same foundation of faith as Paul expressed in this epistle to the Corinthians.

### **Paul's gospel message to the Corinthians**

Note particularly Paul's pivotal message to the Corinthian Church at 1 Cor 1:18-25.

*<sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

*<sup>18</sup>For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written,*

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart."*

*<sup>20</sup>Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."*

From this text, the first glance may appear to present two topics, the *wisdom of God*, and the *folly of human wisdom*, but on closer examination there are two primary principles closely related in one message. The Corinthians have a choice, *choose the wisdom of God for salvation, or the wisdom of the Corinthians for destruction!*

According to traditional Wisdom Literature, wisdom is found in seeking for, and hearing God. It draws attention to the impact of God and his instruction in the life of the individual.

### The wisdom of God verses the wisdom of man

Two further major theological topics surface in Paul's 1 Corinthians text. *First*, the discussion of *divine wisdom*; *second*, the heart and power of Paul's preaching, *the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ*.<sup>8</sup>

The overall *theme* of *wisdom* in Scripture covers several categories such as a literary style; the *Wisdom Literature* of Israel, a *theological category* opposing human wisdom, a specific *theological viewpoint* as in Karl Barth's *dialectical theological*<sup>9</sup> program.

Barth, in an insightful observation, saw the *incarnation of Jesus* as the *epitome of divine wisdom* in the person and life of Jesus, notably *his death and resurrection*. The cross of Jesus represented the divine NO to human effort, you cannot save yourself without God's intervention, and the divine YES of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus proclaiming that God will save you by his grace. *The wisdom of God* is seen in a divine theology of atonement. *Jesus as the word and message of God is thus the divine wisdom message to fallen man*.

Each of the above concepts of wisdom in some measure overlaps with the others with a specific emphasis on *God's wisdom as opposed human foolishness*.

As we work through Paul and Corinthians *wisdom focuses on believing in the working and power of Jesus Christ; that is, his death and resurrection*. Anything else is worldly wisdom and will fail.

**1 Cor 1:17ff.** This pericope represents the heart of Paul's preaching and his view of atonement

<sup>17</sup>*For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

<sup>18</sup>*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* <sup>19</sup>*For it is written,*

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart."*

<sup>20</sup>*Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* <sup>21</sup>*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.* <sup>22</sup>*For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,* <sup>24</sup>*but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* <sup>25</sup>*For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

<sup>26</sup>*For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth;* <sup>27</sup>*but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong,* <sup>28</sup>*God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,* <sup>29</sup>*so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*

<sup>30</sup>*He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our*

<sup>8</sup> All major theological dictionaries have articles discussing the mystery of wisdom. Cf. *The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* and the *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. Both have extended studies on the several aspects of Biblical Wisdom.

<sup>9</sup> Barthian style *Dialectical theology* teaches that God has spoken *two words of wisdom* through Jesus to mankind, one a resounding NO to human activity in salvation, and the other a triumphant YES in Jesus death and resurrection. For a comprehensive overview of Barth's *dialectical theology* cf. Ian A. Fair, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg to Dialectical Theology*, University of Natal, 1975.

righteousness and sanctification and redemption; <sup>31</sup> therefore, as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.”

<sup>2:1</sup> When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; <sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Paul clearly says in this first chapter of 1 Corinthians that the foundation of the religious life of the Corinthian Christians was *faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ*, and their being baptized into Christ, and not in human wisdom however erudite it may seem to the Corinthians.

Thus, Paul resolutely claimed, as in 1 Cor 1:10 ff, that no “super-spiritual” teacher, whether an Apostle or otherwise, was the foundation of the Church of God in Corinth. *The only foundation to the Christian faith is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

### **The character of the church in Corinth**

First Corinthians is unlike Paul’s epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles which were more *pastoral/theological* epistles in which Paul was addressing Christian life or doctrinal issues involving Christians *being misled by false teachers*. First Corinthians was unlike Romans in which Paul was *addressing his mission plans* following an intended visit to Rome, and in which he *delineates his gospel message of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ* rather than through *Torah* Law keeping. In First Corinthians Paul was not teaching against some gnostic platonic/Jewish form of philosophy as in Ephesians and Colossians which drew Christians away from Christ as the center of their faith. The issues in Corinth were different! No false teachers appear on the Corinthian horizon other than the secular pagan culture in which the Corinthian church lived.

The Corinthian problem was their failure to maintain a sound Christian faith in the context of their sectarian pagan culture which was misshaping the Christ-centered practice of their Christian faith! The Corinthian Christians were allowing their secular culture to shape their faith rather than Christ.

Roy Ciampa focuses on the problem the church in Corinth was facing. Corinth was not demonstrating a true Christian faith and lifestyle in a culture that was primarily shaped by the influential Roman/Greek secular and religious environment in which the church lived. *Some self-centered Corinthian Christians were still living as though the church belonged to Corinth and not Christ!*

“Roman Corinth was prosperous, cosmopolitan, and religiously pluralistic, accustomed to visits by impressive, traveling public speakers and obsessed with status, self-promotion, and personal rights ...

However, in recent years a rough consensus has begun to emerge in which scholars agree that the problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians reflect the infiltration of Corinthian social values into the church.

Hans Conzelmann’s question in 1969 was on target: “We have here to do with people [the Corinthians] who have only recently become Christians; what were the ideas they brought with them into the community?” Many of their faults can be traced to their uncritical acceptance of the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the society in which they lived. The glorification of wisdom, the eating of food sacrificed to idols, the denial of bodily

resurrection, and the light assessment of sexual immorality, drunkenness, greed, and vexatious litigation were all common features of their society.<sup>10</sup>

Ciampa includes a sample of commentators who concur with this basic conclusion includes:

“Bruce W. Winter: “The problems which arose subsequent to Paul’s departure [from Corinth] did so partly because the Christians were ‘cosmopolitans,’ i.e., citizens of this world and, in particular, citizens or residents of Roman Corinth,” and thus “the primary influences on the responses of the Christians were derived principally from Romanitas.”

Richard B. Hays: “they [the Corinthian Christians] are uncritically perpetuating the norms and values of the pagan culture around them.”

Wolfgang Schrage, in discussing the various influences on the Corinthians, concludes that “after their conversion they [the Corinthian Christians] remained in contact with their heathen environment, by way of mixed marriages (7:12-16), in the workplace (cf. 4:12), at the marketplace (10:25), through invitations (cf. 10:27) and elsewhere, and were influenced in these settings socially, religiously, ideologically, and in other ways.”

Lyle D. Vander Broek offers a pithy summary: “Each of the community problems Paul needed to address grew out of the Corinthians’ inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their gentile, Greco-Roman lives, whether because they misunderstood that message or because they rejected it outright. They were Hellenists through and through, and this eschatological, cross-centered, body-affirming Jewish sect called Christianity demanded that they enter another theological and ethical world. It is no surprise that these residents of Corinth would seek rhetorical wisdom, be unconcerned with immorality and the preservation of the body, be infatuated with asceticism and spiritual empowerment, and preserve the distinctions between rich and poor. The Corinthians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance.”<sup>11</sup>

Ciampa summarizes his points with the observation that *the church in Corinth was more Corinthian than Christian*:

“That the church in Corinth is God’s church is repeated three times [in 1 Corinthians]. Yet the Corinthians were still behaving as if they belonged to their city! Paul’s aim in writing is to urge them to adopt a way of life more in accord with their true ownership.”<sup>12</sup>

Gordon Fee makes this interesting and profound comment in the closing paragraph of his discussion of the culture of the Corinthian church and Corinthian Christianity:

“Thus, the picture that emerges is one of a predominantly Gentile community, the majority of whom were almost certainly at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder, although there were two or three wealthy families. As former pagans, they brought to their Christian faith a Hellenistic worldview and attitude toward ethical behavior. *Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, an enormous amount of Corinth was yet in them*, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviors that required radical surgery without killing the patient. This is what this letter attempts to do.”<sup>13</sup>

Fee astutely draws attention to the point that what surfaces in the Corinthian correspondence is an obvious tension between Paul and several in the self-aggrandizing Corinthian leaders who

<sup>10</sup> Ciampa, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>11</sup> Ciampa, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>12</sup> Ciampa, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 4.

opposed his leadership. Indications of this can be seen in Paul's comments at the close of our Second Epistle to the Corinthians, 2 Cor 12:11ff:

*"<sup>11</sup>I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup>The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. <sup>13</sup>For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!*

*<sup>14</sup>Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. <sup>15</sup>I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? <sup>16</sup>But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by guile. <sup>17</sup>Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? <sup>18</sup>I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?*

*<sup>19</sup>Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. <sup>20</sup>For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish, and that you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. <sup>21</sup>I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced."*

Under a heading *The Church and its Apostle* in his major commentary, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Fee writes:

*"Our 1 Corinthians is an occasional, ad hoc response to the situation that had developed in the Corinthian Church between the time Paul left the city, sometime in A. D. 51-52, and the writing of our letter approximately three years later ... Paul addresses, in response to reports (1:11; 5:1; 11:18) or to their letter (cf. 7:1), at least 11 different, somewhat disparate concerns, ten of which are behavioral; only the issue of the resurrection of the dead (chap. 15) is theological as such ... Our difficulty at this distance is threefold: (1) to discover the relationship, if indeed there is one of these various items to one another; (2) to determine the relationship of the community to Paul; and (3) to determine what influences/positions in the Corinthian "theology" allowed them not only to adopt such behavior but also to argue for their right to do it."<sup>14</sup>*

### **The Epistle to the Corinthians**

Fitzmyer observes that First Corinthians is more like a letter than an epistle in the sense that Deissmann suggested in his pivotal work, *Light from the Ancient East*, where Deissmann proposed that letters were more personal correspondence than an epistle which represented more formal discussion than personal.<sup>15</sup>

As Fee, Fitzmyer, Garland and others indicate, attempting to determine a meaningful structure to the epistle is difficult since Paul seems to move from one point to another without much correspondence or related thought other than for the fact that Paul was responding to

<sup>14</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.3.

<sup>15</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p.54; Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 1908/1910.

certain received letters and contacts from certain of the Corinthians, cf. chap. 1:11; 5:1; 7:1; and 11:18.<sup>16</sup>

Several structural outlines or approaches to the analysis of the epistle have been proposed to add cohesion to the study, but it may be best to simply follow the outline of the epistle and comment on the different issues to which Paul responds, as they appear!

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<sup>16</sup> Fee, *ibid.*, p. 5; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 54ff; Garland, *Corinthians*, pp. 19ff.

## Chapter 2: Overview of First Corinthians

### 1 Cor 1:1-9 Paul's salutation and thanksgiving

#### 1 Cor 1:1-3: Paul's salutation to the church.

Paul reminds the church that they are a church that belongs to God; *"the church of God which is at Corinth."*

#### 1 Cor 1:4-9: Paul gives thanks for their calling by the grace of God.

He stresses the central figure of Jesus Christ in this laudatory thanksgiving.

### 1 Cor 1:10-4:21 Report from Chloe's people

#### 1 Cor 1:10-16: Paul's first issue/problem; he warns against congregational dissention.

Signs of dissention were due to following certain favored leaders such as Apollos, Cephas, and even Paul himself.

#### 1 Cor 1:14-16 The Corinthians were not baptized into any human person, only into Christ.

The death of Christ on the cross is the power of salvation. Baptism is important but not the foundation of salvation—the death of Christ is that foundation.

#### 1 Cor 1:17-3:4 The power of the cross is the saving power of God.

The cross of the Messiah, Jesus, was a problem for Jews; the resurrection of Jesus was a problem for Greeks!

*The death and resurrection of Jesus* was the central theology and emphasis of Paul's preaching to the Corinthians, not human wisdom and philosophical reason.

#### 1 Cor 2:6-3:4: True wisdom is from God through His Spirit.

The Corinthians had received the Spirit of God at their baptism, not human wisdom, and philosophy.

People who trace their position to Apollos, or Paul, or any human result only in human jealousy!

#### 1 Cor 3:5-23. The Apostles are servants and co-workers with God who gives the growth.

*True Christians boast only in God and Christ, not in human leaders who are only servants.*

Boasting in human leaders results only in self-aggrandizement and societal and cultural favored position – a Corinthian societal and cultural weakness.

#### 1 Cor 4:1-21. Paul and the other Apostles were only humble servants of God.

The power, position, and glory belong to God and Christ, not human leaders like Paul and the Apostles.

Paul appeals to the Corinthians to be humble servants like he and Apollos.

*Self-aggrandizement and social position were issues which plagued the Corinthian Christians.*

#### 1 Cor 5:1-6:20 Incest, Legal issues, Prostitution

Paul's concern was that there was more of Corinth in the Church than Christ. The Christians were modeling their behavior of the religious and cultural practices of the city.

**1 Cor 5:1-13. Incest in the congregation in Corinth.**

Paul seldom manifests as much disgust and criticism as he does in this pericope! The Corinthian sin was so manifest that even the Corinthians community was aware of it. To accentuate the problem, the Corinthian Christians were doing nothing about the egregious example of the congregation.

**1 Cor 6:1-8: Taking brothers before civil courts to resolve relational issues.**

This problem was related to the previous one, and was leaving a poor example of Christian living and behavior in Corinth.

**1 Cor 6:9-11: The sexually unrighteous have no part in the kingdom of God.**

The Corinthians were so unconcerned about the degree of their unrighteous living that Paul sets it in the context of God kingdom living.

**1 Cor 6:12-20: Prostitution has no part in the Kingdom of God.**

Prostitution was not only a sin against one's own body, but also against the body of Christ.

**1 Cor 7:1-9:27 Marriage and Christian freedom**

New Christians now living in Christ with pagan spouses, as well as new Christians seeking marriage to non-Christians posed questions for the Christians living in a pagan world. The standard rules of Judaism did not hold answers to these questions, so Paul discusses the marriage issues in considerable detail in 1 Cor 7.

**1 Cor 7:1-38: Principles of Marriage**

1 Cor 7:10-16: The Christian and Divorce.

1 Cor 7:17-24: Keep your Status Quo in Marriage.

1 Cor 7:25-35: Counsel to the Unmarried.

1 Cor 7:36-38: Asceticism and Marriage.

**1 Cor 7:39-40: Counsel to Widows****1 Cor 8:1-33: Christian Liberty in Food Offered to Idols**

The rules of Jewish *kosher* behavior under the Law of Moses seriously did not address Gentile issues and behavior in a Gentile world. So, Paul discusses several questions relating to food and other Jewish *kosher* rules regarding Christian freedom and responsibility in a pagan culture.

**1 Cor 9:1-14 Rules of expediency****1 Cor 9:15-27: Christian rights and freedoms should be surrendered for others.****1 Cor 10:1-14:40 Problems in the Assembly – Worship**

The Corinthian emphases for own personal rights and freedoms was shaping the Corinthian Christians' attitude toward the kingdom of Christ rather than the principles of the kingdom of God.

**1 Cor 10:1-13: The Evil of Self-indulgence**

Self-aggrandizement and self-indulgence was of greater concern for the Corinthians than was appropriate for Christians.

**1 Cor 10:14-11:1: Sharing Idol Feasts Prohibited**

Trying to live in Christ and remain in the world was a fundamental problem for Corinthians Christians who had just been converted to Christ. Paul explains that it is not possible for Christians to live in both the world of idolatry and of Christ.

**1 Cor 11:2-16: The Head-covering of Women**

Integrating Christian standards of behavior and dress with Gentile cultural practices needed attention, notable in regard to the role of head coverings in the worship assemblies and public life. Clothing that may be approved in a pagan world was not necessarily appropriate in a God kingdom world, such as the church.

**1 Cor 11:17-34: Problems with the Lord's Supper**

Of major concern for Paul was appropriate behavior in the worship assembly. The impact of pagan behavior at feasts was a serious challenge to the purity of Christian worship of God.

**1 Cor 12:1-14:40: Abuse of Spiritual Giftedness**

Paul is aware of how far the Corinthian pride and self-promotion can reach. Spiritual giftedness opened the door for an over-the-top attitude of community stratification common in the Corinthian culture.

The problem is so invasive that that Paul spends three chapters discussing the impact of spirit awareness has invaded the life of the Corinthian church.

**1 Cor 12:1-40: The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual giftedness.**

1 Cor 12:4-11: Varieties of giftedness provided by the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 12:12-26: The Holy Spirit and congregational unity.

1 Cor 12:27-31: Special gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 13:1-13: Love; a more excellent gift than tongues and prophecy.

1 Cor 14:1-25: Prophecy versus speaking in tongues.

1 Cor 14:1-40: The use of spiritual gifts in the assembly.

1 Cor 14:26-40: Some instruction regarding the use of spiritual gifts.

**1 Cor 15:1-58 Issues Regarding the Resurrection**

1 Cor 15:1-11: The fact of the resurrection.

1 Cor 15:12-19: The necessity of the resurrection.

1 Cor 15:20-28: The assurance of the resurrection.

1 Cor 15:29-34: The logic of the resurrection.

1 Cor 15: 35-50: The nature of the resurrection.

1 Cor 15:51-58: The victory of the resurrection.

**1 Cor 16:1-24 Concluding Topics and Benediction**

Paul had introduced the importance and role of the Christian view of the resurrection of Jesus and the hope of a resurrection at the end of the age. He was well aware that some Jews of the Samaritan viewpoint rejected any concept of a resurrection but even Pharisees would have issues with Jesus' resurrection.

The problem in Corinth was not so much a Jewish one, but Greeks and Romans steeped in a platonic mindset rejected any concept of a resurrected body.

The concept of a resurrection is so important to the Christian faith that Paul spent a whole chapter discussing resurrection.

This last chapter is not Corinthian issue oriented, and focuses more on Paul's future itinerary plans. He is heading for Jerusalem with a gentile contribution for the saints in Jerusalem and hopes the Corinthian Christians will take part in this. In fact, his comment is more of an instruction than a wish! He returns to this contribution again in his next letter, 2 Cor 8.

1 Cor 16:1-4: The weekly gathering of the church and the contribution for the needy in Jerusalem.

1 Cor 16:5-12: Paul's itinerary.

1 Cor 16:13-24: Concluding exhortations, greetings, and benediction.

## Chapter 3: 1 Cor 1:1-9: Paul's Salutation to the Church

In this chapter we will examine some interesting thoughts in the opening comments of Paul to the church in Corinth. We will briefly discuss some communication Paul had received from Corinth, and a certain Chloe's report to Paul of the goings on in Corinth.

We will comment on why Paul introduces himself in this letter as an apostle of Jesus Christ in relation to the questions some have of his apostleship which later discusses more fully in his closing comments at 2 Cor 11 and 12.

The meaning of the Greek word church, *ekklēsia*, will be of chief interest especially in relation to the *ekklēsia* of God which is at Corinth.

We will note the reason Paul speaks of the *ekklēsia* of God which is at Corinth, noting that although the church is in Corinth it belongs to God and Jesus Christ and not to the Romans or the Corinthians!

### 1 Cor 1:1-3 Paul's salutation

*"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,*

*<sup>2</sup> To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:*

*<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

With a keen awareness that he was not welcomed or respected by some of the Corinthians, Paul opens his epistle with the statement that he was a *fully established apostle of Christ* with a hint of the fact that *he had been specifically chosen and called by God for a ministry to the Gentiles*, referring to his Domestic road experience with Christ and his subsequent baptism by Ananias.

It is apparent that some Corinthians with an affluent elevated attitude did not respect his having worked as a laborer in tent making, that unlike most philosophers of the day, some wealthy aristocrat did not sponsor him, that he was not accompanied by a wife as were some travelling evangelists, and that he did not make a show of his apostolic powers.

*Some felt that he was inferior to some of the other apostles with whom they might have been acquainted.* Although his fuller defense comes more in his later epistle that we know as Second Corinthians, he obviously felt the need to set this right regarding his apostleship. 2 Cor 11 and 12 express his final exasperation at such charges. We will not describe Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians here but refer the reader to these texts for a clearer understanding of Paul's feelings.

### 1 Cor 1:1. Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and Sosthenes.

Paul's earlier *defense of his apostleship* to the Galatians helps us fill in some of the questions regarding his apostleship. For a variety of reasons some felt Paul could be some form

of apostle, but not one as important as other apostolic leaders, whoever they may have been. Gal 1:11-24.

*“<sup>11</sup> For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man’s gospel. <sup>12</sup> For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>13</sup> For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; <sup>14</sup> and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup> But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, <sup>16</sup> was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.*

*<sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother. <sup>20</sup> (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) <sup>21</sup> Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; <sup>23</sup> they only heard it said, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” <sup>24</sup> And they glorified God because of me.”*

**1 Cor 1:1.** Because of the Jewish and other religious leaders that opposed Paul, he normally introduced himself to his readers in some fashion to clarify his apostleship and authority! *“Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,”*

*We need to consider the term apostle, from the Greek ἀπόστολος, apóstolos, which primarily referred to one who was sent as a messenger with some authority and an important message and mission. It was a generic term that took on meaning according to context. The power or authority of the apostleship lay not in the meaning of the term, but in who sent the messenger and message. In our modern English-speaking context we have read into the term apostle more than the world implies. It is for that reason that Paul spent time defining the nature of his apostleship. His authority lay not in the word but in the ones who commissioned and sent him. God and Jesus Christ. He explains in 2 Corinthians that he furthermore had the necessary credentials confirming his authority and power. 2 Cor 12:1-13:*

*“<sup>1</sup> I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. <sup>3</sup> And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—<sup>4</sup> and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. <sup>5</sup> On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup> Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. <sup>7</sup> And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup> Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; <sup>9</sup> but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

*<sup>11</sup> I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup> The signs*

*of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.* <sup>13</sup> *For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!*"

In 1 Cor 1:1, Paul made the point that he was a *called apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*. In 2 Cor 1:1 he followed with the similar identification reading that he was *an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*.

In his letter to the Roman Christians at Rom 1:1 Paul observes that *he was specifically called to be an apostle and in that he was set apart, ordained, by God for the gospel of God*.

*"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God<sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures."*

Luke gives us an historical glimpse of Paul's conversion and calling at Acts 9:13ff:

*"But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to thy saints at Jerusalem; <sup>14</sup> and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon thy name." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; <sup>16</sup> for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."*

As noted above, in Galatians Paul identified himself as *an apostle—not from Men but through Jesus Christ and God the Father ... set apart before I was born*. In Ephesians and Colossians, he likewise introduced himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God*. In Philippi where his apostleship was not questioned Paul stressed he was simply *a servant (doúlos bond servant) of Christ Jesus*.

Paul could not have better credentials than that God and Jesus Christ called him to be an apostle, chosen by God as a special messenger with a special message and authority.

There is some discussion as to who Sosthenes was other than a companion of Paul. We read of a Sosthenes at Acts 18:12-17 who was as a leader of the synagogue in Corinth brought legal action against Paul before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. Upon hearing Gallio's dismissal of the Jewish accusations against Paul, a mob, possibly of Greeks, seized Sosthenes and beat him.

**Acts 18:12-17.** *"<sup>12</sup> But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, (in Corinth) the Jews made a united attack upon Paul and brought him before the tribunal, <sup>13</sup> saying, "This man is persuading men to worship God contrary to the law." <sup>14</sup> But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, I should have reason to bear with you, O Jews; <sup>15</sup> but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I refuse to be a judge of these things." <sup>16</sup> And he drove them from the tribunal. <sup>17</sup> And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to this."*

However, Paul mentions him here as a brother in Christ which makes sense of the Paul's history of events in Corinth.<sup>1</sup> Fitzmyer suggests that this Sosthenes was the same Jewish leader who was later converted by Paul and who had accompanied Paul to Ephesus. Since Paul includes him in the salutation he was obviously well known and respected by the Corinthians.<sup>2</sup>

### **1 Cor 1:2a. To the church of God which is at Corinth.**

The church in Corinth, like the Synagogue were *the chosen and elect people of God*. In Corinth unlike the *Synagogue of the Jews* the church was the "*synagogue*" of Jesus Christ who

<sup>1</sup> Elwell, W. A., "Sosthenes," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1987

<sup>2</sup> Fitzmyer, *Romans*, pp. 124f.

had been *sanctified in Christ Jesus* and *dedicated to serving and worshipping* God through Jesus Christ!

Our English translations render this simply as *to the church of God which is at Corinth*. However, the greeting is much richer than merely referring to the Corinthians as *the church*!

It is common in some circles today to translate *church* as *the called-out body of people* with a literal interpretation of ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, meaning the people *called out of darkness into the light*. This is marginally correct but is not what the word ἐκκλησία in the New Testament means when referring to the people *called out*! Removing the word *ekklēsia* from its religious context in the Old and New Testament context does the word and concept an injustice.

It means far more than simply *called out* or *called out of darkness*!

To place the meaning of *ekklēsia* in the normal Greek etymology and not in the Old Testament Septuagint *synagogue*, or Hebrew *qahal* context, misses the point of the popularity of the word *ekklēsia* in the context of the unique group of people the apostles refer to by using the term *ekklēsia*!

Zodhiates has an excellent discussion of *ekklēsia* and *qahal*:

“The word *ekklēsia* is nowhere used of heathen religious assemblies in Scripture. In the OT, two different words are used to denote gatherings of the chosen people or their representatives: *edah* (5712) meaning congregation and *qahal* (6951), assembly. In the Septuagint, *sunagōgē* (4864) is the usual translation of *edah* while *qahal* is commonly rendered *ekklēsia*. Both *qahal* and *ekklēsia* by their derivation indicate calling or summoning to a place of meeting, *but there is no foundation for the widespread notion that ekklēsia means a people or a number of individual men called out of the world or mankind. Qahal or ekklēsia is the more sacred term denoting the people in relation to Jehovah, especially in public worship*. Perhaps for this very reason, the less sacred term *sunagōgē* was more commonly used by the Jews in our Lord’s time, and probably influenced the first believers in adopting *ekklēsia* for Christian use. *Sunagōgē*, though used in the early church as a syn. for *ekklēsia* (James 2:2), quickly went out of use for a Christian assembly, except in sects which were more Jewish than Christian. Owing to the growing hostility of the Jews, it came to indicate opposition to the church (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). *Ekklēsia, therefore, at once suggests the new people of God, the new Israel.*”<sup>3</sup>

The term *church*, ἐκκλησία, then, more precisely means a *congregation or group of people* who in the Christian sense *belong to the Lord Jesus*, and who have been *called together to belong to and be assembled to worship and serve God through Jesus Christ*!

We need here to take some time to explore the full meaning of the term *church* as an English translation of *ekklēsia*!

Although the word *church* is easily recognized in our common English vocabulary, and is widely used in the English New Testament, we need to examine how this term would have been understood in the first century CE by a Greek Christian reader!

Both the Greek word *ekklēsia* and the English word *church* have interesting histories.

The equivalent language words to the English term *church* presents an interesting *family of terms* according to their usage in different languages. All, in some measure, are translations or renderings of the Greek *ekklēsia*!

Although the word *church* is used in almost all English bibles in place of the Greek *ekklēsia*, the word *church* is not a simple direct *translation* of the Greek *ekklēsia* but is an *interpretation*

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<sup>3</sup> Zodhiates, ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*.

of the word *ekklēsia* drawn from the German word *kirche* which is a rendering of the Greek *kuriakós*.

Thus, the English word *church* has its roots in the German word *kirche*<sup>4</sup> and its Germanic neighbors which all in turn are derived from the Greek *kuriakós* meaning *belonging to the Lord*. *Kuriakós* does not mean a called-out body! So strictly speaking the English word *church* means a people belonging to the Lord with the purpose of serving God in Christ.

It is interesting that some churches in the heritage of the Germanic church tradition have chosen the translation of *ekklēsia* as *kirche* or *church*, while those of the Roman church tradition have adopted the Latin heritage of Rome describing the term *ekklēsia* as *Iglesia* (Spain), *L'eglesia* (Catalan), *Eglise* (French), *Igreja* (Portuguese), and *Eglws* (Welsh).

The Online Etymology Dictionary<sup>5</sup> explains this history or Germanic heritage of the English word *church*. Its origins lie in the Germanic *kirke*, not *ekklēsia*:

“The Old English *cirice*, *circe*, *church* means ‘place of assemblage set aside for Christian worship; the body of Christian believers, Christians collectively, or an ecclesiastical authority or power,’ drawn from Proto-Germanic *kirika* from the Old Saxon *kirika*, Old Norse *kirkja*, Old Frisian *zerke*, Middle Dutch *kerke*, Dutch *kerk*, Old High German *kirihha*, German *Kirche*.

This is probably ... borrowed via an unrecorded Gothic expression from Greek *kyriake oikia* ... the Lord's house.

The Greek *kyriakon* (adj.) "of the Lord" was used of houses of Christian worship as early as CE 300, especially in the East, though it was less common in this sense than *ekklēsia* or *basilikos*. This is an example of the direct Greek-to-Germanic transmission of many Christian words, via the Goths; probably it was used by West Germanic people in their pre-Christian period.”

Spiros Zodhiates discusses the word *kuriakós* and the origin of the Germanic *kirika*, he explains:

“κυριακός, *kuriakós* ... from *kúrios* ... lord, master, belonging to a lord or ruler. Only in 1 Cor. 11:20; Rev. 1:10 as belonging to Christ, to the Lord, having special reference to Him. Hence, *kuriaké*, came to mean *kuriaké hēméra*, the “Day of the Lord,” what we call Sunday. It was the day kept in commemoration of Christ’s resurrection (John 20:19–23; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2 [see Rev. 1:10]).”<sup>6</sup>

Zodhiates adds furthermore regarding *ekklēsia*:

“ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia* ... feminine noun from *ékklētos*, called out, which is from *ekkaléō*, to call out. It was a common term for a congregation of the *ekklētoí*, the called people, or those called out or assembled in the public affairs of a free state, the body of free citizens called together by a herald (*kérux*) which constituted the *ekklēsia*. In the NT, the word is applied to the congregation of the people of Israel (Acts 7:38). On the other hand, of the two terms used in the OT, *sunagōgē* ... seems to have been used to designate the people from Israel in distinction from all other nations (Acts 13:43 [cf. Matt. 4:23; 6:2; James 2:2; Rev. 2:9; 3:9]). In Heb. 10:25, however, when the gathering of Christians is referred to, it is called not

<sup>4</sup> Myriam-Webster Dictionary, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *church*, *kirche*, Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

<sup>5</sup> For convenience in reading, I have edited this definition somewhat without changing its meaning and source. Cf. [www.etymonline.com/word/Church](http://www.etymonline.com/word/Church).

<sup>6</sup> Zodhiates, S. κυριακός, *kuriakós*, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

sunagōgḗ, but episunagōgḗ... with the prep. epí ... upon, translated “the assembling . . . together.” The Christian community was designated for the first time as the *ekklēsia* to differentiate it from the Jewish community, sunagōgḗ (Acts 2:47 [TR]). The term *ekklēsia* denotes the NT community of the redeemed in its twofold aspect. First, all who were called by and to Christ in the fellowship of His salvation, the church worldwide of all times, and only secondarily to an individual church (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:44, 47; 9:31; 1 Cor. 6:4; 12:28; 14:4, 5, 12; Phil. 3:6; Col. 1:18, 24). Designated as the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; Gal. 1:13; 2 Tim. 3:5, 15); the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18); the church in Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:21); exclusively the entire church (Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23–25, 27, 29, 32; Heb. 12:23). Secondly, the NT churches, however, are also confined to particular places (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 4:15; 1 Thess. 2:14; Phile. 1:2); to individual local churches (Acts 8:1; 11:22; Rom. 16:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). *Ekklēsia* does not occur in the gospels of Mark, Luke, John, nor the epistles of 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 and 2 John, or Jude.”<sup>7</sup>

To Zodhiates’ observations, Louw and Nida add some interesting features that broaden our understanding of the meaning of *ekklēsia* as used in the New Testament in reference to a congregation or assembly of Christians;

“ἐκκλησία, ας: a congregation of Christians, implying interacting membership— ‘congregation, church.’ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὐσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ ‘to the church of God which is in Corinth’ 1 Cor 1:2; ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς αἱ ἐκκλησίαι πᾶσαι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ‘all the churches of Christ greet you’ Ro 16:16.

Though some persons have tried to see in the term ἐκκλησία a more or less literal meaning of ‘called-out ones,’ this type of etymologizing is not warranted either by the meaning of ἐκκλησία in NT times or even by its earlier usage. The term ἐκκλησία was in common usage for several hundred years before the Christian era and was used to refer to an assembly of persons constituted by well- defined membership. In general, Greek usage it was normally a socio-political entity based upon citizenship in a city-state (see ἐκκλησία<sup>c</sup>, 11.78) and in this sense is parallel to δῆμος (11.78). For the NT, however, it is important to understand the meaning of ἐκκλησία<sup>a</sup> as ‘an assembly of God’s people.’

In the rendering of ἐκκλησία a translator must beware of using a term which refers primarily to a building rather than to a congregation of believers. In many contexts ἐκκλησία may be readily rendered as ‘gathering of believers’ or ‘group of those who trust in Christ.’ Sometimes, as in 1 Cor 1:2, it is possible to translate ‘Paul writes to the believers in Christ who live in Corinth.’ Such a translation does, however, omit a significant element in the term ἐκκλησία, in that the sense of corporate unity is not specified.”<sup>8</sup>

Fitzmyer sets the meaning of *ekklēsia* as used in the New Testament of God’s people in the tradition of Greek/Hebrew Old testament development, not simply as the people called into an assembly with the stress on the assembly, which is certainly contained in the Greek *ekklēsia*, but sees the Christian adaptation of this in the Jewish Old Testament adaptation and inclusion of the Hebrew *qēhel* which was closer to the Greek sunagōgḗ of with the emphasis on the people gathered into an assembly. The *ekklēsia* thus has reference to the unique holy nature of the assembly as God’s people.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Zodhiates, ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*.

<sup>8</sup> Louw, and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd edition., vol. 1, p. 125, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 80, 81

My point in this discussion is that the *English term church* is not a direct translation of *ekklēsia*, but is a *Germanic interpretation* or adaptation of the Greek *ekklēsia* and Septuagint and Hebrew *sunagōgē* and *qēhel* which emphasizes that the *ekklēsia* or *church* is a *holy community of people belonging to the Lord dedicated to serving and worshipping God through Jesus Christ!*

In keeping with the real meaning of *ekklēsia* as *an assembly gathered to worship and serve God* it would be better to translate the term *church of Christ* as *the holy congregation belonging to Christ*. Thus, the *church* as the *ekklēsia* are the *chosen holy and elect* people of Jesus who are called to *worship and serve God* in Christ.

**1 Cor 1:2b.** “*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.*”

I have previously mentioned that several commentators see in Paul’s concern an emphasis on the fact that the church at Corinth defined itself and its lifestyle more along the lines of the local Roman/Greek culture than in terms of God or a Christ centered culture!<sup>10</sup>

Paul’s greeting is a correction to the Corinthian church culture and practice.

We will learn from the style and content of his epistle that Paul repeatedly challenged the Corinthians regarding their sociological characteristics which were lacking a true Christian theological foundation and persona.

The expressions of *Christ* or *in Christ* or just *Christ* in some form appear nine times in the salutation and greeting, emphasizing the role that Christ must play in defining the life of the Corinthian Christians rather than the Corinthian sociological culture! Thiselton observes:

“*But as we shall note, Chrysostom and others see very good reasons for the deliberate repetition of **Christ Jesus** up to six times within a short compass. Paul wishes to draw the readers’ attention away from themselves and even away from the writer to Christ.*”<sup>11</sup>

It is not surprising that the word *Christ* occurs sixty-three times in 1 Corinthians!

*This is a letter to the Corinthians, but Christ is the center of the theology and theme of the pericope and epistle!*

It appears that the Christians in Corinth found themselves, like the paganized Canaanite Jewish people of God, in a precarious religious and sociological cultural environment which had repeatedly proven to be a historical religious problem for God’s people living in a pagan or foreign culture.

*God’s people are to be different from the world*, sanctified by God’s atoning work and through his sacrificial system. They are forgiven and cleansed. This leads into one of Paul’s favorite terms, *sanctified*, made holy, *hagiasmós*. Sanctification in one or more of its forms is found over twenty-one times in Paul’s epistles.

Paul drew attention to the Corinthian secularizing tendency by stressing that *the church is a new or different community, living in God*. They were intended to be a *sanctified* people! The Corinthian church *in God* were to be a *sanctified community living in a foreign culture* by different standards. Obviously, they were off target in their purpose!

I like 2 Thess 2:13-15 as an example of sanctification where the term *ἁγιασμῶ* from *ἁγιασμός*, *hagiasmós*, is translated *sanctification* by the Spirit:

”<sup>13</sup>*But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.* <sup>14</sup>*To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may*

<sup>10</sup> Ciampa, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, p. 73.

obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> *So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.*

The Greek structure used by Paul in 1 Cor 1:1 is interesting, *the church of God, the one sanctified in Christ, τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ* (singular) *τοῦ θεοῦ τῆ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, ἡγιασμένοις* (plural) *ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*. It explains that it is the church in Corinth *as a unit* (singular) to whom Paul is writing, with the church made up of *individuals* who have each *individually been sanctified* (plural) in Christ.

Τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ, *the church*, is a *dative singular* noun translated *to the church*, introducing the church as *the recipients of the epistle*.

Fitzmyer has interesting thoughts regarding the *perfect passive* participle ἡγιασμένοις that follows is a *plural* participle stressing the *sanctification of the church as a whole* who have *each been sanctified individually*. It stresses that the *whole church of God* in Corinth whose members have *each individually been sanctified by or in Christ Jesus*, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, have been *called as a church to be sanctified*. They are therefore *κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, called to be sanctified*.<sup>12</sup>

The construction κλητοῖς ἁγίοις is interesting! This does not simply mean that they are *being identified as holy*, but that they have been *called to be holy* or *sanctified servants of God in Christ*.

First, the Greek ἡγιασμένοις is a *perfect passive verb* from ἀγιάζω, *hagiázō*, which is linked to the noun *hágios, holy*, which means *to be holy like God*, that is, *to be cleansed, be pure, to be sanctified*.<sup>13</sup> In the perfect tense passive mood it means *to have been made holy* or *to be sanctified*. This is not something *you do for yourself*, but is *the result of external action*, in the Christian sense, *cleansed and made holy by the action of God and the Holy Spirit*.

Second, there is a secondary meaning to ἀγιάζω, *hagiázō*! It can also mean *to be consecrated and dedicated to the service of another*. A fine example of this use is 2 Tim 2:20-22.

*“In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. <sup>21</sup> If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated (ἡγιασμένον, hēgiasmenon) and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. <sup>22</sup> So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart”*.

In the sense that Paul uses the term there is intended *a purpose* in the sanctification, *to be of service to God*.

Third, the Corinthian Christians were sanctified in Christ Jesus with the purpose of being *called saints*. Thus κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, implies *they were sanctified to be called saints, or called to be saints*. The accusative nouns following the verb *sanctification* point to the direction of the sanctification, *called saints*, or more specifically *sanctified to be called saints, or to be saints!* Paul was a *called apostle* (κλητὸς, *called*, the nominative adjectival noun, plus the nominative noun of ἀπόστολος, *a called apostle*). Thus, Paul was an apostle, but a called apostle.

In like manner, the Corinthians were *sanctified called saints, or sanctified and called to be holy saints of Christ with a purpose* (1 Cor 1:1). The Corinthian saints are *sanctified called saints* (κλητοῖς accusative adjectival noun *called*, with the accusative noun ἁγίοις) with the sense that *they were saints, called to be saints with a divine purpose*.

This *dative adjectival* expression, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, must be seen in relation to the previous *dative participle construction* τῆ οὔσῃ ... ἐν Κορίνθῳ, ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, *the ones*

<sup>12</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> Zodhiates, ἀγιάζω, *hagiázō*.

*having been sanctified, cleansed, made holy are called to be saints, sanctified resolute servants of God in Christ.*

Thiselton observes regarding the dative participle ἡγιασμένοις, *the ones being sanctified*: “Paul applies the cognate terms related to ἅγιος, holy, twice here: sanctified, called to be holy people, ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις. The words translated sanctified and holy derive from the verbal and adjectival cognate forms: (1) ἀγιάζειν, *to dedicate, to set apart, to make holy, to consecrate* (cf. ἡγιασμένοις, perfect passive); and (2) ἅγιος, *holy person, one dedicated and set apart to God*. The latter may signify both status or role and character. Hence *saints* are those set apart as God’s own, and ideally *holy in life*, as a habituated pattern which has become reflected in a settled character. The Greek again reflects an LXX translation, this time of the Hebrew *qadosh*, (*holy, set apart from the world*<sup>14</sup>) which means *separate* or *set apart* in contrast to *being in common use*. The people of God and the things of God *reflect their special status as serving God, who is awesomely other (holy, IAF), transcendent in majesty and purity.*”<sup>15</sup>

The Corinthian Christians *in Christ* have been *cleansed* from the sins of the world or the age. They are called to be *holy, consecrated, and dedicated to living for God and Christ*.

They should be *characterized by true godliness, being like God and Christ*, totally different from the world, they are dedicated and belong to the service of God, *not to themselves!* Thus they must be different *from the Corinthian world or culture!* This is important in view of the incestual behavior of two of their members and the reluctance of the church to do anything about it, 1 Cor 5:1ff.

**1 Cor 1:2c.** The Corinthians have *been called to be saints in the name of Christ* as should be true of all Christians everywhere.

The Greek construction is interesting in that it indicates that the *Corinthians saw themselves even in their worldly lives as part of the universal church of Christ*, τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν, “*together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.*”

Paul’s phrase *in every place* raises some interesting points in that the expression has roots in the Old Testament, Jewish inscriptions, and elsewhere in the New Testament referring to an assembly of God’s people, or the place of such gathering as in the synagogue or temple for the purpose of worshipping. It became a euphemism for *the gathering of the believing community for worship wherever they gather*. Several leading scholars find in this little expression a *liturgical formula* referring to the practice of believers gathering together in assembly to worship God. Parallel expressions are found in several synagogue inscriptions as well as Old and New Testament references; Amos 8:3; Mal1:1; 1 Thess 1:8 (Greek text); and 1 Tim 2:8.<sup>16</sup>

To add to the *universality* of the principle of salvation in God and Jesus *alone, in every place* where Christians gather to worship, Paul adds that salvation is found not in any *one elitist*

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jeff A. Benner and [www.ancient-hebrew.org/definition/holy.htm](http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/definition/holy.htm). This word is frequently translated as “holy,” another abstract word. ... *Qadosh* literally means “to be set apart for a special purpose” ... Israel was *qadosh* because they were separated from the other nations as servants of Elohiym. The furnishings in the tabernacle were also *qadosh*, as they were not to be used for anything except for the work in the tabernacle. While we may not think of ourselves as “holy,” we are in fact set apart from the world to be Elohiym’s servants and his representatives.

<sup>15</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 76.

<sup>16</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 28; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 126, Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 30; Thiselton, pp. 77, 78.

group but *universally only in the Lord, both their Lord and ours*, αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν, both plural pronouns! Emphasizing the universality of the Christian faith at Rom 16:16 Paul added a universal greeting to the Romans from *all the churches of Christ salute you*. The Roman Christians in Corinth are not alone or unique in the business of being Christians in demanding situations!

Thiselton comments briefly on this important expression drawing attention to the Old Testament use of the expression:

“The phrase *all who call on the name of our Lord* comes directly from Joel 3:5 (cf. Ps 98:6), from which it is taken up in Rom 10:13 and Acts 2:21. The LXX of Joel 3:5 reads πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται, which is identical to Paul’s quotation in Rom 10:13, and the vocabulary of the shorter phrase in 1 Cor 1:2 remains the same, allowing for the grammatical variations imposed by the context of reference.”<sup>17</sup>

Paul was seriously opposed to the elitism he saw in the Corinthian church and argued that any form of superiority or elitism is not the right of one party or individuals in a Christian group!

Thiselton succinctly speaks out against Christian elitism and super spirituality, apparently a weakness within the Corinthian congregation:

“The key point is that *the Corinthians*, or at least those who cause the problems which Paul addresses, *are self-absorbed and self-centered. They think and act as if they had a monopoly on Christ and the Spirit.* They tend broadly to match the target of Nietzsche’s telling aphorism: “The ‘salvation of the soul,’ ... in plain English (implies) ‘the world revolves round me.’” *Jesus Christ is not the exclusive “Lord” who serves only the interests of some specific group.* He may indeed include them within wider Lordship, but he remains “both their Lord and ours.”<sup>18</sup>

The expression “*call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” is a common Jewish phrase meaning to *believe in the Lord for salvation*. Cf. Gen 4:26; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13.

### **1 Cor 1:3. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Although the combination of *grace* and *peace* became a standard Pauline greeting, the deep implications of both Greek and Jewish blessings were not absent in the early Christian circles. Their combination in this text in one expression is impacted by deep theological meaning. *It is strikingly Pauline.*

Interestingly, at 1 Tim 1:2 Paul inserted an additional thought, “*grace, mercy, and peace from God.*” The Greek ἔλεος *éleos*, *mercy*, and *compassion*, with a sense of *goodness in general* add an impressive component to Paul’s normal greeting.<sup>19</sup>

The *repeated* use of the *grace and peace* greeting, for Paul almost *common* greeting, should not indicate a superficial regularity. Both are loaded terms with significant theological meaning that become vital components of Paul’s basic theology.

*Grace* from χάρις, *cháris*, with roots in the traditional Greek greeting of χαίρειν, *chairein*, which was a simple Greek greeting of *joy and good will*, has considerable theological significance for Paul. The concept of grace in relation to God carries a theological dynamic of undeserved merit granted to believers in Christ.

Some Jewish connotations in the Hebrew *shalom* are present in Paul’s Greek greeting of χάρις, *cháris*. *Shalom* carried the sense of *peace and blessing with spiritual nuances*. As a Jew,

<sup>17</sup> Thiselton, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Zodiates, ἔλεος, *éleos*.

Paul would certainly have understood the sense of the rich meaning of *shalom* in a favored Christian greeting.

Furthermore, the root word of the Greek χαίρειν, *chairein*, is χαρά, *chará*, meaning *joy and gladness*. In Paul's use of χάρις, *cháris*, *grace*, there is thus a deep sense of *spiritual joy and gladness* bestowed on those being greeted.

Fee includes an excellent summary of Paul's use of *grace, charis*:

“Here is a marvelous example of Paul's Christianizing whatever he put his hand to. The traditional greeting in the Hellenistic world was *chairein*—the infinitive of the verb “to rejoice,” but in salutation meaning simply “Greetings!” ... In Paul's hands this now becomes *charis* (“grace”), to which is added the traditional Jewish greeting *shalom* (“peace”). This instead of “greetings,” it is “grace to you—and peace.” In a sense this sums up the whole of Paul's theological outlook.”<sup>20</sup>

From a careful study of Paul's writings such as Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, *grace* takes on a powerful contextual theological force in contrast to any common idea of justification or salvation *by personal works* such as was apparent among the super spiritual, self-aggrandizing Corinthians.

Although the common understanding among many Christians is that *grace* means *unmerited favor*, the word itself does not *alone* imply *unmerited favor*. It simply means *a kindness on the part of one for another*. In the Biblical and Christian context of *justification* and *salvation* in which the *atonement work is done by God in Christ and the Holy Spirit*, apart from man's efforts, *grace takes on the deep theological flavor of a kind action by God rooted in his eternal love for man and not in man's personal accomplishments!*

Paul expresses this beautifully at Col 2:11ff and Eph 2:4ff.

Col 2:11f “*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; <sup>12</sup> and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.*

Eph 2:4ff. “*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not because of works, lest any man should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

Zodhiates comments on the *theological* implications of Paul's use of the Greek χάρις, *cháris*, observing that it refers to:

“that which causes joy, pleasure, gratification, favor, acceptance, for a kindness granted or desired, a benefit, thanks, gratitude. A favor done without expectation of return; *the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor.* *Cháris* stands in direct

<sup>20</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 31.

antithesis to *érga* ... works, the two being mutually exclusive. *God's grace affects man's sinfulness and not only forgives the repentant sinner, but brings joy and thankfulness to him. It changes the individual to a new creature without destroying his individuality (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:8, 9).*"<sup>21</sup>

Paul further drives home the point that such grace and peace come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and not from personal social or cultural merit!

### **1 Cor 1:4-9. Spiritual giftedness is a blessing from God out of his grace in Christ.**

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

**1 Cor 1:4.** It could appropriately be said that this first verse, 1:4 summarizes the heart of Paul's response to the Corinthian problems, *"I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus."* The source of any spiritual blessings in Corinth lay in *God's calling and grace* not in Corinthian personal endowments.

*"In Christ"* they had been spiritually enriched with *all speech and knowledge*; two characteristics obviously praised by the Corinthian elitist.

**1 Cor 1:5-7.** Apparently, as we learn from some of the concerns Paul addresses, *Paul had been criticized by the Corinthian elites for not speaking with the same excellent rhetoric and Hellenistic claims for wisdom that some itinerant preachers demonstrated.* Paul reminds the Corinthians that they had already *in Christ* received all the *special speech and knowledge* they needed for eternal life and the spiritual giftedness regardless of his supposed personal failures.

Paul concluded this profoundly loaded special salutation with the reminder that the Corinthians had been *called by God himself into a special fellowship with Jesus Christ.*

Just in case they missed his implication, Paul stressed that neither Rome nor a panoply of Greek and pagan gods was lord of their lives, for Jesus Christ, *"is our Lord"*! The plural τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν, *our lord* stresses that Jesus is the Lord of *all Christians, not simply of one group of exclusivist super spirituals. The Church of God assembled in Corinth, although blessed by God* was in reality only one member of a much larger congregation of God's elect people!

**1 Cor 1:9.** The concept of being *called by God* has roots in Israel's *election by God's to be his chosen people through whom he would carry out his special redemptive mission.* The church belonging to Christ and *called in Christ* was a continuation of *God's elect people.*

The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible on *election* observes:

*"When the verb "elect" is used theologically in the Bible, it usually has God as its subject. In the OT it is used for God's choice of Israel to be his people (cf. Acts 13:17). Israel became God's people, not because they decided to belong to him, but because he took the initiative and chose them. Nor did God's choice rest on any particular virtues that his people exemplified, but rather on his promise to their forefather Abraham (Dt 7:7, 8). God also chose their leaders, such as Saul and David (1 Sam 10:24; 2 Sam 6:21), apart from any popular vote by the people. The word thus indicates God's prerogative in deciding what shall happen, independently of human choice..."*

<sup>21</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament.*

The word translated “elect” is generally found in the plural and refers either to the members of God’s people as a whole or to those in a particular local church (Rom 8:33; Col 3:12; 1 Thes 1:4; 2 Tm 2:10; Tit 1:1; 1 Pt 1:1; 2 Pt 1:10; Rev 17:14; Rom 16:13 and 2 Jn 13 have the singular form). The use of the plural may partly be explained by the fact that most of the NT letters are addressed to groups of people rather than to individuals. More probably, however, the point is that God’s election is concerned with the creation of a people rather than the calling of isolated individuals.”<sup>22</sup>

In view of the critical nature of Paul’s comments about to follow, and in view of the apparent discord implied in his previous several contacts with the Corinthian *elitist leadership*, Paul writes a positive salutation which should indicate his deep love and concern for the Corinthians despite their apparent unchristian behavior. We should note that the negative comments Paul makes regarding Corinthians practices is also an indication of his deep love for them. After all, many of them were his spiritual convert and children in Christ!

An interesting double implication rubs through First Corinthians, commendation—condemnation. We see this also at 1 Cor 11:2 and 11:17.

“<sup>11:2</sup> *I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you ... <sup>11:17</sup> but in the following instructions I do not commend you.”*

**Summary - The church of God at Corinth was a new congregation of God’s elect covenant people in Christ, called by God with a kingdom purpose!**

Although election or calling was not a theme Paul developed in detail in his opening salutation, it nevertheless runs beneath his greeting and through his theology in general, “*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints (consecrated and dedicated) together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.*”

We should remember that Paul was a deeply convinced Hebrew who understood well the *covenant promise of election in God’s purpose*. God calls people to be his children in his kingdom with a kingdom perspective in mind. In true Jewish theological form, Paul intended the Corinthians, who obviously had some connection to the Synagogue, to understand *that God had called them as members of God’s new congregation in Christ to be a critical ingredient in carrying out his eternal kingdom purpose*.

As relatively new Christians they probably did not yet fully understand this, but Paul intended to progressively through his Corinthian letters and continued contact build this insight in them. They were no longer simply Corinthians with the freedom to live as Corinthians. They were now the covenant called people of God, a covenant kingdom, with a singular purpose, to witness for God through their lives and teaching.

Being the elect people *called by God in Christ* carried significant theological purpose far beyond being a church or congregation (*ekklēsia*) of people living in Corinth!

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<sup>22</sup> Elwell & Beitzel, “Elect, Election,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 682.

## Chapter 4: 1 Cor 1:10-4:21: Report from Chloe's people

In this section Paul explains that he was responding to a report by, or from, "Chloe's people." Paul does not identify them but explains that he is troubled by the negative aspects of the report regarding congregational disunity developments in Corinth.

This pericope is only 8 verses in length, but it introduces and covers Paul's primary concern throughout his Corinthian correspondence. Disunity over interpersonal and spiritual elitism, and the Christianization of the church detract from the theological heart and power of his gospel; Jesus Christ and his resurrection. In some way each of these issues Paul will discuss in Corinthians points back to the super-spirituality and self-aggrandizement of certain leaders in Corinth. It sets the tone of a line of thought that runs throughout the epistle.

### 1 Cor 1:10-3:4. The primary problem; the spiritual wisdom of God verses the human carnal wisdom of the Corinthians

#### 1 Cor 1:10-17. Developing factions over spiritual leaders

*"I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." <sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; <sup>15</sup> lest anyone should say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."*

#### Introduction

To take his concern further than mere supposition, Paul even mentions some of the names of apostles and teachers some were claiming. This is interesting since most Christians today remember and honor the teacher or minister that taught and baptized them. But in the case of the Corinthians, they were taking this beyond honoring their teachers. *They were claiming personal positions of rank depending on the supposed authority or rank of their teacher, and even attributing their salvation to the one who had baptized them*

Ranking or giving credit for esteemed teachers, even apostles, was creating *dissension*, or *schisms* within the congregation to the point of ascribing their salvation to their favored teacher! Paul's criticism is severe! *"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"*

Doing something, even being baptized in the name of someone in the biblical sense means having faith in the teacher or baptizer for their salvation. Luke recorded that Peter had made a statement to the high priests Annas and Caiaphas in Jerusalem in Acts 4:12 regarding such matters:

*"be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

It is possible that when Peter made this statement to the high priests in Jerusalem Paul as Saul of Tarsus had been present and had heard this statement!

### 1 Cor 1:10, 11. Paul's strong exhortation in the context of schisms

*“<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”*

Paul opens it with a strong appeal indicating the seriousness of the Corinthian situation. The Greek word appeal, παρακαλέω, *parakalēō*, has an interesting “dual meaning.” Its common usage can refer to *comforting* one another, but a secondary meaning can refer to *exhorting* one another.”

Zodhiates observes regarding the opening words Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, “*I appeal to you*”:

“Παρακαλέω, *parakalēō* is contracted ... from *pará* ... to the side of, and *kalēō* ... to call, to aid, help, comfort, encourage ... to comfort, exhort, desire, call for, beseech with a stronger force than *aitēō*, to ask or request.”<sup>1</sup>

It would seem obvious from the context of παρακαλέω, *parakalēō*, in this pericope, that Paul did not intend this word to mean *comfort*. In contrast, he was making a *strong appeal or exhortation* to the Corinthians to see where their decisions were taking them. The verb *parakalēō* is a *present indicative active* verb which implies a *constant sense of I am employing you* stressing the present urgent condition and need of the issue.

The fact that *he calls on the name or person of Jesus Christ* to support his exhortation stresses its urgency. That he immediately refers to the *dissentions*, σχίσματα, *schisms*<sup>2</sup>, among them, indicates a more serious appeal than to comfort them! *There is a sense of extreme urgency in Paul's appeal!*

Paul considered that unity within a congregation to be a critical *identifying characteristic* of the new congregation of God's people, the church. Unity of believers in Christ is well supported by both Jesus and Paul.

Jesus had encouraged such among his disciples. On the night before his betrayal Jesus had urged his disciples to *love one another*. This would be a clear sign before the world of faithfulness to Jesus and an identifying *sign Christian discipleship*, John 13:31-35.

“<sup>When</sup> *he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; <sup>32</sup> if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup> Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ <sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Later in his epistle to the Ephesians Paul developed this theme in more specificity at Eph 4:1-11.

“<sup>1</sup>, *therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of us all, who is above all*

<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates, παρακαλέω, *parakalēō*.

<sup>2</sup> Zodhiates, σχίσμα *schisma*; a split, tear as in mind or sentiment, and divisions into factions.<sup>2</sup>

*and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."*

Profound characteristics and ingredients for Christian unity flow out of Paul's mind in this magnificent pericope. We see *a strong appeal for unity based on the unity of the Godhead and the one baptism into one body and the working of the Holy Spirit.*

At 1 Cor 12:1-13 Paul will stress this point further in considerable detail, note vs. 1 Cor 12:12, 13.

*"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."*

That schisms are *cognitively preventable* can be seen in Paul's statement *that they should be of the same mind and the same judgment.* The Corinthians needed to make a strong cognitive effort to break the schismatic tendencies in an ethnically and sociologically diverse congregation.

### **The Problem of baptism and partisanship**

We gather from Paul's remarks in his pericope that the Corinthians were defining themselves and their "rank" in the congregation along elitist lines, favoring certain leaders above others!

*First*, they were ranking themselves along the likes of the supposed status of their former leaders or teachers, some were obviously apostles, but others prominent preachers and teachers.

However, Jesus had taught his disciples that the greatest in the kingdom would be the servants, not the ones being served! He also defined them as little children!

At Matt 18:1-14 we read that the disciples asked Jesus "*who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*" Obviously, the disciples were caught up in the mindset of the age. A kingdom implied a king and servants ranking in some order. Jesus initial response was that the greatest in the kingdom would be *disciples like children, implying humble and vulnerable* servants, open to abuse.

Shortly after this, when discussing the kingdom of heaven with his disciples Jesus said *the first would be last and the last first*, Matt 20:1-16. Following this at Matt 20:20 we read of the mother of James and John asking Jesus a favor that the mother of most concerned mothers would ask!

*"Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. <sup>21</sup> And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." <sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." <sup>23</sup> He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." <sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

*Second*, the Corinthians were more proud of who it was who had baptized them than what had happened to them when they had been baptized such as salvation by in the name of Christ or from being in a *right relationship with Jesus.*

There is nothing wrong with recognizing those who had led us to Christ and salvation as long as we recognize that our salvation does not lie in the baptizer, a preacher or missionary, but in the one into whom we were baptized, Jesus Christ! Although Paul had obviously baptized some, he plaid this down with his coy comment *“<sup>14</sup> I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.”*

One of the clearest statements of Paul regarding baptism and the one into whom we are baptized is found in Rom 6:3-5. Notice how Paul ties baptism, the one onto whom we have been baptized, and our resurrection with Jesus’ resurrection.

*“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

*<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”*

Salvation comes through being baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ into the body of Jesus Christ*, not by being baptized by an apostle!

### 1 Cor 1:13-17. Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthians

Paul felt that the Corinthians were giving honor to him rather than to Jesus Christ

*“Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; <sup>15</sup> lest anyone should say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”*

Paul’s point is clear! His ministry and commission was to preach the gospel to the point where people would hear and believe the message of salvation in Jesus, and be baptized *into the name or person of Jesus*, not Paul or Peter or Apollos!

Perhaps it is here in this one verse that we engage a key issue and theme of Paul’s concern and gospel.

**1 Cor 1:17.** *“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”*

Although baptism was obviously an important doctrine to Paul and his ministry; it is mentioned over twenty times as a fundamental principle or action in his preaching and teaching; he clearly held that it was not central or pivotal to his theology.

He preached faith, repentance, and baptism, *but the heart of his theology of atonement and justification was the death and resurrection of Jesus, not baptism.*

In both Rom 6:3-5 and Col 2:11 ff Paul explained that baptism through faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection was the point where one gained access to the real power of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

*Rom 6:3-6 “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

*<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.”*

Col 2:11-13 “*and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.* <sup>11</sup> *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ;* <sup>12</sup> *and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.* <sup>13</sup> *And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,”*

### **1 Cor 1:17-2:5. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the saving power of God**

Moving on from the discussion of being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ rather than Paul, Peter, and Apollos, Paul defined in clear terms his theology of salvation. *It is through believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on a Roman cross as God’s Messiah and king of his kingdom.*

The cross of Jesus was a fundamental problem for the Jew, for it seemed incoherent to them that the promised Messiah king would die so incongruously! How could one become king of a promised eternal kingdom, cf. Dan7:13-27, by dying on a pagan cross?

To the Jewish politically/religiously minded person the death of a Messiah at the hands of the pagan Romans was simply unacceptable!

However, as Paul so astutely pointed out in his letter to the Romans, for centuries the Jews had not understood the message of the suffering *servant messiah* of Isaiah 42-49! Paul reflected on this failure of the Jew hearing Isaiah at Rom10:18-21:

*“But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”*

<sup>19</sup> *Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.”* <sup>20</sup> *Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”* <sup>21</sup> *But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”*

The Jews were not alone in having issues with the doctrine of a crucified and resurrected savior! Although the death of Jesus was not a critical issue to the Greek mind, although some Greek philosophers as were reluctant of adopt the theology of the cross as in Athens on Paul’s visit as recorded in Acts 17:32, overall, *it was the resurrection of a dead body that raised serious question so the platonic Greek philosophy.* Since the Greek considered the body to be corrupt and destined for mortality, why raise a dead body for further corruption!

Fitzmyer astutely observes an age-long principle, and human fallacy, regarding *human wisdom*. Paul notices this fallacy of human wisdom in the verse that follow, 1 Cor 1:18ff. Note Fitzmyer’s comments:

*“In effect both the Jew and the Gentile became the adversaries of the crucified Christ. The cross always remains a scandal and foolishness for Jew and Gentile, inasmuch as it exposes man’s illusion that he can transcend himself and effect his own salvation, that he can all by himself maintain his own strength, his own wisdom, his own piety, and his own self-praise even toward God.”* <sup>3</sup>

To the Jew and the Greek, the death of Jesus and his resurrection were deemed to be foolishness, 1 Cor 1:18-25. His response to the Corinthians was clear!

<sup>3</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 160.

*“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.” <sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”*

After stating in unambiguous terms, *“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”* Paul focused his argument on an issue that he saw as a fundamental weakness in the Corinthian situation; their predilection for Graeco-Roman philosophical wisdom. For God had previously said at Isa 29:14, *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.”*

Paul notices this thought, asking, *“<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world. For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”*

That the Jew and Gentile mockingly referred to Paul’s gospel message as folly or foolishness, Paul responded, 1 Cor 1:21:

*“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”*

Paul makes a striking point here! It is not my man’s efforts and wisdom that God saves people! *It is through accepting the grace of God and believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus that God saves people.*

From a brief study of the New Testament and the apostolic preaching it is clear that the death and resurrection of Jesus was perceived and proclaimed as good news, not foolishness. It was *the euangelion, the gospel*, a loaded term that both Jews and Gentiles understood for it already conveyed both political and religious overtones to both the Jews and Gentiles!

Paul clearly had demonstrated to the Corinthians that the death and resurrection of Jesus was the climax of God’s redemptive activity which had been accompanied in their experience by powerful signs of the Spirit.

As such, the death and resurrection became and focal point of apostolic preaching as Paul so clearly argues in 1 Cor 1:18-25:

*“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written,*

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.”*

*<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

<sup>25</sup> *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*”

Paul did not leave the issue as a doctrinal or theological soteriological argument, but immediately focused his argument on the Corinthians themselves! The first Corinthian converts did not come from an elitist high society of Corinth, but from ordinary people! **1 Cor 1:26.** The Social standing of the early Corinthian converts.

*“For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; <sup>27</sup> but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; <sup>31</sup> therefore, as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.”*”

Although Paul had experienced some success in his early preaching in Corinth it appears that most of the converts were from the lower working class, not the aristocracy, or ruling class.<sup>4</sup>

The wisdom of God’s working in Corinth should be seen in his calling and election of fallibly human beings, not super spirituals to achieve his purpose!

*“<sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”*

Paul’s last comment in this pericope is a mild chastisement! God did not choose the super educated and influential Corinthians or Romans to call the Corinthians into his purpose and redemption, he chose the Synagogue of Jews and the working class to be the foundation and avenue to his calling!

### **1 Cor 2:1-5. The heart of Paul’s preaching – the power of the Cross**

*“<sup>1</sup> When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; <sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*

Paul’s response to the Corinthians in this pericope is both defensive and positive! Defensive in that it was in response to the criticism of some that his preaching was not on a par with the Corinthian philosophic rhetorical style of their philosophers, flowered with their customary oratorical lofty words of wisdom.

In contrast, Paul’s preaching was a simple message based on the wisdom, knowledge, and power of God accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit! Paul’s preaching simply pronounced the redeeming power of God in the death of Jesus on the cross, and Jesus’ resurrection from the dead! *“My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”*

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<sup>4</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 161, 162; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 83f; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p.72f.

Although the Corinthians were living in a “Graeco-Roman Hellenistic culture”<sup>5</sup> which will have relevance to Paul’s discussion of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15, they were nevertheless Romans, impressed by the power of Rome in its emperors and gods. In an address to the Romans in his epistle to them, Paul emphasized *the powerful working of God through the Spirit in Jesus’ resurrection*, Rom 1:1-4.

*“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God<sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,<sup>3</sup> the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh<sup>4</sup> and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

At Rom 8:9-11 Paul again emphasized the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection.

*“<sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if (since) in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if (since) Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If (since) the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.”<sup>6</sup>*

Notice Paul’s emphasis, *“since you are in Christ, and since you are in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will raise you with Christ and give life to your mortal bodies.”*

Thus, 1 Cor 2;1-5 echoes the heart of Paul’s theology! The atoning power of cross of Jesus Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection of those in Christ!

Paul expresses this beautifully on this in his letter to the Colossians at Col 1:24-29:

*“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints.<sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ.<sup>29</sup> For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.”*

Rom 1:16, 17 is possibly Paul’s finest affirmation of the power of the gospel message and of this theology:

*“<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.””*

Clearly Paul wanted the Corinthians to remember their early experience when he had arrived in Corinth. He had preached to them in their synagogue and the city square, had been brought by

<sup>5</sup> I use the expression Graeco-Roman Hellenistic culture to refer to the complex culture with both Roman and Greek influences and a Hellenistic philosophical frame of mind regarding a corrupt physical body and its mortal perishable future.

<sup>6</sup> The three small conditional adverbial conjunctions translated *if* in English in the Greek form first class conditional clauses, *ei* with indicative verbs express a condition of fact. In the context of Rom 8 the *ei* and *if* are better translated as *since*!

them for mock trial before Gallio, the proconsul of Rome Sosthenes, he ruler of the Synagogue had been beaten with Paul but he had responded to the preaching and had been baptized, Acts 18:1-17, 1 Cor 1:1.

Paul's point was that the power of the gospel was in the power of the message concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus, and a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit, and not in eloquent philosophical words:

*“and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*

### **1 Cor 2:6-3:4. True wisdom is received from God through His Spirit**

*“<sup>6</sup>Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. <sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

<sup>9</sup> But, as it is written,

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him,”*

<sup>10</sup> *God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. <sup>13</sup> And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.*

<sup>14</sup> *The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup> The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. <sup>16</sup> “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.*

<sup>3:1</sup> *But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely men?”*

There is some discussion among scholars as to the nature of Paul's discussion of wisdom in this pericope. Obviously, he was contrasting the Hellenistic wisdom which the super Corinthians were using as their category for criticizing Paul's message and preaching. Paul does not immediately condemn them, but shortly describes their charge as immature; the greater wisdom which comes from God which he proclaims is far superior to their human wisdom..

Fee points out that this pericope contains some “bite,” implying some sarcasm in describing the Corinthians' wisdom as being *immature wisdom*.<sup>7</sup> Paul contrasts the *unspiritual “super spiritual Corinthians”* with the real *spiritual man* who is *guided by the Spirit of God*, not human wisdom!

<sup>7</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 104.

**1 Cor 2:6.** “*Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.*” Any thinking mature Corinthian would know that human wisdom is transitory and doomed to pass away with the mortal nature of man.

**1 Cor 2:7.** The wisdom from which Paul draws has its roots in God’s eternal nature and purpose in Christ. “*But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.*”

**1 Cor 2:8-13.** Paul states that had the rulers of this world, the Jews and Romans, had not understood God’s wisdom for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord. What they missed, God has now through his Spirit and the resurrection of Jesus demonstrated their error.

*.<sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.<sup>9</sup> But, as it is written,*

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him,”*

*<sup>10</sup> God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.<sup>11</sup> For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”*

Paul makes an interesting point here which he would also express to the Romans at Rom 8:26 ff. The Spirit who knows God’s mind also knows man’s mind! The natural man’s mind, however, does not know God’s mind without the intervention of the Holy Spirit. The wisdom that originates in man’s mind is transitory, but the wisdom that originates in God’s mind and is revealed by the Spirit is eternal! The Corinthians must determine which wisdom they chose to follow!

**1 Cor 2:12, 13** Paul explains that in order to understand the gifts bestowed from God, man needs a deeper wisdom than human wisdom; he needs a wisdom that is in touch with God, not with human experience! It is this “spirit wisdom” that Paul claims he has preached to the Corinthians, not human wisdom. “*Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.<sup>13</sup> And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.*”

**1 Cor 2:14-16.**

*“The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.<sup>15</sup> The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.<sup>16</sup> “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”*

Paul draws attention to the fact that several of the Corinthians claimed to be spiritual because they had experienced the gifts of the Spirit in some form. His argument was that this could not be so, they could not be spiritually minded because they neither discerned nor understood spiritual things.

Fitzmyer argues that Paul was citing an expression from the Septuagint reading of Isa 40: which reads “*Who has known the mind of the Lord; who has been his counselor, who instructs him.*” His point is that the Christian is influenced by the mind, spirit, or psyche of Christ. He thinks like Christ!<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 185.

In their schismatic and divisive behavior, attested by Chloe's people, they did not have *the mind or spiritually intellectual psyche of Christ*. The Corinthians were manifesting the worldly psyche of the Corinthians!

At **1 Cor 3:1** Paul changes his mood and becomes satirical!

*“But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely men?”*

He implies that those who thought they were spiritual are merely of the flesh, just immature babies! The expressions men of the flesh and mere babies would certainly challenge their *super spiritual* attitude! The word in Greek translated *flesh*, σαρκίνοις *sárkinois*, is possibly more appropriately translated in the King James Bible as *carnal*. A person fluent on Greek would have seen the word *sarkikós* lurking as an intended Pauline slur in meaning! Σαρκίνοις, *sárkinois* certainly implied a carnal tendency to satisfy the flesh, implying sinfulness or a sinful propensity.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than acting like mature *spiritual* Christians, the Corinthians were acting like newborn infants needing more mature spiritual food than they had been consuming! They simply needed to grow up in Christ, fed by the *psyche of Christ*, not by the *carnal* world!

## 1 Cor 3:5-23. The nature of true apostles; co-workers of God

### 1 Cor 3:5-9. Exactly “what” are Apollos, Paul.

*“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.”*

Paul does not ask *who* Apollos or Paul might be! The Corinthians would know who they were. That was not his point. The question was *what* are they? They are not overlords or superior saints. They are *servants* who *serve the Lord*. They planted the seeds of the gospel by their example and preaching. The *success* or *power* of their preaching was the *work of God*. The sower and planter, which is the preacher and teacher are not important. The [power lies in the power of their preaching, hat I the power of the cross, not their words or erudition.

Their success of the teachers and preachers is their working together with God who does the real work.

Think back to 1 Cor 2:1-5:

*“When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; <sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”*

<sup>9</sup> Zodhiates. Σαρκίνοις, *sárkinois*, and σαρκικός, *sarkikós*.

**1 Cor 3:10-15. Paul, a master builder on the foundation of Christ.**

“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. <sup>14</sup> If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.”

The key to this pericope, and to the thrust of this section of 1 Corinthians is verse 11, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” The preacher lays the foundation by *preaching Christ*, his death and resurrection, God does the rest!

Rom 10:15-17 lays down the same message:

“But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); <sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. <sup>11</sup> The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. <sup>13</sup> For, “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

<sup>14</sup> But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!” <sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.”

**1 Cor 3:14,15.** Paul’s closing comment to this section challenging the Corinthians to understand that what God has been building in Corinth through his evangelistic program will stand firm even if the church ails, but it needs purifying. *If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.* Fitzmyer adds that these words;

“do not speak of purification by refining fire, but rather of a testing of constancy and subsequent deliverance achieved only with real difficulty. They thus give the addressees a criterion for judging preachers who have appeared on the scene in Corinth after Paul and caution them about overestimating their worth.”<sup>10</sup>

**1 Cor 3:16-23. The Corinthian church must be the temple of God**

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

<sup>18</sup> Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,

“He catches the wise in their craftiness,”

<sup>10</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 201.

<sup>20</sup> and again,

“The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise,  
that they are futile.”

<sup>21</sup> So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, <sup>23</sup> and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”

**1 Cor 3:16.** Paul’s opening comment to this pericope is intended to remind the Corinthians of what they are supposed to already know! Fitzmyer observes that this expression “Do you not know” can be translated “Do you not realize ...” Paul uses it frequently in 1 Corinthians, at least nine times, once at 1 Cor 11:3 translated as “I want you to realize ...”<sup>11</sup> As was standard procedure in the New Testament evangelistic message, the Corinthians had been taught that the Holy Spirit was a gift from God who dwelt in them, Acts 2:38, 5:32.

The presentation of the *ekklēsia* church, even a local congregation, as the temple of God was a common feature in New Testament thought. The imagery was not only drawn from Judaism and its dominant temple in Jerusalem and the role it played as the center of divine worship and ministry, but also as the place where God dwelt. The concept of church as the naos of God bore profound meaning from the Temple as naos in Judaism with its *holy place* in which only the high priest could venture. The writer of Hebrews (passim) expresses the privilege all Christians have if entering the very holy of holies into God’s presence. Note his relevant thoughts at Heb 10:19-27.

“<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

<sup>26</sup> For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries.”

The temple or sanctuary as the dwelling place of the gods was a common feature of most religions of the day.<sup>12</sup>

The wording in Greek regarding this temple is meaningful. Paul could have used the Greek word *hierón*, but chose to use the word *ναός*, *naós*<sup>13</sup> which implies the actual dwelling place of God rather than the holy place of religious activity. Certainly, Paul will later stress in 1 Cor 11-14 that the *ekklēsia* congregation is the place of holy religious activity, but here he stresses in that the *ekklēsia* congregation is actually where God dwells in Spirit.

Fee adds the profound thought that Paul’s use of *ναός*, *naós* is loaded with meaning.

“The imagery of the gathered church as God’s temple, which occurs twice more in Paul (2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21), is a pregnant one both for the Jewish Paul and for Gentile

<sup>11</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 202; Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 158.

<sup>12</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 158f.

<sup>13</sup> *Zodhiates*, *ναός*, *naós* ... noun from *naíō*, to dwell. A dwelling, temple. In Class. Gr., mostly equivalent to the syn. word *hierón* ... the entire area of a temple which included the inner temple (though sometimes *naós* referred only to the interior and most sacred part of a temple where the image of a god was set up).

Corinthians. The word used (*naos*) refers to the actual sanctuary, the place of the deity's dwelling, in contrast to the word *hieron*, which referred to the temple precincts as well as the sanctuary."<sup>14</sup>

Paul was reminding the Corinthians that the *ekklesia* congregation was not only where they gathered together to celebrate their love feasts, which they in fact desecrated, but was where they met God in all of his holiness. *Surely, appropriate holy behavior was essential in such situations.*

**1 Cor 3:17.** In language that would be familiar to most ancient traditions the divinity dwelt in temples, and to destroy the temple was to not only destroy the temple but also the divinity! But in this case, Paul adds a serious thought, if the Corinthians destroy their temple, God will destroy them! Since they had desecrated the temple by their schismatic attitude, they were no longer the temple of God!

*"<sup>17</sup>If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."*

**1 Cor 3:18.** Paul warns the Corinthians to not let their elitist carnal wisdom deceive them! Being wise in their Graeco-Roman wisdom amounted to nothing in God's eyes other than foolishness.

*"<sup>18</sup>Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. <sup>19</sup>For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,*

*"He catches the wise in their craftiness,"*

<sup>20</sup>*and again,*

*"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."*

**1 Cor 3:21.** Paul returns to the opening statements or issues of this long section; *their chosen heroes are nothing more than human, even if they are apostles!* Their leaders are just like them, not super spirituals, *but they all belong to Christ who belongs to God.*

*"<sup>21</sup>So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup>whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, <sup>23</sup>and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."*

### **1 Cor 4:1-21. The ministry and apostles will be judged by God, not man.**

Paul closes this section which opened in a serious appeal to the Corinthians regarding information from Chloe's people the Corinthian Christian aggrandizement of their leaders and teachers. Paul now closes this discussion with another earnest appeal to leave the judging of leaders and teachers to God.

#### **1 Cor 4:1-5. The apostles are servants of Christ**

Key to this pericope is the statement that the Corinthians should regard Paul, Apollos, and Peter simply as *servants of Christ*. Paul is not impressed by their evaluation of himself and makes the point that he and others and their ministry will be evaluated by God, not the Corinthians

*"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup>Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. <sup>3</sup>But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup>I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup>Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before*

<sup>14</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 158.

*the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.*

Paul will add an interesting thought along these lines in his next letter, our 2 Corinthians, at 2 Cor 3:4-6:

*“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, <sup>6</sup> who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”*

### 1 Cor 4:6-13. The humility of the Apostles

*“I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. <sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?”*

The thought Paul adds is interesting, “*that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written.*” Although this is a good principle, *what is it that has been written* to which Paul alludes. *And where was it written?*

Several possible suggestions have been made based on little firm evidence. For varied discussion cf. the scholars referenced below.<sup>15</sup>

Thiselton observes, “The speculative theory that the notorious difficulties of this verse are due to a series of scribal misunderstandings and corrections” are not sustainable.<sup>16</sup> He adds:

“The next clause provides one of the most technically interesting and notorious examples for textual and exegetical discussion. Collins heads it “An Enigmatic Saying” and *confesses that it is difficult to understand*, while Schrage *also* views it as “*one of the most difficult places of the whole epistle.*” In general seven possible interpretations of the phrase invite consideration:

- (i) that the reference to **what is written** rests on a misunderstood scribal gloss ...
- (ii) that **what is written** refers to the OT in general, i.e., the principle of *sola scriptura* (Bengel, Schlatter, Leitzman, Bruce, Barrett);
- (iii) that the phrase means **what is written** in this epistle (Calvin [this or iv]; Cranmer)
- (iv) that it refers to what Paul has quoted as scripture already in the epistle (Hooker, Fee, Kleinknecht, Wolff, Lange);
- (v) that it alludes to **what is written** in church regulations or earlier letters (Parry) or explicit public “church regulations” or “bylaws” (Hanges)
- (vi) that it refers to (ii) or (v) as a familiar or accepted maxim (Godet, Moffatt, Bruce, in the sense of ii; Ross and Welborn in the sense of v)
- (vii) that part of the “childishness” of the addressees is like that of children unable to read letters properly (Ebner).<sup>17</sup>

Finding an Old Testament citation to *what is written* has not been productive.

<sup>15</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, pp. 180 ff; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 214ff; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 134ff; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 348 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 348 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Thiselton, A. C., *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 351–352.

As mentioned above, a crucial challenge in this text is presented in the Greek syntax<sup>18</sup> which itself is difficult and has several possibilities which have challenged scholars ever since the early church father John Chrysostom, ca. CE 347 commented on its difficulty.

The syntax of the phrase we are considering, “*do not go beyond what is written*,” can be misleading, and is one in which the theology itself is difficult to interpret. Although scholars have sometimes chosen to discuss the syntax in various ways, proposals regarding the syntax have provided little that is conclusive or finally definitive in the meaning of the clause.

Regarding the meaning of the expression, one suggestion is that the words *was written*, (γέγραπται, *gegraptai*, being a perfect passive verb indicate *what was written in the past and was still pertinent when Paul was writing this text*.

*This could be something that Paul had previously written to them in his original first letter, which we do not have, but to which he does refer in 1 Cor 5:9;*

*“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; <sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup> But rather I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one.”*

Paul had possibly written to them about their self-aggrandizing tendency, and encouraged them to stop praising teachers for their salvation. This ties into the next possibility, that it refers back to what he had already written in 1 Cor 1:10-17 regarding not prizing or judging one another based on leadership preferences in a schismatic manner.

Paul obviously was relating this expression to the immediate context of *not esteeming him or others* for any gifts they have been given, obviously in context, *special spiritual gifts*. Christians do not esteem themselves or others for what God has done or is doing.

Fitzmyer and some scholars suggest that the expression is drawn from some Corinthian philosophical saying to which Paul is pointing, possibly a local idiom.<sup>19</sup> “*Do not let your behavior go beyond what is appropriate.*”

**1 Cor 4:8-13.** This pericope brings Paul’s comments to this discussion to a conclusion. “*In your relationships with one another do not live like the world, like Corinthians. We live for Christ’s sake, not our own prestige!*”

*“<sup>8</sup> Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! <sup>9</sup> For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. <sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. <sup>11</sup> To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, <sup>12</sup> and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when*

<sup>18</sup> Syntax has reference to the arrangement of words in a sentence demonstrating the complexity of a writer's or speaker's sentences when creating a formal or informal level of speech or writing. It refers to the arrangement of words and phrases that create well-formed sentences in a language. In Greek the relationship between parts of speech, between verbs and nouns, between conjunctions and nouns, can complicate exactly what the writer intended. [Britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com) defines syntax as “the arrangement of words in sentences, clauses, and phrases, and the study of the formation of sentences and the relationship of their component parts. Sentences are constructed from phrases or groups of words that have a closer relationship to each other than to the words outside the phrase.”

<sup>19</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 214ff. Cf. also Garland, Fee, Thiselton.

persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.”

In Christ, not Corinth, you are filled with all the glory you need. “*We (the apostles and leaders) are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.*”

### **1 Cor 4:14-21. Paul appeals to the Corinthians as a father**

“*I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup> For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> I urge you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup> Therefore I sent to you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup> Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. <sup>19</sup> But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. <sup>21</sup> What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?*”

In keeping with his encouragement to the Corinthians to not esteem their teachers, he urges them to imitate him, obviously his humble attitude, for they had criticized him for being a person of the lower class, working with his hands, rather than being like the super spirituals of their liking.

**1 Cor 4:15.** Like a father, he was concerned for his “children in Christ” whom he recognized as “*beloved children*” rather than opponents.

**1 Cor 4:17-19.** Paul had sent Timothy to continue his work among them with the promise that he would come to them to encourage them and evaluate their spirit.

Notice **1 Cor 4:17**, Paul referred to their remembering his teachings, which teachings he taught everywhere in every church.

**1 Cor 4:19-21** is not a threat, but a promise to hold them accountable in Christ for their behavior.

“*But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. <sup>21</sup> What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?*”

There is more to the kingdom of God than bold argumentative talk. The Power of the Holy Spirit in conversion and living is the proof of Christian spirituality.

## Chapter 5: 1 Cor 5:1-6:20: Sexual infidelity, lawsuits; kingdom standards

### Sexual infidelity or incest

Typical of their Corinthian ethical standards certain in the congregation was little wrong with one of their members living in an incestual relationship with his father's wife! To add to Paul's frustration and displeasure the church tolerated such behavior. Some even boasted over this. Paul's response and condemnation on the individuals involved in the incestual relationship was severe, but his judgment on the congregation was possibly even more acute. This incident introduced several other ethical issues common to the Corinthian ethical standards that Paul addressed in these two chapters.

#### 1 Cor 5:1, 2. Incest in the congregation in Corinth

*"It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you."*

The incredulity of such immoral incestual behavior among the Corinthians surprises Paul and triggers a sarcastic opening statement to this pericope, "*it is actually reported*" implies that the behavior was well known among the Corinthians, both within the church, and among the Corinthian community at large. People were actually talking about the behavior of the Corinthian Christians!

Fee<sup>1</sup> observes that there is an obvious connection to the preceding pericope in which Paul condemned the Corinthians or their arrogance and the continued unethical behavior of the Corinthian Christians.

At **1 Cor 4:18** Paul charged them for being *conceited*. "*Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.* <sup>19</sup> *But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.* <sup>20</sup> *For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.* <sup>21</sup> *What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?"*<sup>2</sup>

Although the wording of Paul's charge is not as firm as one might expect, it was serious, "*for a man is living with his father's wife*" was firm enough for the Corinthian Christians to know what Paul had in mind! Paul does not describe the details which in view of the public knowledge of the issue made this unnecessary!

Fitzmyer, Fee, Garland, and Thiselton<sup>3</sup> all point out the seriousness of this incestual behavior in both the church and its influence in the Corinthian community. Fitzmyer points out that Paul is not only reacting against the individual sin, but also against the image that the Corinthian church was projecting to its neighbors.<sup>4</sup>

**1 Cor 5:2**, is a strong condemnation and judgment! The sinful man must be excommunicated, "*Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*" Fitzmyer states that such a form of excommunication would have been well known among the Jews of the Synagogue, and would make a clear statement of judgment. Excommunication was well attested

<sup>1</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 4:18–21.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 228ff; Fee, *First Corinthians*, pp. 212ff; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 155ff; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, pp. 385ff.

<sup>4</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 229.

in the Old Testament as well as in the Dead Sea tractates of Qumran.; Ex 12:15, 19; Lev 17: 9-10; Num 19:20; 1 QS6:24-7:18.<sup>5</sup>

**1 Cor 5:3-5.** Paul assured them that he was not afraid to firmly address the issue, and would do so with a spirit of power! Obviously, the Corinthians knew of Paul’s Holy Spirit commission and empowerment. He continued:

*“<sup>3</sup> For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment <sup>4</sup> in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”*

Paul’s expression “I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus” as immediacy and authority to Paul’s instructions. In Paul’s mind, Jesus has already passed this judgment! Paul’s *spirit* and *the power of the Lord Jesus* are present in Paul’s instruction!

**1 Cor 5:5.** The purpose of this judgment is important. It is not only to clear this stain from the image of the Corinthian congregation, but also hopefully has the purpose that it would cause the man to repent and be saved on the *day of final judgment*.

This text has caused some modern-day Christians concern in the light of Jesus teaching as recorded in Matt 7:1-5:

*“Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

First, we should note that Jesus’ teaching is not a prohibition of judging, but an exhortation to *not fall into the habit of constantly judging one another*. The expression “judge not” in the Greek is Μὴ κρίνετε, *mé krinete*, in which the verb κρίνετε is a *present active imperative* which means *be constantly judging*, the present tense implies a *continuous activity*, which when coupled with the negative adverb μή, *mé* reads *do not be constantly judging one another*.

Donald Hagner comments on this in his commentary:

“The command μὴ κρίνετε, lit. “do not judge,” should not be taken as a prohibition of all judging or discerning of right and wrong, since elsewhere in Matthew’s record of the teaching of Jesus—indeed, already in v 6—the making of such judgments by disciples is presupposed (see 7:15–20; 10:11–15; 16:6, 12; 18:17–18). Furthermore, v 2a assumes the making of fair or charitable judgments and does not entail the avoidance of judgments altogether. The meaning here, accordingly, is that unfair or uncharitable judgments should be avoided.”<sup>6</sup>

Paul continues his charge and judgment of the situation in the strongest terms.

Paul’s expression *for the destruction of the flesh*, *ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός*, does not speak simply of corporeal judgment, but of a judgment of *the man’s carnal nature*. Zodhiates observes:

“The word σάρξ, *sárx*; refers primarily to the flesh of a living creature in distinction from that of a dead one ... As implying *sinfulness, proneness to sin, the carnal nature, the*

<sup>5</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, p. 169.

*seat of carnal appetites and desires, of sinful passions and affections whether physical or moral* (the epistles of 2 Pet. and 1 John, cf. Eccl. 2:3; 5:5)<sup>7</sup>

Note that this action was *not to be a private judgment* interpersonal judgment! It was to be a *congregational action* taken and pronounced in the assembly. It is important to note that this was not a private sin, but a public sin known to everyone, including the Corinthian public.

Wisdom should lead the leadership of a congregation to determine whether the judgment of a private sin that needs to be judged should be officially announced beyond the knowledge of the individual and the congregation itself. Where the sinful behavior of an individual or individuals does not impact the community spiritual “image” of the congregation, the decision and action should be kept within the congregation as a whole, and not made before the public.

Care should also be taken that the sin could be repented and forgiven. The egregiousness of the incest in Corinth needed firm and immediate resolution carried out in such a manner that the citizens of Corinth would know that such behavior was not tolerated in Christ.

There are other texts that discuss discipline involving disfellowship in different situation. We will shortly discuss some of these in context.

Paul continues with his reprimand of the congregation in Corinth for their disregard of appropriate sexual conduct, and marriage relationships. These points will shortly be discussed by Paul in the context of Christians living in a pagan society with different marital rules.

**1 Cor 5:6-8.** However, at this point Paul continues by chastising them again for their boasting:

*“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”<sup>7</sup> Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”*

What he means by their boasting is unclear other than for their refusal to act appropriately in disciplining the culprits. The Greek actually reads, “Οὐ καλὸν τὸ καύχημα ὑμῶν” which actually reads “it is not good, the object of your boasting.” The word order emphasizes the point of bad behavior, it is not good!

Zodhiates observes regarding *καύχημα*,

*“καύχημα, καύχῃμα, to boast ...the result of boasting ... It also refers to the object of boasting, ground of glorying, exultation ...”*<sup>8</sup>

Thiselton has several good comments on this interesting claim at 1 Cor 5:6 that the Corinthians were boasting, “*Your boasting is not good because you are arrogant*”:

*“To translate οὐ καλόν as not good (NIV, AV/KJV) or not a good thing (NRSV) understates Paul’s words and invites a sense of anticlimax or banality. Paul wishes to express deep shock. The REB’s (Revised English Bible, 1989) ill becomes you rightly takes up the meaning of καλός as seemly or appropriate (as well as its basic meaning, good or well), but NJB’s is ill-founded grasps and conveys Paul’s point still more precisely. We try to combine the best of NJB and REB by translating **is ill-placed**. On the cognate verb καυχάομαι, of which καύχημα, boasting, **self-satisfaction**, self-congratulation, glorying, complacency is the related noun, see above on 1:29, 31; 3:21; and 4:7. In 15:31 Paul also*

<sup>7</sup> Zodhiates, σάρξ, *sárx*.

<sup>8</sup> Zodhiates, καύχημα, *kaúchēma*.

uses *καύχησις*, and repeats *κάυχημα* in 9:15 and 16. Paul's one ground of "boasting," we noted, is the cross of Christ (cf. Gal 6:4)."<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps we can read, "the object of your boasting is not good. You are boasting in your self-indulgence to the point where in your arrogance you ignore what is important."

Paul's next comment reinforces his frustration. There are things which the Corinthians should know by now! "*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*"

Thiselton has a good explanation of this expression and its relationship to power of leaven:

"The phrase **do you not know that** occurs ten times in 1 Corinthians and only once elsewhere in Paul's established letters (1 Cor 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 17; 9:13, 24; and Rom 6:16). Hurd, once again, points out that these carry the notion of exposing what the addressees might be expected to know if indeed their claim "all have γνῶσις" (8:1) were actually true! They generally allude either to axioms or to maxims, but also to theological principles or to knowledge of the world. Harrisville sums up the use neatly as to "signal a contradiction between what is and what ought to be, between what Corinth knows and does."<sup>103</sup> Here the phrase introduces what is probably a maxim or proverb (although there is little evidence for this) or at least a standard metaphor. Paul similarly quotes it in Gal 5:9. Appeal to the penetrating and influential effects of leaven had probably become a standard metaphor (whether in terms of its negative effects, Mark 8:15, par. Matt 16:5; Luke 12:1: "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," or for a more positive evaluation in Matt 13:33, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven hidden in a batch of dough," as is evident from its other NT parallels)."<sup>10</sup>

The Corinthian Romans and Greeks would have been well aware of the dynamic spreading influence of leaven, for bread making was a common practice in all ancient homes. However, here may be a hint of the danger of sin acting as a leavening influence as discussed under the Law of Moses which the Jews of the synagogue would know well. Paul had already discussed the power of leaven in his Galatian letter, Gal 5:9, and in preparation for the Passover Feast the Jews had been instructed to purge out all of the old leaven for a new beginning after the Passover feast, Ex 12:14-20. Failure by a Jewish family to do so during the Feast of Passover would result in their being expelled from Israel. Surely the Jews would know that law!

Notice Paul's reference to the *paschal lamb* of the Passover Feast:

"<sup>7</sup>cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup>Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil."<sup>11</sup>

The reference here to casting out the old leaven (the Corinthians sinful carnal nature) because it can corrupt the new leaven of the Corinthians life in Christ must be seen in reference to the background symbolism of casting out old leaven, symbolic of the Jewish practices, for the new leaven of celebration in Christ to take the place of the old carnal leaven. Paul's reference to Christ as the *paschal lamb* is a classical *Mishnaic* Jewish practice of seeing the Old Covenant in Christ, the New Covenant.

Although Paul does not make a direct reference to the Lord's Supper here, his reference to *Christ the paschal lamb* and the Passover Feast must be seen as a connection to the *celebration of*

<sup>9</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 400–401.

<sup>10</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 400–401.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the discussion of this leavening influence in the major commentaries of 1 Corinthians, Fee, pp. 236 f; Garland, pp. 178ff; Fitzmyer, pp. 240ff.

the Lord's Supper which the Corinthians were already abusing, as will be discussed later at 1 Cor 11:17.

At **1 Cor 5:9-13** Paul continues his stern rebuke of the Corinthians for their disregard of his earlier letter discussing such matters.

*“<sup>9</sup>I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; <sup>10</sup>not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup>But rather I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup>God judges those outside. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup>God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”*

This pericope is loaded with interesting thoughts and instructions!

First, “*I wrote to you in my letter*” indicates two things among several! It indicates that Paul had previously written to them regarding sexual morality. It also shows a continuing carelessness among the Corinthians in regard to living a righteous sinless life, especially as an example to their neighbors.” The Greek word used by Paul for *write* is ἔγραψα, an aorist indicative verb. It indicates a strong in meaning, demonstrating an *emphasis on the writing*. Something like, *I have already written to you not to associate with immoral people*. Fee<sup>12</sup> suggests that the former letter had *forbidden* any association with immoral people, for several reasons, *first*, the danger of the leaven like character of sin, *second*, the *example* of the Christians living in a pagan culture and neighborhood.

*Second*, Paul's instruction “*not to associate with*” builds of the composite Greek word συναναμίγνυμι, *sunanamígnymi* which I like to describe as a twelve-cylinder word, made up of several important components!

Summarized, Zodhiates observes that συναναμίγνυμι, *sunanamígnymi* means *to be caught up together with*, or *to mingle in close association with someone*:

*“Συναναμίγνυμι, sunanamígnymi; from sún, together or with, and anamígnymi, to mix together, which is from aná, on, upon, and mignumi, to mix, to mix together. Passive or middle voice to mingle together, have fellowship or keep company with; 1 Cor. 5:9, 11; 2 Thess. 3:14; Sept.: Hos. 7:8.”<sup>13</sup>*

Paul's conclusion, Christians are simply not to have a close social association with an immoral person which leaves an attitude or impression of acceptance.

*Third*, “*immoral men*” is from πόρνος, *pórnos*, which has a long and interesting use in the New Testament. Zodhiates summarizes this:

*“A whoremonger or male prostitute. In the NT, a fornicator (1 Cor. 5:9–11; 6:9; Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 12:16; 13:4; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). The Greeks considered one who prostituted himself for gain as a pórnos. In this sense it seems to be used in 1 Cor. 6:9 where malakoi, the effeminate, are also mentioned. The distinction between them and pórnnoi, fornicators, seems to consist in that the pórnnoi prostitute themselves for gain, but the malakoi, effeminate ones, do it without charge. It is in this manner that the word is used in Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:10. The word also has the meaning of an impure or unclean person of*

<sup>12</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, pp. 242ff.

<sup>13</sup> Zodhiates, συναναμίγνυμι, *sunanamígnymi*.

*whatever kind, and it is thus used in 1 Cor. 5:9–11 (cf. 5:1, 13); Heb. 12:16; 13:4; Rev. 21:8; 22:15. Pórnos does not occur in the Sept.*<sup>14</sup>

*Fourth*, Paul is aware that Christians have to live in an evil world, and also have the responsibility of reaching out to the immoral people of the world. His brief qualifying sentence explains this, “*not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.*”

*Fifth*, Paul explains that it is not the Christian’s responsibility to judge those of the world outside of Christ. That is God’s business. “*For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?* <sup>13</sup> *God judges those outside.*”

*Sixth*, Paul does not let God’s business diminish the responsibility of the Christians to *keep their house pure*. His next sentence is direct, “*For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?* <sup>13</sup> *God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”*”

The judgment already given by Paul, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was severe! “*Drive out the wicked person from among you.*” The verb ἐξάρατε is aorist active imperative. One could hardly put this in stronger terms. Zodhiates explains the word, ἐξάιρω *exairō* as “to remove, to take out of any place, to lift up from, to remove, to expel or excommunicate.”<sup>15</sup>

Paul’s term from describing the person as a wicked person is interesting. Zodhiates explains *wickedness* in Greek as “πονηρία, *ponēria*, *evil, malicious, of an evil nature*, badness in a physical sense, but in the New Testament only in a moral sense, *evil disposition, wickedness, malice.*”<sup>16</sup>

It would be natural for one to see the next chapter as a new topic, which is regarding taking one another to law courts, but that misses the point of judging within the church. The church should take care of its own business and not automatically turn judging over to the secular world as this only contributes to their neighbors having something to point to in their criticism of the church.

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<sup>14</sup> Zodhiates, πόρνος, *pórnos*.

<sup>15</sup> Zodhiates, ἐξάιρω *exairō*.

<sup>16</sup> Zodhiates, πονηρία, *ponēria*

## Law court issues with members 1 Cor 6:1-8: Taking brothers before civil courts to resolve relational issues

A major section of the message in this pericope is defined by the *inclusio* at 6:1 and 6:6, “*a grievance against your brother*” and “*brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers.*”

Following this, Paul engages carnal issues that should not be found thriving in the Corinthian congregation.

Thiselton opens his discussion of this long and complicated argument with the strong comment;

“The very first word [of 6:1], *τολμᾷ*<sup>17</sup>, identifies another anomaly which causes Paul to experience a further sense of outrage and disappointment, introduced here by means of a rhetorical question. The question carries the force of an exclamatory expression of censure: *How dare you!*”<sup>18</sup>

Paul’s long pericope covers several topics all under the category of carnal issues that should not be part of the Corinthian landscape; lawsuit cases before pagan magistrates, carnal issues not up to kingdom standards, sexual immorality. This discussion leads up to the next pericope in 1 Cor 7, marriage.

### Lawsuits before carnal magistrates

*“<sup>1</sup> When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? <sup>2</sup> Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life! <sup>4</sup> If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? <sup>5</sup> I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, <sup>6</sup> but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?*

*<sup>7</sup> To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? <sup>8</sup> But you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that even your own brethren.”*

At its worst, Paul indicates that *the real issues is over* “trivial cases” which should be handled within the brotherhood or congregation! Paul stresses that such action of taking these cases before civil courts is a shame.

Paul’s brief statement that the saints will judge the world has generated significant discussion regarding the impact and origin of the statement.

Questions relate to whether this is *a present action* of judging in reference to the Corinthian Christians, or an axiom for the eschatological end of the world judgment.

Some suggest that the expression is a confidence building statement emphasizing the role that God’s people already share in God’s eschatological judgment. Cf Rom 1:18 in which Paul states “*For the wrath of God is revealed* (Ἀποκαλύπτεται, present tense, **is revealed**, is

<sup>17</sup> Zodiates, *τολμᾷ* *tolmāō*, To show oneself bold, to act with boldness, confidence against someone or something, daring; Low and Nida, to be so bold as to challenge or defy possible danger or opposition—‘to dare.’ *τολμήσας εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς τὸν Πιλάτον* ‘he dared to go in to see Pilate’ Mk 15:43; *καὶ οὐδεὶς οὐκέτι ἐτόλμα αὐτὸν ἐπερωτῆσαι* ‘and from that time, no one dared to ask him any more questions’ Mk 12:34; *οὐκ ἐτόλμησεν κρίσιν ἐπενεγκεῖν βλασφημίας* ‘he did not dare to bring an accusation involving insulting words’

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 423.

constantly being revealed) from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.” Jewish and Christian eschatology incorporates a unique already present reference to contemporary situations with eschatological end of the world implications.

Eschatology (from *éschatos* and *λόγος*) is a theological term rooted in Jewish Christian views that the period or dispensation from the death of Jesus Christ to his final coming at the end of the world is referred to as the *last days*. It proclaims that the *final end of the world* is already present in Jesus and the Christian or messianic age. It can be described as *the already but not yet age!* Wolfhart Pannenberg described it as *the appearance of the future, or the arrival of the future*.<sup>19</sup>

David L. Peterson in the *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* Describes eschatology as follows:

“Derived from the Gk word *éschatos*, meaning “last” or “final,” eschatology is teaching about “the last things.” It refers to a time in the future when the course of history will be changed to such an extent that one can speak of an entirely new state of reality. This entry surveys eschatological ideas in the biblical world, and it consists of three separate articles. The first focuses exclusively on the idea as it is expressed in the Hebrew Bible. The second, which notices the OT material, mainly surveys the so-called intertestamental writings. The third article focuses mainly on eschatology in the NT.”<sup>20</sup>

Thiselton observes regarding the expressions of judgment in our text:

“It is more than likely that the saying “**the saints will judge the world**” represented a ... well-known axiom derived from *Dan 7:22* (LXX: “judgment was given to the saints of the Most High”).

In Jewish apocalyptic and in the writings of Qumran the theme features regularly, e.g., “God will judge all the nations by the hand of his elect” (1QpHab 5:4).

It also features in Christian apocalyptic: “to him who is victorious, to him who perseveres ... I will give authority over (*ἐξουσίαν ἐπί*) the nations” (Rev 2:26); “Then I saw thrones (*θρόνους*) and upon them sat those to whom judgment was committed (*κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς*) ... those who had not worshipped the beast... They reigned (*ἐβασίλευσαν*) with Christ” (Rev 20:4). The startling saying of Matt 19:28 appears in the Synoptic tradition: “When the Son of Man is seated on his throne in heavenly splendor, you my followers will have thrones of your own, where you will sit as judges (*καθήσεσθε ... κρίνοντες*) of the twelve tribes of Israel.” This is not peculiar to Matthean eschatology or to his attitude for or against Judaism. Luke offers a parallel: “you shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones as judges (*καθήσεσθε ... κρίνοντες*) of the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:30).”<sup>21</sup>

Paul is not stating that no legitimate case, legal and civil, should be presented before the official courts. His point is that it is a shame for such action, it is better to suffer wrong and be defrauded than to seek retribution before the courts.

The following long discussion by Thiselton perceptively points to three important issues, among others, which achieve prominence in this passage:

<sup>19</sup> Ian A. Fair, “Eschatology,” *Conquering with Christ, passim*. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Appearance (or Presence) as the Arrival of the Future,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume XXXV, Issue 2, 1 June 1967, pp. 107–118; Alan Richardson, “Eschatology,” *Dictionary of Christian Theology*, pp. 113ff.

<sup>20</sup> David L. Peterson, “Eschatology,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, p. 575.

<sup>21</sup> Thiselton, pp. 425–426.

“First ... the theme of “church order” identified ... *1 Cor 5*, undergoes further development in this chapter? ... Thereby both internal issues of institutional order and external questions about community boundaries continue a theme begun in 5:1–13.

Second, the local [socializing stratification] situation at Corinth was without doubt a major factor in this Pauline reading. For whereas the criminal courts of the Roman government to some reasonable extent could be respected as sources of relative justice (cf. Rom 13:1–7), the local civil magistrate’s courts allowed too much room for patronage and vested interest in the stance of local judges or the appointment of juries to reflect anything like even a near degree of integrity in comparison with major criminal courts. The wealthy, “influential,” and “clever” could manipulate social networks outside the church to their advantage and thereby, in effect, take advantage of the poor or “weak” within the congregation.

Third, the community identity of the church could be put at risk either by practicing manipulative strategies in full view of Gentile patrons or clever legal advocates, whom wealthy Christians might hire, and the Gentile world be exposed to the sight of believers obsessed with acquisition of property or of their “rights,” as against the sacrificial service of others which truly identifies what it is to be “of Christ” and to share in Christ’s cross. Hence the specific moral failures of 6:9–11 continue the theme of sacrificing the credibility and meaning of Christian identity for the sake of personal gratification.

Margaret M. Mitchell ... perceives the initiation of litigation in secular courts as aligning divisions or splits within the church with cliques or rival networks of influence outside the church and thereby doing double damage: (i) promoting and inflaming division within the church; and (ii) involving the unbridled rhetoric of those outside the church to exacerbate division within and thereby simultaneously disrupting the unity and cohesion of the church and compromising its boundaries of corporate Christian identity.

The issue which now emerges resolves into a general principle: are the “insiders” within the congregation to draw not only their assumptions about “wisdom” and “rhetoric” (1:10–4:21) but also their standards of self-gratification, morality, and manipulation from the secular culture of “outsiders” at Corinth? How distinctive (not how ghetto-like) is the community to be which is founded not on human wisdom or “religion” but on the centrality of Christ and the cross, within the framework of the interpretative and moral tradition of the scriptures?

The case study of initiating litigation brings this universal issue to a sharp local focus. Moreover, as Conzelmann observes, in conjunction with 5:1–5, 13 we see the beginnings of an internal jurisdiction within the church, which brings us back to the first main point of this introduction.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Thiselton, p. 421.

## Sexual immorality and the kingdom

### 1 Cor 6:9-20: The sexually unrighteous have no part in the kingdom of God.

Paul repeats what should be well known and readily acknowledged by the Corinthian Christians, kingdom standards are radically different from local secular and pagan standards, and certainly different from their own self-important images. They obviously had been taught by Apollos and Paul who would have made this a fundamental point of the Christian life; and the synagogue would have been familiar with. Kingdom life must be different!

### 1 Cor 6:9-11. Kingdom standards are different from carnal standards.

*“<sup>9</sup>Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, <sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup>And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”*

The opening statement “Do you not know” is one of those ten similar statements in 1 Corinthians that stresses the point that *this was something that they should know well and should need no reminder*. The expression can be translated “do you not realize by now ...” *You should now this instinctively* as a Christian principle.

Zodhiates observes that the word *oída* used by Paul means “to know intuitively or instinctively.” The root word for *oída* is εἶδω, *eidō*, to see with perception ... *Oída strictly means to have seen, perceived, apprehended.*”<sup>23</sup>

We have quoted previously that both Fitzmyer and Thiselton emphasize that those claiming “mature wisdom,” as was apparent in Corinth, should already know these points and realize their consequences.

The Corinthians had been well taught by Paul and the other reliable teachers like Apollos and Peter that the Christian life, kingdom living, was far removed from the carnal life practiced and celebrated by most Corinthians.

**1 Cor 6:11.** In his greeting and salutation at **1 Cor 1:2** Paul had explained to the Corinthians that *they had been sanctified, set apart from the world for service to God, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”* Paul’s comment, 1 Cor 6:9, “surely you realize what this means” was a clear rebuke; intended to be shocking!

To the Corinthians Paul’s sarcasm was not concealed. His point that God would destroy all of their so-called wisdom was also quite clear.

Paul was still discussing the issues of *porneia*, unchastity and impure sexual relations, which he began at 1 Cor 5:1 with the man living with his father’s wife!

His contemptuous indignation is barely concealed! Not the expression “do you not know again! Surely you realize what is going on!”

The body is not meant for selfish fornication but for service to the Lord! Fornication with a prostitute unites you with the prostitute and all her or his sinful nature. You belong to the Lord and were united with him in baptism.

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<sup>23</sup> Zodhiates, οἶδα, *oída*.

**1 Cor 6:12-14. Paul's facetious comment on the Corinthian wisdom.**

Paul sarcastically refers to one of the Corinthians own favorite statements as pieces of “carnal wisdom.”

The first words of his reprimand are a mocking reference to comments apparently made by the Corinthian super-spirituals in their “worldly wisdom.”

Paul's discussion is in a common diatribe form which the supposed educated Corinthians understood' *first*, their statement of carnal wisdom, *second*, followed by real wisdom, “*all things are lawful; but not all things are helpful.*” Follow this form of argument through vs 12-13!

*“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be enslaved by anything.*<sup>13</sup> *“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*<sup>14</sup> *And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.”*

Thiselton observes regarding the words of Corinthian “wisdom” beginning in 6:12:

“There can be no question that the initial clause of v. 12 represents a quotation used as a maxim by some or by many at Corinth ... The overwhelming majority of modern scholars adopt this view, and tables of such writers are readily at hand. Schrage calls it a “Corinthian maxim;” and Collins, “probably a slogan bandied about among some of the Christians in Corinth and used ... to justify an indiscriminate exercise of their rights (ἐξουσία).”<sup>24</sup>

**1 Cor 6:15-19. The desecration of the body; the temple of God.**

Returning to the discussion of the casual fornication which was apparently tolerated in the Corinthian congregation, Paul observes:

*“<sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two shall become one flesh.” <sup>17</sup> But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. <sup>18</sup> Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”*

**1 Cor 6:15.** Paul's statement “*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ*” carries within it marriage overtones which Paul picks up in 1 Cor 7:1ff. It is almost certain that Paul would have explained to the Corinthians that in baptism they were united with Christ (cf rom 6:1-11) in a” marriage bond”. Their bodies belonged to Christ for several reasons! The Corinthians awareness of slavery and the bond in slavery would have sensitized them to the fact that they were now slaves of Christ. His comment at 1 Cor 6:19, 20 would have established this! “*You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*”

**1 Cor 6:16.** Calling on a well know Hebrew maxim<sup>25</sup>, “*the two become one flesh*” certainly points back to the man living with his father's wife in an incestual relationship and forward to Paul's coming discussion in 1 Cor 7 on marriage.

<sup>24</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 460–461.

<sup>25</sup> Maxim definition, “a short, pithy statement expressing a general truth or rule of conduct; a maxim speak louder than words”

Regarding this Hebrew and Old Testament maxim Thiselton references the result of scholarly research on the Hebrew and Septuagint rendering of this expression. The translation from Hebrew to Greek to English poses several difficulties.

“The quotation in 1 Cor 6:16 follows the unanimous wording of the LXX tradition of Gen 2:24. However, the Hebrew Masoretic Text does not include **the two** behind οἱ δύο, even if the words are found in the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Targum of Jonathan. The LXX’s **two** does occur in the numerous quotations in Philo and in Mark 10:8, Matt 19:5, and Eph 5:31. Further, following the Hebrew idiom behind the Greek, we translate ἔσονται **shall become one flesh.**”<sup>26</sup>

Paul’s view is that the Corinthians have through baptism been united with Christ in a marriage bond. To share one’s body with a prostitute, or in an incestual relationship, was the equivalent of breaking a marriage bond and defiling the body, the temple (ναός, *naós*) of God and the Holy Spirit.

Since God dwells with Christ and the Holy Spirit through faith in the Christian, such incestual behavior not only *defiles a marriage relationship* with Christ, but also *the desecrates the temple of God!*

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<sup>26</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 467.

## Chapter 6: 1 Cor 7:1-9:27: Marriage

### Introductory comments on marriage

#### Jewish marriage practice.

The overall topic of marriage in Scripture is enormous and beyond the scope of this commentary. We will limit our comments in this chapter to Paul's understanding of marriage principles based on his knowledge of Judaism and the Gentile practice of marriage, and the needs of the Corinthian congregation. We will notice the theological principles Paul advocates in this chapter.

However, we include the following information based on a cursory examination of the many resources indicated in the bibliography.

We begin with a few comments on the Jewish tradition of marriage as reflected in the Old Testament *Torah*, from Creation through the Mosaic era. Comments from the Old Testament include references to marriage practices from the pre-history of Judaism, Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, and in the post Mosaic era of the settlement on Canaan.

Topics reflected in the resources are too extensive to discuss in detail. They cover the Creation narrative of husband and wife being one flesh, parentally arranged or self-initiated marriages, monogamy and polygamy, and levirate marriages. All of these narratives support the sanctity of marriage and appropriate behavior in marriage.”<sup>1</sup>

### New Testament references to marriage

#### The Gospels.

The gospels briefly discuss marriage in the context of Jewish principles or “laws.” These will be discussed in the context of Paul's discussion of marriage in 1 Corinthians.

#### Paul

Two major texts surface in the Pauline Epistles. The first, 1 Thess 4:3–8. The *Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary* observes:

“1 Thess 4:3-8, Paul's early views on marriage are expressed in Thessalonians, the earliest of his epistles. Paul shared the view of the Jewish paraenetic and polemical traditions in which sexual and marital mores distinguish God's people from the Gentiles. He uses them to distinguish the behavior of the believer from the nonbeliever (v 5). Because Paul made use of a traditional *topos* (*method of argument*), familiar to Hellenist and Jew alike, there is no real reason to think that the sexual and marital practices of the Thessalonian Christians were particularly lax. Paul was simply exhorting the neophyte Christians to a pattern of behavior consistent with their new situation. Specifically, he exhorted them to avoid immoral behavior, and positively encouraged them to marry (v 4, a verse that some authors, incorrectly, take to be an exhortation to sexual asceticism), while warning against adultery within the Christian community ... Paul urges that the marital relationship, lived as he encourages them to live it, be

<sup>1</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “Old Testament and Ancient Near East,” *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, pp. 559ff.

seen as a matter of their belonging to God (“their sanctification,” v 3), a relationship in which the spirit is the empowering force (v 8). In typical fashion, Paul proposed fidelity to Jesus, the relationship with fellow Christians, and the fear of divine vengeance (see also Heb 13:4) as a triple motivation for the pattern of life which he had encouraged the Thessalonian neophytes to live.”<sup>2</sup>

The second text is 1 Cor 7:1ff. which is the content of this commentary. It is also commented on in the *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* as follows:

“Paul’s response (1 Cor 7:2–5) to the Corinthians’ query essentially reiterates the views which he had expounded in 1 Thess 4:3–8. In order that immorality be avoided (cf. 1 Thess 4:3), each person should have his or her own spouse (vv 3–4), a rather egalitarian view which distinguishes Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians from the earlier expression of his teaching on marriage. This egalitarian view is consistent with Paul’s exposition in the entire chapter (vv 10, 12–14, 16, 32–34).

The avoidance of immorality as a motivation for marriage (v 36) is entirely in keeping with the Jewish tradition. A novelty, however, is Paul’s opinion that marriage is a charism, a special gift from God (v 7), a point of view that is in keeping with Paul’s emphasis on the role of the Spirit in 1 Thess 3:8. For Paul marriage is a sanctifying and salvific reality whose benefits redound not only to the believer but also to an unbelieving spouse and the children born of the marital union (vv 14–16).”<sup>3</sup>

### **Paul at 1 Thess 4:1-8.**

It will not be my purpose to provide an exegesis of this fascinating text. Scholars are aware of the textual issues and problems in this text. A comparison of our various translations will demonstrate the problems encountered in this text. We will work under the assumption that the translation of the RSV is possibly as good as any! Paul was obviously calling for a faithful monogamous marriage.

*“Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. <sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. <sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; <sup>4</sup> that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, <sup>5</sup> not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you. <sup>7</sup> For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. <sup>8</sup> Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”*

### **Paul at 1 Cor 7:1-9. Principles of sexual activity in marriage**

It is important that when interpreting the following pericope that one must remember the context of Paul’s discussion, a letter from the Corinthian Christians to Paul, and the casual and unchristian practice of sexual immorality. Note verse 2 below!

*“<sup>1</sup> Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. <sup>2</sup> But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife*

<sup>2</sup> Collins, R. F., “Marriage: New Testament,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, p. 571.

<sup>3</sup> Collins, R. F., “Marriage: New Testament,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, p. 571.

*and each woman her own husband.* <sup>3</sup> *The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.* <sup>4</sup> *For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.* <sup>5</sup> *Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.* <sup>6</sup> *I say this by way of concession, not of command.* <sup>7</sup> *I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.*

<sup>8</sup> *To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do.*

<sup>9</sup> *But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.*”

What was Paul calling for in this pericope, and why was he doing so?

**1 Cor 7:1.** “*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote.*” Obviously, it has to do with correspondence from concerned persons in Corinth, most likely in response to the incestual behavior of one of their members. It is apparent that the issue of fornication and the role marriage played in the Christian community as opposed to the Corinthian ethics or social behavior was a concern possibly at first for the Synagogue converts who brought with them the Jewish tradition of marriage, whatever that may have been in the diaspora of Judaism.

Paul’s following comment is interesting, “*It is well for a man not to touch a woman.*”

Zodhiates observes regarding the Greek ἅπτεσθαι, ἅπτω, *háptō*:

“to handle an object so as to exert a modifying influence upon it, to fasten to ... *Háptō* involves a self-conscious effort to touch.”<sup>4</sup>

James Swanson enlarges on the word ἅπτω, *háptō*, notably in the context of a wife and marriage:

“ἅπτομαι (*haptomai*), ἅπτω (*haptō*) ... to start a fire (Ac 28:2+); 2. LN 18.6 ... to hold on to, seize, grasp (Jn 20:17); 3. LN 24.73 ... touch, with relatively firm contact (Mk 7:33; Lk 7:14); 4. LN 20.16 ... harm (1Jn 5:18); 5. LN 34.70 (dep.) γυναικὸς ἅπτομαι (*gynaikos aptomai*), *marry, formally, touch a woman* (1Co 7:1).”<sup>5</sup>

Fitzmyer adds that the term touch, ἅπτω, *háptō*, must be kept in the context of the general Corinthian discussion, overt sexual contact, fornication, immorality. He observes that the term is used in the Septuagint on several occasions (Gen 20:4, 6; Ruth 2:9; Prov 6:29, in the sense of sexual contact. He adds that Josephus, Ant. 1.8.1.163, used the term as a euphemism for sexual intercourse.<sup>6</sup>

From the remainder of the discussion of marriage it is apparent that Paul was not censuring sexual intercourse, but keeping it in the context of the Corinthian sexual issues his advice is it might be advisable to refrain for sexual intercourse if you cannot control your sexual impulses. He obviously argues below that sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is permissible, and is to be advised under certain circumstances, 1 Cor 7:15ff.

**1 Cor 7:2.** “<sup>2</sup>*But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.*”

<sup>4</sup> Zodhiates, ἅπτω, *háptō*.

<sup>5</sup> Swanson, J., “ἅπτω, *háptō*,” *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*, 1997. LN refers to *Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 278.

Without necessarily proclaiming a marriage law, Paul at least was laying down a principle for marriage. The verb ἐχέτω, from ἔχω, *échō*, is a present active hortatory imperative appropriately translated as *should have*. In the context of the Corinthian question regarding marriage and the immoral behavior in Corinth, Paul uses the hortatory imperative to establish correct behavior in marriage and sexual behavior.

**1 Cor 7:3-5.** In this brief paragraph Paul addresses questions of husband-wife relations regarding sexual intercourse. Each spouse should provide the appropriate sexual outlet to the other in view of reducing the temptation for infidelity and fornication.

Our English translations, (RSV, NRSV, RSV) all translate ὀφειλὴν ἀποδιδότω, *opheilēn ἀpodidōtō*, as *conjugal rights* implying *what is owed* to one another in the marriage bond.

One definition of conjugal renders this as in a composite definition from various sources:

“Conjugal rights are the mutual rights and privileges between two married individuals, such as companionship, support, sexual relations, affection, and joint property rights<sup>1,2,3</sup>.

These rights can be violated by a third party who interferes with the marriage relationship, and the injured spouse may sue the wrongdoer for damages<sup>4</sup>. Some states allow prisoners to have private visits and sexual relations with their spouses or partners in a special room or apartment, which are called conjugal visits.”<sup>7</sup>

**1 Cor 7:4, 5.** Paul clarifies his meaning by stating in clear terms that the wife and husband do not own their own bodies in the marriage relationship, the other party does. Whatever concession in sexual intercourse is conceded should be granted only for a short season of prayer and religious devotion.

“<sup>3</sup>*The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.* <sup>4</sup>*For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.* <sup>5</sup>*Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.*”

**1 Cor 7:6-9. Paul’s own celibate practice; a *charism* or gift from God through the Holy Spirit.**

“<sup>6</sup>*I say this by way of concession, not of command.* <sup>7</sup>*I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.*

<sup>8</sup>*To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do.*

<sup>9</sup>*But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.*”

**1 Cor 7:10-11. To the Married Christians on Divorce**

“<sup>10</sup>*To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife.*”

Who are these that Paul refers to as the married? From what follows it is Christians who are married to Christians!

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<sup>7</sup> References cited are Cornell Law Department, Cornell University, and the Miriam Webster Dictionary: Microsoft Bing Website.

Paul refers to these Christian couples back to Jesus teaching; they should not *separate*, or *divorce*.

The word *separate* is from “χωρίζω, *chorízō*; to put apart, separate, sever completely.”<sup>8</sup> Louw and Nida suggest “to separate objects by introducing considerable space or isolation— ‘to separate, to isolate one from another.’”<sup>9</sup>

Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider in Exegetical Dictionary Testament discuss this more comprehensively:

“Passively. *be separated (get divorced)* (in marriage contracts ... in 1 Cor 7:10: A wife should not *be separated / divorced* from her husband. If she *does separate*, however, she should remain ἄγαμος (“single,” which she then becomes again! v. 11).”<sup>10</sup>

Paul’s instruction to the *men* or *husband* is that they should not *divorce* their wives. The word *divorce* is translated from ἀφίημι, *aphiēmi*; to send, to send forth or away, let go from oneself, to dismiss.<sup>11</sup>

Thiselton, with other scholars point out that the syntax of this pericope is complicated as the major manuscripts have some variations which can shape the meaning of the text somewhat, however, most agree with Thiselton that the two verses must be seen in parallel form, *wife—husband, separate—divorce*.

It is the opinion of most Greek commentators that the words ἀπολύω, *apolúō*; ἀφίημι, *aphiēmi*; and χωρίζω, *chorízō* are used by various authors synonymously. Cf. Balz and Schneider. Scholars observe that the choice of the words is often determined by the context of the discussion.

Notice how Matthew records this in his discussion of Deut 24 and *divorce*, Matt 19:3-9. One should notice the uses of synonyms in the English translations.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>3</sup>And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce (ἀπολύω *apolúō*; to let loose from, to loosen or unbind a person or thing) *one’s wife for any cause?*”  
<sup>4</sup>He answered, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them *male and female*,<sup>5</sup> and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”<sup>7</sup> They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce (ἀποστασίου καὶ ἀπολύσαι, *the instrument of divorce*<sup>13</sup>), and to put her away (ἀπολύω *apolúō*, put away, send

<sup>8</sup> Zodhiates, χωρίζω *chorízō*.

<sup>9</sup> Louw, and Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*, 2nd edition., vol. 1, p. 615.

<sup>10</sup> Χωρίζω, Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1990, Vol. 3, p. 492.

<sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, ἀφίημι *aphiēmi*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the comment below at fn 13. In the text I have inserted exegetical explanatory comments in a lower font.

<sup>13</sup> Zodhiates, “to depart or stand away from. A departure, a divorce or dismissal of a woman from her husband, the deed or instrument of such divorce (Matt. 5:31; see also Matt. 19:7). In Mark 10:4, biblῖon (975), a book or document, apostasiou, of dismissal. This is a reference to the document spoken about in Deut. 24:1–4 which the dismissing husband was required to give to an innocent, dismissed wife in whom the husband was finding a pretext for dismissal. It is equivalent to a certificate of innocence because the husband who was instructed to issue it in divorcing his guiltless wife and sending her away from his house was, in fact, the guilty person. If the woman had

away)?”<sup>8</sup> He said to them, “For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce (ἀπολύσαι, *send way*) your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.<sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces (ἀπολύσει, *divorces or send away*) his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.”

### 1 Cor 7:12-16. “To the rest”!

Who are the rest? Obviously, those not referenced in 1 Cor 7:10, 11! “Any brother who has a wife who is an unbeliever!”

“<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace. <sup>16</sup> Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?”

This pericope has several theological implications, and we should note that Paul addressed it initially to the Christians in Corinth, *but in this instance he is speaking of a Christian who has a spouse who is not a believer.* Some were married, some were not. Most likely these Christians were married before they became Christians but their spouse remained a non-believer.

Being married to a non-believer was not ground for divorce if the non-believer wished to remain married to the Christian. Paul’s point was that the believer may teach and convert the non-believer but this would be difficult if they became divorced.

Marriage to a non-believer does not desecrate the marriage vow!

However, if the non-believer wished to divorce, obviously because he spouse had converted to Christ, then a divorce (separate, χωρίζω, chorizō<sup>14</sup>) was permissible. Paul’s next statement is interesting and informative! “*In such a case the brother or sister is not bound.*”

Paul’s comment *is not bound* is interesting and the cause for some debate by those totally opposed to divorce under any circumstances. The Greek word for *bound* is δεδούλωται, a *perfect passive verb* from δουλόω, *doulōō, enslaved*, which when prefaced by the negative ού, *not*, reads

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committed fornication, she would have been dismissed and never permitted to remarry as this woman was: “And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife” (Deut. 24:2). In fact, the guilty dismissed spouse (see Deut. 22:21) was to be stoned to death which was rarely, if ever, practiced. The teaching of our Lord was that, although contrary to God’s will and purpose, if a man decided to put away his wife or a wife her husband (Mark 10:12), the innocent spouse was to be given a bill of divorcement or a certificate of innocence which would free him or her of the stigma of being considered as having committed adultery. The word “divorce” as understood in our modern society and which is issued by a judge without reference to the guilt or innocence of either party, does not have its real equivalent in the OT or NT. The apostáson, then, was supposed to be given by a guilty husband to an innocent wife, or vice versa (Mark 10:12), whom he or she wanted to dismiss, since it was through such a certificate of innocence that the dismissed one had the possibility of remarrying. The teaching of our Lord in Matt. 5:32; 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12, is that a woman dismissed without a bill of divorcement carries the stigma of adultery, and if someone marries her, that stigma passes on to him. This is conveyed by the middle / passive verb moichátai (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:12).

<sup>14</sup> The Greek reads εἰ δὲ ὁ ἄπιστος χωρίζεται, χωρίζεσθω, “but if the unbeliever *separates themselves* (middle verb), *let them separate themselves* (passive verb)”! The verb in each case is χωρίζω, *chorizō, to separate or divorce.*

is *not enslaved*, or “*is not under bondage or enslaved.*”<sup>15</sup> The perfect tense implies an action of the past that remains in the present. In this text it implies *was bound* in the past but is *no longer bound* in the present.

*The context of both civil and religious life in Corinth, and the Gentile world, was dramatically different from that of living in Jerusalem in Jesus’s day.* Laws were given to the Jew under the old covenant that were *certainly not applicable to Gentiles* living in the diaspora, and more specifically in Corinth. So in the Gentile context of Corinth, *the divorced person was no longer under the bondage of the marriage law.*

Mixed marriages among the Gentiles of Corinth was accepted and considered legal and under the normal bondage of the law.

Under the laws of Judaism, intermarriage with non-Jews was not permitted. Kaufmann Kohler observes:

“Marriage between persons of different races or tribes. A prohibition to intermarry with the Canaanites is found in Deut. vii. 3, where it is said: "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them [any of the seven nations of the land of Canaan]; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son." The reason stated for this prohibition is: "For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods" (*ib.* vii. 4); and, inasmuch as this reason holds good as regards intermarriage with any idolatrous nation, all Gentiles are included in the prohibition ... At any rate, from Ezra onward this prohibition was extended to all Gentiles (Ezra ix. 1-2, x. 10-11; Neh. x. 31), and accordingly the Law was thus interpreted and codified by Maimonides ... Older, however, than the Deuteronomic law is the patriarchal law forbidding the descendants of Abraham to intermarry with the Canaanites (Gen. xxiv. 3, xxvi. 34, xxvii. 46, xxviii. 8, xxxiv. 14).”<sup>16</sup>

There were no ethnic or religious restrictions for Greeks or Romans living under pagan civil and religious laws in Corinth to experience mixed marriages. In other words, the context of Paul’s discussion must be seen in the context of Corinthian principles or practices, and not Jerusalem Temple customs or practices.

To cloud the discussion even further, Fitzmyer points to the fact that there were *two Jewish contexts* under which discussion of marriage and divorce surfaced, Palestinian Judaism away from Jerusalem (the Deuteronomic discussion), and Jerusalem Temple practices and views (the Pharisees in Jesus’ discussions of the topic at Matt 19).

Much of Jesus’ Jerusalem discussions in the Gospels, ca 30 CE, centered on a trick questions by the Pharisees over the conflicting views of the Deuteronomic discussion as was seen in the debate between the two Rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai and their different thoughts on divorce based on **Deut 24:1-4**.

*“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it*

<sup>15</sup> Zodhiates, “δουλόω *doulōō* ... *perf. pass. dedoulōmai* with the *pres. meaning to be a slave, to serve*, from *doúlos... slave*. To make a *slave or servant, a subject, subjugate* (Acts 7:6; 1 Cor. 9:19; Sept.: Gen. 15:13); in the passive, *to be subjugated, subdued* (Rom. 6:18, 22); in the perfect tense, *to be dependent* (Gal. 4:3). *It denotes not so much a relation of service as primarily one of dependence upon, or bondage to, something* (Titus 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:19). *In 1 Cor. 7:15 the verb refers to a brother or sister being bound by law.*

<sup>16</sup> Kaufmann Kohler, Joseph Jacobs, *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

*in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, <sup>2</sup> and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, <sup>3</sup> and the latter husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, <sup>4</sup> then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt upon the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance."*

**Rabi Hillel** had established a Rabbinic school in Jerusalem. His 40 years of leadership likely covered the period of 30 BCE to 10 CE.

**Rabbi Shammai** likewise established a Rabbinic school in Jerusalem ca 50 BCE – 30 CE.

The difference between the Hillel's and Shammai's views of Deut 24 hinged around the meaning of a man finding "*some indecency in his wife.*"

Hillel interpreted this to mean *any kind of uncleanness in her person or housekeeping.*

Under such circumstances a man could *write her a bill of divorce.*

Shammai interpreted this as *sexual uncleanness or unchastity.*

The nature of the Hillel and Shammai debate weighed heavily in the challenge brought to Jesus by the Pharisees as recorded in Matt 19:3-9. The Pharisees were not interested in Jesus' interpretation of Deut 24. They only wanted to create a tricky situation around which to challenge Jesus. They even introduced Moses into their argument. Jesus turned their deceit back on them by explaining God's purpose in marriage from the beginning.

His comment sidestepped the Hillel—Shammai discussion and went right back to God's original purpose in marriage which was intended to unite the male and female in one body which no one was to *put asunder*. Jesus' answer was clear, in the context of the Temple and Jerusalem and not the Sinai desert and Canaan of Deut 24, "*And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.*"

**Matt 19:3** "*and Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" <sup>4</sup> He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." <sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery."*

### **Marriage and divorce: Jesus and Paul**

We do have an interesting thought inserted into the discussion. Jesus' reference to Moses and Deut 24 acknowledge that there could be certain circumstances when the divorce prohibition could be waived or at least not enforced. In similar fashion Paul indicates that a pagan Gentile cultural context was one such circumstance. Both Jesus and Paul while acknowledging the shift in traditional prohibition systems referred discussion on marriage and divorce back to God's original intention. Man should not put asunder what God has joined together!

**1 Cor 7:17-24 Keep your status quo in marriage**

*“<sup>17</sup> Only, let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. <sup>18</sup> Was any one at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was any one at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. <sup>19</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. <sup>20</sup> Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. <sup>21</sup> Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. <sup>22</sup> For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. <sup>23</sup> You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. <sup>24</sup> So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God.”*

Paul refers to a general principle he has laid down everywhere he teaches, 1 Cor 7:17.

*“<sup>17</sup> Only, let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.”*

The question we must ask is, “what is the rule or principle he has been discussing?” The context refers back to the immediately previous point, in **1 Cor 7:12-16!** This he had stated in 1 Cor 7:12-16. *Remain in the same condition of marriage in which you were called as long as this is possible*

*“<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace. <sup>16</sup> Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?”*

Regarding the intent of this pericope at 1 Cor 7:17, Thiselton and others agree that this is a general instruction to all Christians to not seek a different sociological status in Christ, but to remain in whatever sociological status they find themselves as long as it is possible. This does not mean that slaves under the Roman or other civil laws should not seek freedom if that is possible, only that freedom is not the ultimate order in life.

Most scholars see 1 Cor 7:17 and 1 Cor 7:24 as the beginning and end of a chiasmatic structure, both stressing the same principle, “*remain in whatever state each of you is called.*”

Thiselton cites Deming in support of the principle regarding slavery and circumcision:

*“Deming makes an apt comment: “First ... no Christian can be enslaved by the circumstances of his or her life, by virtue of God’s ‘call’ to become a Christian.... Second, undue concern for changing the circumstances of one’s life disregards the efficiency of God’s call, and thereby represents a form of slavery in itself. In this way, the pair circumcised-uncircumcised (7:18–19) functions here to illustrate the general principle that*

*outward circumstances are of no consequence to the Christian, and therefore a Christian should not seek to make a change in one way or the other.”<sup>17</sup>*

So, the *rule* (διατάσσομαι, from διατάσσω, *diatássō*<sup>18</sup>) or *guiding principle* Paul is stressing is to not seek a higher status in Christ or the church than that in which God has called you. This is the principle Paul has been stressing since he opened the letter at 1 Cor 1:10 regarding the sin of social structuring and superior standing in the church. Paul will return to this in 1 Cor 11 regarding the corrupt behavior of the super spiritual during the Lord’s Supper.

### **1 Cor 7:25-35 Counsel to the Unmarried**

*“<sup>25</sup> Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. <sup>26</sup> I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is. <sup>27</sup> Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. <sup>28</sup> But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. <sup>29</sup> I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, <sup>30</sup> and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, <sup>31</sup> and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.”*

Note that Paul closes this discussion with an *eschatological comment*, *this world is passing away* and a *new world system is coming!* Christians should lift their eyes to a new horizon, life with God and Christ in heaven!

However, he opens this pericope in a more practical way, “*now, to sum things up in reference to your comments in your letter regarding the unmarried, stay single if you can!*”

Paul clarifies his point; *in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is.*” Paul obviously had an eye on a coming time of distress caused by political and theological issues, most likely Roman persecution which even Jesus had warned about, and local Corinthian opposition and persecution. He simply defines these as *worldly troubles!* Increasing one’s personal and family security over marriage might not be the best for the present time!

### **1 Cor 7:32-35 Asceticism and Marriage**

*“<sup>32</sup> I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; <sup>33</sup> but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, <sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. <sup>35</sup> I say this for your*

<sup>17</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 547); Deming, W., *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Cor. 7*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 157–73.

<sup>18</sup> Zodhiates, “*διατάσσω, diatássō* to appoint, to order, to arrange throughout ... In the NT ... *of arrangements made by Paul (Acts 20:13); of what the Apostle ordained in the churches in regard to marital conditions (1 Cor. 7:17).* Louw and Nida, “*to give detailed instructions as to what must be done— ‘to order, to instruct, to tell, to command.* Gerhard Delling in Kittel, *the power of the state is decisively seen as the watcher over good and evil on God’s commission, and it is presupposed that in principle at least it is able to use a just standard in its judgments and decisions.*

*own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*"

### **1 Cor 7:36-40 Counsel to Widows**

*<sup>36</sup> If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. <sup>37</sup> But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. <sup>38</sup> So that he who marries his betrothed does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.*

*<sup>39</sup> A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. <sup>40</sup> But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I have the Spirit of God.*"

Paul's *personal advice*, stay as you are, stay single if you can, stay married, stay devoted to the Lord, but if you have strong sexual impulses, get married!

If you need to marry, marry a Christian, someone in the Lord.

Remember the context of this discussion, cultural, social, and religious standards in Corinth are not in keeping with the Lord. Do not bring Corinthian standards with you into your life in Christ and the church.

## Chapter 7: 1 Cor 8:1-13: Christian Liberty and Freedom

*<sup>1</sup> Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” “Knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup> If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But if one loves God, one is known by him.*

*<sup>4</sup> Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” <sup>5</sup> For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*

*<sup>7</sup> However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. <sup>8</sup> Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. <sup>9</sup> Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol’s temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? <sup>11</sup> And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. <sup>12</sup> Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother’s falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.”*

### 1 Cor 8:1-13. Christian Liberty and Food Offered to Idols

In this chapter Paul discusses the responsibility Christians have toward other people, primarily believers, but also non-believers.

The focus of the issue hinges primarily around attending idol feast offered in the Corinthian community. The problem relates to the failure of the Corinthians to separate themselves from the sociological strata of their pagan communities. Paul will pick up again on this problem of idolatry issue at 1 Cor 10.

#### 1 Cor 8:1. Now concerning food offered to idols

Some new Christians would have faith issues over buying food offered to idols believing that this had been contaminated with idolatry.

There is considerable discussion over whether this was simply a kosher food issue or most likely a religious sociological issues over idolatry.

Thiselton discusses this at length. For our benefit I have included his ideas on the issue.

“The wealth of archaeological and social data which Theissen, Murphy-O’Connor, and many others have collected supports this broad approach. Murphy-O’Connor observes, “About the only time that meat came on the market was after pagan festivals, and it had been part of the victims sacrificed to the gods.” This meat could be purchased for use in private homes, where “the strong” in socioeconomic status could afford it and “the strong” in “knowledge” about the nonexistence of pagan deities could enjoy it without scruple. But this was not the only possible location for a festive meal involving the serving of meat. Murphy-O’Connor provides a sketch of the temple of Asclepius located just inside the north wall of ancient Corinth, to which Pausanias (c. AD 170) alludes explicitly (Pausanias, 4:5). Originally built in the fourth century BC and then damaged in 146 BC, the temple was newly restored in 44 BC by Roman colonists, and at an indeterminate period (probably but not

definitely the first century) three dining rooms were built on the east side of the temple courtyard. On the analogy of the adjacent church hall built next to many English parish churches, these could be used for either religious or social events. Just as the vicar or minister of the church might open the event but have minimal connection with it, so people could hold birthday celebrations, festive meals to celebrate a family event, or other social occasions under the auspices or patronage of the temple dining facilities.

Since the social, socioeconomic, cultic, and religious dimensions of τὰ εἰδωλόθυστα are so multidimensional and complex, we propose the translation meat associated with offerings to pagan deities. This allows for the breadth of locations and settings discussed by Willis, while retaining the importance of meat shared by Theissen, Yeo, and Gardner, but also coupling broader association with the more sensitive issue of cultic offering as “the weak” would all too readily perceive it, and as Paul perceives it as being in the context of 10:14–22.”<sup>1</sup>

### **1 Cor 8:1. The super-spiritual and knowledge.**

The statement in “quotation marks” in 1 Cor 8:1, “*all of us possess knowledge*” was obviously intended by Paul as a cynical reference to the claims of some Corinthian super-spirituals who believed they had *superior knowledge* or *spiritual knowledge* that others did not have or understand. They believed that since they had a *spiritual gift of knowledge* they could do things such as food offered to idols without necessarily worshipping the idols. Paul explains to these super-spirituals that there is a fine line separating eating food offered to idols and worshipping idols.

We will note at 1 Cor 12, 13 that Paul will discuss the various gifts of the Spirit including spiritual knowledge and comment that this knowledge although a great help is only temporary and will pass away, stressing that *the superior gift is love*, which it is obvious the Corinthians lacked.

An additional ingredient is introduced in this discussion which has relevance also for 1 Cor 10. Most of the food offered for sale in Corinth had most likely been offered to idols and then sold in the market place.

### **1 Cor 8:5, 6. So-called gods in heaven, and the supposed plurality of “gods”.**

<sup>5</sup> *For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—*<sup>6</sup> *yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”*

Paul introduces a thought that needs clarification! In fact, the syntactical and theological components of this text have set scholars off into extensive possibilities and speculations based on numerous archaeological discoveries.<sup>2</sup>

The two “em” dashes inserted in the text by translators indicate parenthetical statements indicating the views of the isolators. The phrase “*as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”*” was intended to clarify what Paul was writing, there is only one deity, *god*, only the non-believers would hold to *other gods*!

<sup>1</sup> Thiselton, pp. 618-620.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Thiselton, pp. 631ff.

However, we should begin with the point that Paul believed that God and Christ, with the Holy Spirit, are the only true “gods” or “deities;” that there are no other genuine gods in existence other than the “gods” that people or cultures have created as Psalm 115:4 and Isa 2:8 proclaim, “*gods made with their own with their hands!*”

### 1 Cor 8:9, 10. *Stumbling blocks and a person’s conscience.*

<sup>9</sup> *Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.* <sup>10</sup> *For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol’s temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?* <sup>11</sup> *And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.* <sup>12</sup> *Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.* <sup>13</sup> *Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother’s falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.”*

At Rom 14 Paul has an extensive argument on the issue of food, and causing a fellow Christian to stumble. I have included comments from my commentary to the Romans here with comments on both Col 2:16-23 and Matt 18 in support of Paul’s reasoning.

“Paul begins by speaking of Christians being a *hindrance* and *stumbling block* to others. He includes injuring others and becoming *the ruin* of some. He is obviously speaking of *spiritual matters* of faith and not simply addressing principles of hygiene!

Christians should not let their freedom in Christ cause those who are weaker in their faith to act in a way that is not determined by their faith and understanding of their freedom in Christ!

He sets this whole discussion in the context of *the work of God*, obviously speaking of *God’s atoning work in Jesus Christ!*

We should note here that Paul is not simply speaking about *offending* some by exercising their freedom. It is obvious that some Jews would be offended by the Christians’ freedom to eat food outside of Jewish *kosher* laws, which laws were instruction to Israel coming out of pagan practices in Egypt and facing all kinds of pagan customs in Canaan, and which laws as part of the Mosaic covenant had been annulled by Christ’s death.

Paul had previously addressed these food and special day principles to the Colossians, Col 2:16-23:

<sup>16</sup> *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath.* <sup>17</sup> *These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.* <sup>18</sup> *Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,* <sup>19</sup> *and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

<sup>20</sup> *If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations,* <sup>21</sup> *“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”* <sup>22</sup> *(referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines?* <sup>23</sup> *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.”*

**Rom 14:13. First,** Christians should first understand what a *stumbling block* means! Paul uses two words that are somewhat synonymous, “a *stumbling block* or a *hindrance*”

The first word *stumbling block* derives from πρόσκομμα, *proskomma*, meaning *an occasion of stumbling*. Christian freedom should not become an *occasion of stumbling* for others!

The second word σκάνδαλον, *skándalon*<sup>3</sup> as used in the New Testament means *something that causes someone to stumble in sin and ruin*. The word σκάνδαλον, *skándalon*, in its broader common day sense means *a trap*!<sup>4</sup> However as a used by Paul and other places in the New Testament it implies an action that *produces certain behavior which can lead to ruin*.

Cf. **Matt 18:7** in the RSV and (NIV similarly) where σκάνδαλον, *skándalon* is translated *temptation to sin*!:

“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!<sup>8</sup> And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.<sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”

At **Matt 18:7f** above I have underlined the word *sin* in our RSV translation. The context of Matthew clearly shows that the word *skandalon*, *stumbling block*, can be used as a synonym for *a stumbling block for sin and ruin*!

**Second**, these two words, *stumble* and *hindrance*, do not mean doing *something to which someone else might object*! The words imply doing something that would cause someone to stumble and sin in ruin!

Christians must be careful not to act in a manner in which their freedom from Torah might cause another person to fall and sin.

Paul urges Christians to refrain from judging, and to decide never to act in a manner that might cause someone who might be weaker in the faith to stumble and sin!

**Rom 14:15-17**. Paul teaches that *there is more to the kingdom than opinions about eating and drinking*, and yet too often we cast a shadow over the kingdom by *squabbles over our opinions* regarding food restrictions, special days, or even doctrinal opinions!

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<sup>3</sup> Zodhiates, σκάνδαλον *skándalon*; A trap. The trigger of a trap on which the bait is placed, and which, when touched by the animal, springs and causes it to close causing entrapment. The word and its derivatives. belong only to biblical and ecclesiastical Greek. In the Septuagint it answers to the word for *pagis* ... trap. However, *pagis* always refers simply to a trap hidden in an ambush and not to the results; whereas skándalon involves a reference also to the conduct of the person who is thus trapped. *Skándalon always denotes an enticement to conduct which could ruin the person in question*. See ... In the NT *skándalon* is used figuratively in a moral sense. It is concerned mainly with the fact that it produces certain behavior which can lead to ruin (Rom. 9:33; 11:9; 14:13; 16:7; 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:8; 1 John 2:10; Rev. 2:14).

<sup>4</sup> Zodhiates observes, σκάνδαλον *skándalon*; the trigger of a trap on which the bait is placed, and which, when touched by the animal, springs and causes it to close causing entrapment. The word and its derivatives. belong only to biblical and ecclesiastical Greek. In the Septuagint it answers to the word for *pagis* ... trap. However, *pagis* always refers simply to a trap hidden in an ambush and not to the results; whereas *skándalon* involves a reference also to the conduct of the person who is thus trapped. *Skándalon* always denotes an enticement to conduct which could ruin the person in question. See Sept.: Lev. 19:14.; Josh. 23:13; 1 Sam. 18:21. In the NT *skándalon* is used figuratively in a moral sense. It is concerned mainly with the fact that *it produces certain behavior which can lead to ruin* (Rom. 9:33; 11:9; 14:13; 16:7; 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:8; 1 John 2:10; Rev. 2:14).

The essence of the kingdom is living under the principles of Christ and the *evangelistic missional nature of the kingdom*. The spirit of the kingdom is loving others just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

*The question is, how much of ourselves will we give up for others and the kingdom?*

**Rom 14:19** again stresses the need that Christians must then *pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding*. Squabbling over *opinions* does not make for peace, but creates friction that too easily leads to divisions in the living body of Christ, the church!

A significant point in Rom 14:19 is that Christians should *strive for mutual up-building*, which means to *give others time to grow*, and to make every effort to help them to mature in Christ by Christian example and teaching.

*The heart of Christian faith is helping others to study and to grow in their faith, and not to dispute over opinions that create decision!*

**Rom 14:20**. Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome *not to destroy the work of God in saving both Jew and Gentile for the sake of food!*

The point here is that Christians can so easily destroy God's work of saving someone by squabbles over opinions!"<sup>5</sup>

It seems from similar discussion in Romans and Colossians that issues over food, either offered to idols or contrary to the kosher instruction of Israel, was a general issue in congregations comprised of ethnic differences. We can add that this seems to be an age-old problem and one with which we still struggle today. Ethnic issues should never raise their heads in Christian communities regardless of the age or geographic boundaries!

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<sup>5</sup> Ian A. Fair, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, HCU Media, 2023, pp.272-275.

## Chapter 8: 1 Cor 9: Rules of expediency

### 1 Cor 9:1-14. Paul's Christian rights acknowledged

In the first 14 verses of this chapter Paul defends his rights as a Christian and apostle against the criticism of those who were offended by his teachings and challenged his authority. Apparently, this was a recurring issue, for he repeated at 2 Cor 11, 12 a defense of his apostleship and challenged the false apostles who were undermining his teaching. For Paul it was not a personal pride issue that caused this “outburst,” but he knew how important his credibility was for the church, as well as the credibility of his message on a larger scale than Corinthians.

*“<sup>1</sup> Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? <sup>2</sup> If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*

*<sup>3</sup> This is my defense to those who would examine me. <sup>4</sup> Do we not have the right to our food and drink? <sup>5</sup> Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? <sup>6</sup> Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? <sup>7</sup> Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?”*

Nevertheless, the criticisms were directed at Paul, whereas the same criticism apparently was not directed against others who had passed through Corinth. It is easy to see that the intention was to *eliminate Paul's influence and authority.*

Thiselton opens his discussion of this pericope with a strong focus attention on the authority of Paul and his teaching:

*“We strenuously urge that to construe this chapter as a “defense of Paul's apostleship” as if this were the central issue in its own right is to miss the point of Paul's theology, ethics, and rhetoric in these verses.”<sup>1</sup>*

Thiselton continues:

*“Paul therefore establishes first that he is no less free, ἐλεύθερος, than “the strong” or other believers. He includes this rhetorical question among a strikingly forceful series construed with the negatives οὐκ ... οὐκ ... οὐχί ... (not ...not ...not...) to invite an emphatically affirmative set of answers: Am I not free? (*Of course I am!*) Am I not an apostle? (*It could be otherwise!*) But just as we all have knowledge (8:1) is affirmed only to be subsequently qualified, so this freedom is taken up in 9:19 with the comment: although I am from all [people or restrictions?] I made myself a slave for all (πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα).<sup>2</sup>*

Paul continues with a personal analogy to the Jewish tradition of regarding taking care of teachers or rabbis:

*“<sup>8</sup> Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same? <sup>9</sup> For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? <sup>10</sup> Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a*

<sup>1</sup> Thiselton, p. 666.

<sup>2</sup> Thiselton, p. 667.

*share in the crop.* <sup>11</sup> *If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?* <sup>12</sup> *If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more?* Paul augments his human rights by referencing both Moses in the Law and the Lord.

Thiselton adds a translation issue at v. 8 from the Greek to English at this point which helps clarify and strengthen Paul's argument. Paul wrote in Greek, *Μὴ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον ταῦτα λαλῶ ἢ καὶ ὁ νόμος ταῦτα οὐ λέγει*, which our English translations translate as "Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same?"

"Some English idiom has to be found to convey the rhetorical force of *μή*, i.e., a question which is formulated with the sole purpose of eliciting a participatory "No!" Barrett translates, *you don't suppose, do you ...?* Collins has, *I do not say this on human authority, do I?*<sup>3</sup>

The rhetorical Greek question is, "does not the law agree" with me; the rhetorical answer is, "yes it does"!

**1 Cor 9:12-13.** Paul adds a disclaimer to his personal rights:

*"If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more. Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.* <sup>13</sup> *Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?."*

**1 Cor 9:14,** *"<sup>14</sup> In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. But I have made no use of these right, nor am I writing this to you to secure any such provision."*

This discussion has elicited considerable discussion on paying ministers, both positive and negative. The point is, the God had always intended his temple and gospel servants to be supported in their ministry.

"Patristic sources identify this directive of the Lord as "the laborer (ὁ ἐργάτης) deserves his food" (ἄξιός ... τῆς τροφῆς αὐτοῦ, Matt 10:10), or "the laborer deserves his pay" (ἄξιός ὁ ἐργάτης τοῦ μισθοῦ αὐτοῦ, Luke 10:7). Chrysostom identifies the passage without further comment, but Theodore of Mopsuestia calls attention to the Gospels' corollary that only thus can the Twelve in Matthew or the Seventy in Luke "take no bag nor money" but place their trust in God and stay at the first house where they are welcomed without picking and choosing. Luke's context (9:58; 10:3-9) associates this ministerial direction with "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," which is also combined with the motif of urgency for the path of the good news in Matt 8:18-22; 9:37-38; 10:5-14.<sup>4</sup>

### **1 Cor 9:15-27 Rights surrendered by Christians in Christ**

Paul uses his own personal practice to point out that his purpose in preaching and teaching was not for self-service, even in the issue of self-preservation!

*"<sup>15</sup> But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting.* <sup>16</sup> *For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!* <sup>17</sup> *For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.* <sup>18</sup> *What then is*

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton, p. 684.

<sup>4</sup> Thiselton, p. 692f.

*my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel.”*

Paul sets his ministry in a higher dimension than personal gain. His encouragement to the Corinthians is that they would follow his example of *self-surrender for the sake of the gospel, the kingdom of God, and saving others.*

*“<sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. <sup>23</sup> I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”*

Thiselton concludes this discussion with the following comments drawn from Paul’s own experience, and the common knowledge of the Corinthians.

“Paul’s appeal to the principle of forbearance, or to voluntary renunciation of rights or entitlements, receives explication through *three categories of examples.* In 9:1–23 Paul appeals to his own personal example (cf. 11:1), although this appeal also embodies analogies and appeals to scripture and to the sayings of Jesus about ministerial maintenance. In 9:24–27 Paul appeals to an example drawn from Graeco-Roman competitive pursuits, namely, the Isthmian games ... (Some scholars correctly) agree that the central issue here is the need for *ἐγκράτεια*, **self-control**, or in some contexts abstinence (see below).”<sup>5</sup>

Paul’s final comments on this topic are emphasized through his oft repeated, ten times, expression, “do you not know” or more expressively “surely you know and understand” that in the gymnasium athletes compete in order to win! So you must run the Christian life for the imperishable reward of eternal life, rather than for local approval! He encourages them to imitate him by being willing to surrender personal rights for winning others for the Lord and kingdom.

*“<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; <sup>27</sup> but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”*

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<sup>5</sup> Thiselton, pp. 708–709.

## Chapter 9: 1 Cor 10:1-11:1: The dangers of idolatry

The Corinthian concerns for their own personal rights and freedoms was shaping their attitude toward the kingdom of Christ and God more than the principles of the kingdom of God.

The practice of eating food bought in the market place created issues of food offered to idols and attending festivals where food offered to idols was part of the celebration. Questions were asked about participating in such festivities either in ignorance or intentionally.

### 1 Cor 10:1-13: The danger of idolatry

**1 Cor 10:1-5.** The Israel, Moses, wilderness analogy:

*<sup>1</sup> I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> and all ate the same supernatural food <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”*

Paul warned the Corinthians and reminded them of Israel’s failures in the wilderness wanderings of the Sinai desert and Canaan. His opening thought in this pericope was a satirical challenge to the Corinthians, “surely you remember the story of Moses and Israel in the desert of Canaan! Paul uses a euphemism of the baptism of Israel in the Red Sea to highlight the close and dependent relationship of Israel and Moses to God who had delivered them from the sins of Egyptian idolatry. Moses was their leader who under God kept Israel safe from the threat of Egypt. Every person associated with the synagogue would have almost memorized that story! God fed Israel and supplied water when needed. However, Paul reminded them that in spite of God’s provision they still failed in their faith and returned to idolatry. Twenty-three thousand fell in a single day!<sup>1</sup>

Paul reminded the Corinthians that the stories of the Old Testament were written to remind Israel of God’s salvation, but also his stern judgment on those who lost their faith and returned to idolatry. Paul wrote:

**1 Cor 10:6-8.** “*Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance.” <sup>8</sup> We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.”*

Paul’s next comment returned to a theme he had been stressing since 1 Cor 1:10 ff, the Corinthians were more concerned with the cultural practices of their neighbors than they were with their faith in Jesus. They were overconfident in their super-spiritual mindset thinking they had special knowledge that excused their behavior. “<sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

The Corinthians were overconfident in their own ability to resist temptation and the dangers of idolatry.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 25:9 records this a 24,000. Paul was simply making an analogy illustration and not a fulfillment statement.

*<sup>6</sup> Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance.”*

**1 Cor 10:8-13.** Paul turned in this text to focus on the Corinthian practice of engaging in idol feasts. Referring back to Israel and its tendency to fall back into idolatry Paul warned against a faith based on uncertain grounds.

*<sup>8</sup> We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup> We must not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; <sup>10</sup> nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*

**1 Cor 10:12.** The word *stand* in Greek is ἵστημι, a perfect active infinitive from ἵστημι, *hístēmi*, implies *have stood firm in the past and continue to stand firm, to endure*<sup>2</sup>. The Corinthians were overconfident in their own ability to resist temptation and the dangers of idolatry and its partner in crime, *immorality*. Paul warned the Corinthians that the persistent temptation to idolatry and immorality which were in the Corinthian culture were a common ever-present danger, for “*no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.*” So, he encouraged them to keep their faith on God and his provision of strength, and not fall into the temptation of idolatry as in the case of Moses and Israel in the wilderness, with the thought that

*“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*

The ancient world was far more aware of the reality of spiritual warfare than we in the modern “scientific” world. Nevertheless, we in our modern world are increasingly being made aware of spiritual or psycho-spiritual powers that lie beyond our physical powers of determination. Christians today need to be sensitive to the fact that Satan is still a real and active power who at the slightest opportunity will use some form of trial or situation to draw Christians away from their need for Christ to fill their lives, rather than to be filled by some pseudo remedy as in the world-wide plague of drug addiction. Those who fall into drug addiction pitfalls seldom do so intending to become addicted. Satan works though all forms of nascent addiction to draw people away from Christ and overpower them into a false sense of spirituality or reality escape.

The temptation of idolatry, which on the surface was a pseudo spirituality, was a powerful addictive force in the ancient world drawing people away from God, just as drug addiction is a powerful addictive force in hiding and distracting people away from reality, God, and Christ today.

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<sup>2</sup> Balz and Schneider, ἵστημι, ἵστανόω, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, “ἵστημι sometimes takes on the meaning stand firm, resist ... 1 Cor 10:12. Zodiates, ἵστημι, *hístēmi*, to stand fast, i.e., to continue, endure, persist.

Satan will use any means available to distract people for God and Christ. Paul warned the Christians in Ephesus of Satan's deceptive power. Idolatry was rampant in Ephesus, so Paul wrote to the Ephesians to be aware of the powers of Satan:

**Eph 5:3ff.** *“But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

*<sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not be associated with them. <sup>8</sup> For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— <sup>9</sup> for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. <sup>10</sup> Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; <sup>13</sup> but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,*

*“Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”*

*<sup>15</sup> Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”*

**Eph 6:10.** *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. <sup>15</sup> As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

*<sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.”*

The Apostle Peter likewise warned the Christians he worked with in the Gentile diaspora, writing to them:

**1 Pet 5:8.** *“Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, steadfast in your faith.”* Demonstrating the problem of idols and of Satan Paul wrote also to the Colossians:

**Col 1:9** *“For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. <sup>11</sup> May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has rescued*

*us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

*<sup>6</sup> As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”*

**Col 2:8.** *“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. <sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; <sup>12</sup> when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup> And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.”*

Paul prayed for the Ephesians, and for all God’s people:

**Eph 3:14ff.** *“<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, <sup>17</sup> and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. <sup>18</sup> I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*<sup>20</sup> Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

### **1 Cor 10:14-11:1: Sharing idol feasts prohibited**

*“<sup>14</sup> Therefore, my beloved, shun the worship of idols. <sup>15</sup> I speak as to sensible men; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a **participation** in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a **participation** in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup> Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices **partners in the altar?***

In the Lord’s Supper, which Paul will address in the next chapter, Christians *participate with Christ* in drinking cup of blessing, the Lord’s Supper communion.

*Paul warned in the strongest terms that participating in idol feasts was not innocent! It was participating with demons!*

*<sup>19</sup> What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. <sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup> Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

Thiselton explains that the “elliptical transition to ἄλλ’ which primarily means *but* at the beginning of 1 Cor 10:20 causes a headache for some translators.”<sup>3</sup> The transition between 10:19 and 10:20 has caused some discussion ranging from a simple “No” as in the RSV, to “*not at all, no but, no not at all*”. His discussion focuses on the *No, but ἄλλ’* ὅτι ἂ θύουσιν δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῶ ... [*No, but the sacrifice of demons is not a sacrifice to God*], οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι. [*I do wish you to know or think that the idols are gods*].

Paul’s intention was to demonstrate that there is *no intention on his part to imply that food offered to idols have any meaning or power. Food offered to idols was food offered to demons, not God!*

Paul returns to a common saying of the spiritual superiors of Corinth in their catchword, “*all things are lawful and helpful*,” by demonstrating that selfish decisions, beliefs, or actions *do not enrich or edify any other person in their faith*. Knowing that food purchased in the marketplace is in reality only food does not help those who do not have that understanding and believe that such food was actually offered to the gods in worship. The faith, or conscience of the weaker brother should not be disturbed or harmed by selfish desires, or self-serving understandings. To know the error of idolatry does not excuse those who were “super spiritual” for acting selfishly if their action would cause another’s faith to be weakened.

### **1 Cor 10:23-11:1. The basic arguments and principles of 1 Cor 10:1-11:1 reviewed.**

We should note that this pericope is a difficult one to deal with as we have to work with several hypothetical diatribe type arguments in which we have to assume some of the arguments Paul is debating.

Paul summarizes the argument of eating a meal in someone’s home where meat bought in the market place was served. Christians concerned for the weaker should be careful in such situations. Paul was concerned for the weaker Christian’s *conscience*, in other words, *deep faith and feelings regarding something*.

**1 Cor 10:23-30.** Paul summarizes his thoughts regarding some of the Corinthians super spiritual attitudes he finds contrary to Christian principles.

<sup>23</sup> “*All things are lawful,*” *but not all things are helpful.* “*All things are lawful,*” *but not all things build up.* <sup>24</sup> *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.* <sup>25</sup> *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience.* <sup>26</sup> *For “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”* <sup>27</sup> *If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.* <sup>28</sup> (**But** *if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then out of consideration for the man who informed you, and for conscience’ sake—* <sup>29</sup> *I mean his conscience, not yours—do not eat it.*) *For why should my liberty be determined by another man’s scruples?* <sup>30</sup> *If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?”*

Thiselton points out that this section is best seen as a summation of the previous arguments regarding food bought in the marketplace:

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton, p. 774.

“Paul has covered most of the ground which he wishes to address in 8:1–11:1. This concluding section addresses issues which arise concerning meat bought from the market, which may well have been resold after earlier use and passage through pagan temples. To what extent, if at all, does what may earlier have been εἰδωλόθυτα acquire a different status for Christian believers when it is subsequently sold in the open market perhaps alongside ... “ordinary” meat on the open market? Should all market meat be abandoned in case its origin is cultic or even unknown? Should attitudes differ depending on whether the context is a believer’s own home or whether the believer is a guest in the home of a Gentile friend or colleague? How can the series of principles and case studies examined over virtually three chapters (from 8:1 onward) be summed up and applied to the practical situations of the addressees? Since much of the ground has been covered, little further literature provides resources for this section beyond that cited already.”<sup>4</sup>

The transition of thought between 10:28 and 29 presents some challenges! The problem is heightened in that we do not have the full argument that Paul is debating. We hear only one side of the argument, Paul’s side. The Corinthians knew the other side! The diatribe type argument in which a point is cited and then debated was well understood in the Greek environment. We must assume we know the Corinthian side as we examine Paul’s argument!

Thiselton mentions the difficulty in examining these verses:

“The Greek subjunctive ἐὰν δέ τις ... εἴπη projects a scenario which is *only hypothetical* or at most *perhaps infrequent*. Hence we translate, “if, however, someone should say.” The present tense of the negative imperative μὴ ἐσθίετε also deserves note. Since it cannot mean *do not continue to eat*, the Greek present suggests make a practice of not eating it.”<sup>5</sup>

On 10:29b-30 Thiselton guardedly observes:

“<sup>28</sup>**But** if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then out of consideration for the man who informed you, and for conscience’ sake—<sup>29</sup> I mean his conscience, not yours—do not eat it.) For why should my liberty be determined by another man’s scruples? <sup>30</sup> If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?”

We should note the two “em dashes” in this biblical text at vv.28, 29 which tend to complicate the flow of thought.

“The problems of vv. 29b–30 have been described by Barrett and Fee as “notoriously difficult” and as “a notorious crux.” No fewer than six possible accounts of the verses have been offered by major writers, although in our view the most careful and convincing explanation can be found in an article on the rhetorical function of these questions by Duane F. Watson.<sup>45</sup> Watson examines all the other major proposals, but convincingly concludes that these rhetorical questions serve a multilayered function of recapitulation, argumentation (which focuses the weakness of the position of “the strong”), and a proposal of policy. Once the rhetorical structure and functions have been grasped, and parallels noted, the apparent

<sup>4</sup> Thiselton, pp. 779–780.

<sup>5</sup> Thiselton, p. 787.

abruptness of the sudden change from the second person to the first person and supposed ambiguity of the questions cease to remain a problem.”<sup>6</sup>

**1 Cor 10:31-11:1.** The Corinthians should be careful that their freedom does not offend others, especially the weaker Christians.

*“31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. <sup>32</sup> Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, <sup>33</sup> just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.*

*<sup>11:1</sup> Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”*

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<sup>6</sup> Thiselton, p. 788.

## **Chapter 10: 1 Cor 11:2-16: Women and men in the public worship**

### **Some exegetical and theological comments**

Often, when discussing these chapters and debating principles addressing the congregation worship assembly, concerned Christians fear that the *status quo* of their liturgical worship practices might be challenged. This creates insecurity and concern! The fear is that some may permit their personal presuppositions to impinge on and shape the discussion and debate.

The danger of permitting personal presuppositions to determine the direction of the study is real and needs to be addressed, for we all come to the biblical text with some personal presuppositions.

I remember well the statement of one of my New Testament professors, Dr. Abraham Malherbe at Abilene Christian College made in an advanced exegetical course in 1967. He admitted the danger of presupposition but emphasized that all presuppositions must be carefully examined since not all presuppositions are valid, and all presuppositions must be kept in check. To keep such presuppositions in check there are several critical biblical principles available to the exegete. Such critical approaches as literary criticism, historical criticism, sociological and cultural criticism, and religious criticism assist the exegete in managing personal presuppositions.

I mention the above to stress how important the process of critical biblical exegesis is in eliminating personal presuppositions especially in subjects that reflect on critical liturgical worship and soteriological church practices.

Biblical exegesis is the practice of a critical study of the biblical text *in its original context* to determine as carefully as possible *what the original meaning the original writer had in expressing his thoughts in the text.*

Once the exegetical study is completed the *biblical theologian* seek to determine what the *major theological principles* were that the original writer intended, and then see how the original theological principles apply to present day contexts.

These thoughts are germane to this study of the 1 Cor 11-14 pericope which discusses Paul's concern for the behavior of the Corinthian Christians in their worship assemblies. It will not be my intention to examine or judge the liturgical worship practices of churches today! As best as is possible, we will ignore present church liturgical practices to eliminate any favored presuppositions we might have.

We will seek to examine Paul's original message to the Corinthian church, and highlight what theological principles we find in the text. We will leave it to the reader to examine their worship assembly practice in light of these theological principles.

We might say that our intention is to provide an *exegetical theological study of the text* and not a historical church institution overview.

In several places of his study Fitzmyer alludes to the fact that these chapters break away somewhat from the previous chapters in which Paul was responding to questions regarding personal cultural issues from "Chloe's people" and letters received from Corinth. We do not

have any indication of how these issues regarding women and head coverings came to Paul's notice other than his personal knowledge of the liturgical worship practices of the church.<sup>1</sup>

Another interesting thought is mentioned by Fitzmyer! He points out that this pericope discusses "*problems about sacred assemblies*" that address the *liturgical worship of the church*. His point is that this and the following four chapters material *addresses the church worship assembly*.<sup>2</sup>

I stress again, Paul was discussing in the following chapters *behavior in the corporate worship assembly service, not everyday life*. This is true especially in regard to the *head covering and speaking and singing* in the church assemblies. There may be a cultural public theological principle in the head covering discussion of the men and women, but Paul was *not addressing every day public life in Corinth*.

### 1 Cor 11:2-16: The Head-covering of Women

Thiselton has an excellent heading to this section; "Mutuality and Respect: Men and Women at Worship in Public, and Rich and Poor at the Lord's Supper."<sup>3</sup>

We will note that throughout *this pericope discussing behavior in the public worship assembly a common thread runs through each topic Paul addresses*. It is the theme of *mutual respect and honor* of the other persons involved. *This was a theme that in one way dominates the major issues in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, which for convenience we refer to as First Corinthians*.

We have noted that there are some respect issues among the Corinthians regarding those not baptized by Paul, Peter, or Apollos. There was also a lack of concern in the congregation over the neglect of action to discipline the man living with his father's wife demonstrating a lack of respect for the woman's husband. There was little concern for the weaker fellow Christian who might be affected by eating food offered to idols and bought in the coon market place.

Now in this great pericope concerning the worship assembly we see several items surfacing that demonstrated an apparent a lack of respect for others regarding head coverings in the public worship service. There was some concern over eating a meal during the Lord's Supper resulting in a neglected or disregard for the poor. Concerns over spiritual giftedness and super spirituality was developing a ranking system in the church. Speaking in *tongues* and *prophesying* for self-gratification missed the whole purpose of spirit giftedness.

### 1 Cor 11:2. Praise for following Paul's previous teaching.

*"<sup>2</sup> I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you."*

Paul's use of the concept of *praise*, ἐπαινέω, *epainēō*,<sup>4</sup> is striking in light of what he has been saying in the previous 11 chapters, and what he will say beginning with the word *but*, δὲ in vs. 3, "*But I want you to understand ...*" The expression I want you to understand is obviously *intensive* as were the ten previous examples of this expression.

<sup>1</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 405ff. Cf. also Thiselton, pp. 800ff.

<sup>2</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 404ff.. Cf. also Thiselton, pp. 800ff.

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton, p. 800.

<sup>4</sup> Zodhiates, ἐπαινέω, *epainēō* ... to praise, to bestow praise upon, applaud, commend.

*But- δὲ*, is a coordinating conjunction which is strictly *adversative* ...more frequently denoting transition or conversion ... serving to introduce something else, whether opposed to what precedes or simply continuative or explanatory.<sup>5</sup>

Paul's use of the words *the traditions* is interesting and directive! The expression ὅτι πάντα μου μέμνησθε καί reads *that things of mine you have indeed remembered*.

I like Thiselton's translation of this verse, "*I give you full credit for keeping me in mind unfailingly, and for continuing to hold fast to the traditions which I, in turn, handed on to you."*<sup>6</sup>

The copulative conjunction καί, *kai*, serves with in emphatic sense of *having an intensive force*<sup>7</sup> which Thiselton translates as *unfailingly*.

Paul refers to his *teachings* which he *handed down* to the Corinthians as *traditions*, παραδόσεις. Zodhiates explains παραδόσεις as:

"A tradition, *doctrine or injunction delivered or communicated from one to another*, whether divine (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6) or human (Matt. 15:2, 3, 6; Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8).<sup>8</sup>

A closer look at Paul's clause is helpful, καθὼς παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, τὰς παραδόσεις κατέχετε. A direct translation of this reads, "*just as I handed over or dawn to you, the traditions you are keeping.*" Thiselton's rendering of this is good, "*continuing to hold fast to the traditions which I, in turn, handed on to you."*<sup>9</sup>

The word *tradition* in biblical uses implies *something more than a mere suggestion!*

Friedrich Büchsel in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* expands on Paul's use of the term παραδόσεις:

"For Paul Christian teaching is tradition (1 C. 11:2; 2 Th. 2:15; 3:6; cf. 1 C. 11:23; 15:1–11), and he demands that the churches should keep to it, since *salvation depends on it* (1 C. 15:2). He sees no antithesis between pneumatic piety and the high estimation of tradition. *The essential point for Paul is that it has been handed down (1 C. 15:3), and that it derives from the Lord (11:23). A tradition initiated by himself or others is without validity (Col. 2:8). It is no contradiction that Jesus repudiates tradition and Paul champions it. Paul's tradition agrees with Jesus' rejection, since they are both opposed to human tradition. Paul's use of παράδοσις and παραδοῦναι rests on the Jewish usage, and agrees with that of the Mysteries to the extent that this agrees with Jewish usage. On the other hand, Paul does not recognize (stet) the sacraments as objects of παραδοῦναι and παράδοσις ... The same is probably true of 1 C. 11:23 ff.; the ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου implies that the Lord's Supper, its celebration and the appropriate words come from the Lord, not that Paul received the formula in visionary instruction by the ascended Lord."*<sup>10</sup>

Balz and Schneider in their *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* add:

"This noun is found 13 times in the NT — 8 times in Mark 7:3–13 par. and elsewhere only in the Pauline corpus. 2. a) The noun consistently means *traditional regulation* (Cerfaux: "rule-tradition"), that which is handed down from generation to generation with

<sup>5</sup> Zodhiates, δὲ.

<sup>6</sup> Thiselton, p. 800.

<sup>7</sup> Zodhiates, καί.

<sup>8</sup> Zodhiates, παράδοσις, *parádoxis*.

<sup>9</sup> Thiselton, p. 800.

<sup>10</sup> Büchsel, F., παράδοσις, Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 172–173.

an authoritative demand for compliance and is received accordingly. It thus approaches the sense of rule, command, law (cf. Gal 1:14 with Phil 3:6; analogous to ἐντολή and λόγος in Mark 7:8f. par.; v.l. νόμος in Matt 15:1). The regulation is “learned, passed on, received, obeyed, grasped;” one either “walks” in accord with it or “transgresses” it. The semantic structure remains unaffected by the sphere of application (Jewish παράδοσις in Mark 7 par. and Galatians 1, Christian in 1 Corinthians and 2 Thessalonians, heretical in Colossians 2) and any negative or positive evaluation. Παράδοσις is rejected when it is human in form and stands against the will of God.”<sup>11</sup>

### **1 Cor 11:2, 3, a positive Pauline commendation**

Between his criticism of the Corinthians for their lax judgement of Christian standards of sexual morality, and their boldness in associating in pagan festivals in which idol meat was sold and consumed, and then a major section in which he faults them for poor judgment and behavior in their worship assemblies, Paul was commending the Corinthians for their faithfulness in adhering to the basic Christian teachings he had brought to them.

It is nevertheless interesting that this brief commendation of 1 Cor 11:2, 3 falls between *two important discussions of worship services; pagan idolatry and Christian worship assemblies.*

### **1 Cor 11:3-16. Women, men, and head coverings in the worship assembly**

When exploring the section we are about to enter, men and women’s head coverings fall under the same overall concern for mutual respect for others in the public worship assembly.

Before we engage this pericope and discuss the words “*the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God*” we should note that the opening words of the pericope “*I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ.*” Paul opens the discussion with his familiar expression which he uses to lead into most of his arguments. They must have some theological import! *I want you to know with understanding*, the headship of every man, which is man and woman, is Christ. This establishes the theological stream of thought running through the text.

These fourteen verses have generated more pages of Christian speculation and comment than almost any other fourteen verse pericope in Scripture! It certainly generated as many heated discussions in church fellowship as any other!

Thiselton devotes numerous pages to a discussion of the various views of scholars through time to this remarkable discussion of women, including comments from respected feminist scholars such as Elizabeth Fiorenza Schuessler. He introduces this pericope with the following important comments concerning how this pericope fits into the overall argument of Paul in 1 Corinthians regarding how people should relate to one another in the church while maintaining unity:

“It is very surprising how readily virtually all commentators appear to ignore the fundamental continuity between the arguments and themes of 8:1–11:1 and the application of these very same themes to issues concerning public or corporate worship in 11:2–14:40

...

In 11:17–32 “the strong” or wealthy turn the Lord’s Supper into a festival meal in the course of which socially deprived or economically dependent late-comers are treated as

<sup>11</sup> Balz, and Schneider, In *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 21.

hangers-on who may have to eat different fare in a different part of the house, thereby undermining the “for others” of the cross itself which the Lord’s Supper proclaims (11:26). In 12:1–14:40 the “gifted” seem hardly to care if less “gifted” believers somehow feel estranged or second-class (see below, esp. 12:20–22 and 14:20–22).

“In 11:2–16 both “rights” to female emancipation and “rights” to male headship receive careful qualification as contributory strands, but by no means the whole picture within a larger, more complex whole, in which respect for “the other” (the other gender and the outside world) remains a fundamental concern. Love modifies “freedom” and “rights” if the good of the whole is thereby better served, and especially if the gospel is more effectively promoted (cf. 9:19–27).”<sup>12</sup>

Thiselton’s point is well made! If the meaning of this pericope is limited to veils and length of hair, or even if the focus is placed on female—male orders of rank, *then we have missed what Paul was addressing*. It seems most likely that the female—male gender relationship was off balance in Corinth. Paul would have learned of this and noticed it. *This pericope then is intended to set the relationships of all the members of the church in Corinth in an appropriate eschatological kingdom scheme rather than in a typical Roman—Greek cultural context.*

In summary, this means *this is how we behave in God’s eschatological kingdom, not the Roman kingdom!*

The emphasis of an eschatological kingdom theme is that things are different in the kingdom of God and Christ. Disciples of Jesus live by a different standard than those outside Christ. This was the major theme of Matthew’s Gospel where he taught Jewish and Gentile disciples of the kingdom’s eschatological (end of the world) soteriological principles. Think for a moment of Jesus’ sermon on the mount, *disciples of Jesus are different!*

The connection between the idolatrous worship issues of 1 Cor 10 and the Christian worship assembly of 1 Cor 11:2ff lifts the discussion above mere cultural practices into an *eschatological dimension* which Paul has already introduced with his discussion of the resurrection of 1 Cor 1 and his culminating discussion of the final end of the world second coming of Jesus and the general resurrection a 1 Cor 15.

Fee, like Thiselton, identifies an eschatological theme or concern running through Paul’s male—female discussion specifically in regard to the public worship theme. Apparently Paul recognized some imbalance in the Corinthian cultural practices that were not in keeping with kingdom eschatological principles.<sup>13</sup> Fee observes:

“Much more likely the problem is related to the overall historical situation in Corinth and reflects the theological outlook noted elsewhere in this letter ... especially that of the “eschatological” women noted earlier ... There can be little question that in the new era inaugurated by Christ, *women participated in worship along with men*. For the most part, in these matters Corinth followed the traditions they had received when Paul was among them ... it is also difficult to understand Paul’s *answer unless their “spiritualized” eschatology also involved some kind of breakdown in the distinction between the sexes.*”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Thiselton, pp. 798–799.

<sup>13</sup> Eschatological principles refer to theological principles that deal with end time things, final things, and principles of the eschatological age, the Christian age. Cf fn 19, 20, on eschatology in Chapter 5.

<sup>14</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 548.

Whichever way you approach this periscope, the discussion hinges around the relationship of the women to men and Christ. What the reason is for Paul's discussion has to do with some behavior of the women in relation to the men in the Corinthian congregation's cultural practices. It certainly did not have anything to do with feminist concerns in Corinth, but it does have some theological application to feminist concerns today. How do men and women relate to one another with mutual respect in Jesus' eschatological kingdom, the church?

### 1 Cor 11:2-16 – a *chiastic* structure

David Garland devotes considerable space to introducing this pericope, including an informative *chiastic* structure to the pericope. The *chiasm* runs from point **A.** to **E.** and then back again to point **A.** Point **E.** is the high point of the structure and pericope.

Garland suggests two levels of *shame* in Paul's admonition; social and theological.

- A.** *Commendation for maintaining the traditions* handed on by Paul and the assertion of the basic principle that everyone has a head (11:12-3)
- B.** *Shame* about coverings for men and women (11:4-5)
- C.** *Social* impropriety for a woman to be covered: *theological* impropriety for a man to be covered (11:6-7)
- D.** *Theological* explanation from the creation account (11:8-9)
- E.** Central assertion: for this reason, a woman ought to have authority over her head (11:10)
  - D.** *Theological* caveat from procreation (11:11-12)
  - C.** *Social* impropriety for a woman to be uncovered (11:13)
  - B.** *Shame* (and glory): lessons from nature about coverings for men and women (11:14-15)
- A.** *Admonition* to conform to *Paul's customs and those of the churches of God* (11:16)

### 1 Cor 11:3-16. An exegetical,<sup>15</sup> contextual discussion of the headship of women, men, and Christ in the context of the Corinthian church.

<sup>3</sup> *But I want you to understand that the **head** of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.* <sup>4</sup> *Any man who prays or prophesies with his head (covered, where it means something hanging down from the head like a veil<sup>16</sup>) dishonors his head,* <sup>5</sup> *but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head **unveiled** dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven.* <sup>6</sup> *For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; **but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven**, let her wear a veil.* <sup>7</sup> *For a **man** ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and **glory of God**; but **woman is the glory of man**.* <sup>8</sup> *(For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.)* <sup>9</sup> *Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.)* <sup>10</sup> *That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels.* <sup>11</sup> *(Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman;* <sup>12</sup> *for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.)* <sup>13</sup> *Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?* <sup>14</sup> *Does **not** nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him,* <sup>15</sup> *but if a*

<sup>15</sup> Exegesis is a disciplined critical examination of a text in its original historical, literary, cultural, and religious context.

<sup>16</sup> Zōdhiates, κατὰ κεφαλῆς.

*woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup> If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.”*

Thiselton discusses this pericope under one extensive detailed section of his commentary headed, “*Freedom, Status, Reciprocity, and Respect for the Other in the Ordering of Public Worship*”<sup>17</sup>

This heading in some ways misses the import of the major discussion. *The first fourteen verses are about women and men respecting others, including the Lord.* It is not merely a discussion of *cultural gender relations* as one might expect. Although it touches on Corinthian customs, it is more *Corinthian theological* than simply customary practice, that is *how Corinthian Christians behave before God and Christ in God’s plan for the kingdom of God.*

Thiselton observes that the discussion of the role of women in this larger pericope, 1 Cor 11:3-14:40, had an *eschatological* role. The discussion is more than clothing! It has reference to *God’s order of things in his kingdom*—appropriate respect for one another. It has *kingdom theological import*, both women and men are equally involved in the kingdom but with appropriate relations to Christ and God.

“Many commentators believe that the tradition for which Paul commends the readers is the eschatological inclusion of men and women as active participants in prayer and prophetic speech, in contrast to the issue of clothing, which Paul believes must still generate signals of gender distinctiveness on the basis of the order of creation, which still holds sway even in the gospel era.”<sup>18</sup>

### **We need to examine more closely some of the major Greek words in this pericope**

To begin, we briefly mention **Head** (*kephalḗ*); **shame** (*κατασχύνω, kataischúnō*); **veiled** (*κατακαλύπτω, katakalúptō*); **uncovered** (*ἀκατακάλυπτος, akatakályptos*).

Regarding the first word, **head**, *kephalḗ*, Zodhiates observes,

“**head, κεφαλή, kephalḗ**, this primarily means the head, top, that which is uppermost in relation to something.”<sup>19</sup>

Baltz and Schneider observe that the word *kephalḗ* appears 75 times in the New Testament in a variety of contexts.

“If one includes the 5 occurrences of *κεφαλή γωνίας* [*head corner stone*], *κεφαλή* occurs 75 times in the NT, most often in the singular (of the 17 plural forms, 14 are in Rev; ...) with the literal meaning of the “*principal*” *part of the human body* ... Most of the occurrences are in the narratives in the Gospels, in the visions in Revelation, and in 1 Cor 11:4–10. The few theologically significant occurrences are concentrated, however, in Paul’s letters (esp. 1 Cor 11:3) and the ... Pauline letters Colossians and Ephesians. NT usage does not reflect the entire breadth of meaning for *κεφαλή* ... Yet certain word combinations, expressions, conceptual associations, and specific sayings of some NT writings require a *very differentiated classification of meanings.*”<sup>20</sup>

Thiselton offers one of the most complete discussions on the text we are exploring and the meaning of the work *kephalḗ*. His detailed discussion covers over twenty-one pages of small print in his commentary. He observes:

<sup>17</sup> Thiselton, pp. 798–799.

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, p. 811.

<sup>19</sup> Zodhiates, *κεφαλή, kephalḗ*.

<sup>20</sup> Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 285.

“The translation of this verse has caused more personal agony and difficulty than any other in the epistle, not least because the huge array of research literature and lexicographical data which presses controversially and polemically for diverse translations of κεφαλή, in which each of three main views finds powerful and well-informed advocates.<sup>21</sup>

Under a summary heading Thiselton proposes several ways *kephalē* can be translated and understood.

A major difficulty is differentiating when the word is used *literally*, *metaphorically*, and *theologically* in the same pericope. The following is a compilation of the thoughts of Thiselton, Balz and Schneider, Fee, and Oepke (Kittel) of the following metaphorical or theological possibilities for the use of the term *kephalē*:

As we compile a list of the possibilities of suggestions, we begin with Thiselton who tentatively favors *head* involving:

Authority, supremacy, leadership, source, origin, temporal priority, synecdoche for preeminence, foremost, topmost, serving interactively as a metaphor drawn from the physiological head.

Theologically, although Thiselton does not list this category in his listing of options, he refers repeatedly to the theological meaning implied in the use of *kephalē*.<sup>22</sup>

If we add Balz and Schneider, *then we have the concept of the principle part of a relationship*.<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the words *shame* and *veiled*, κατασχύνω, *kataischúnō*, and κατακαλύπτω, *katakalúptō*, Zodhiates defines these two words as related;

“to cover with a veil or something which hangs down, hence, to veil; in the pass., katakalúptomai, to be covered, veiled, to wear a veil (1 Cor. 11:6, 7). The covering here involves either the hair of a woman hanging down or, in case that may not be possible, the veil. It must be remembered in this connection that women of loose morals, especially the prostitute priestesses of the temple of Aphrodite at Corinth, kept their hair very short in order to be distinguished for what they were. This was strictly forbidden for Christian women in order that no one would mistake them as women of loose morals.”<sup>24</sup>

On these two words, *veiled* and *shame* Balz and Schneider add:

“in the NT only mid.: 1 Cor 11:6 ... 7: *women must veil themselves* (v. 6) during the worship service (with a veil, v. 10), while men, the image of God, may not (in v. 7 τὴν κεφαλὴν is probably an accusative of relationship.”<sup>25</sup>

In an extensive article Oepke, in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, observes regarding the Greek κατακαλύπτω, *katakalúptō*:

“Outside the NT the word is found in the sense of “to veil” or “to veil oneself” from Homer, esp. in the poets, but also in inscriptions...and in Plato. In the OT it acquires a sacral sense not only as used anatomically in sacrificial regulations (Ex. 29:22 etc.) but also in the command that Moses should place the ark within the Holy of Holies and hide it from

<sup>21</sup> Thiselton, p. 811. Cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 408-411 for opinion similar to Thiselton.

<sup>22</sup> Thiselton, p. 812-25.

<sup>23</sup> Balz and Schneider, vol. 2, p. 285

<sup>24</sup> Zodhiates, κατακαλύπτω, *katakalúptō*.

<sup>25</sup> Balz and Schneider, vol. 2, p. 258.

sight behind the curtain (Ex. 26:34). Isaiah says of the seraphim before the throne of Yahweh that they respectfully covered their faces and feet with their wings (κατεκάλυπτον, Is. 6:2). The veiling of women is a custom in Israel. A disgraced woman comes veiled to judgment (κατακεκαλυμμένη ... Yet one may also suspect that a woman muffled up (κατεκαλύψατο τὸ πρόσωπον) and lurking by the wayside is a harlot (Gn. 38:15). This opens up the way for an understanding of the relevant NT passage."<sup>26</sup>

Thiselton adds the following comments on *uncovered* and *covered*:

*Uncovered*, (ἀκατακάλυπτος, *akatakályptos*).

*Covered*, κατακαλυπτέσθω, *present passive imperative verb, let her be covered or veiled.*

Thiselton observes, "Archaeological evidence from Rome itself to the Roman East is unambiguous, Oster urges, in depicting the "liturgical head covering" of men when they pray or use prophetic speech: "the practice of men covering their heads in the context of prayer and prophecy was a common pattern of Roman piety and widespread during the late Republic and early Empire. Since Corinth was a Roman colony, there should be little doubt that this aspect of Roman religious practice deserves greater attention by commentators than it was received."<sup>27</sup>

On the challenging definition of *nature*, Zodhiates observes:

"φύσις nature, natural birth or condition ... natural disposition."<sup>28</sup> *TDNT*, "the natural qualities of man"! Thiselton adds, "No doubt some will attack our translation of οὐδὲ ἡ φύσις αὐτῆς as "*not even the very ordering of how things are*" (drawn primarily from Schrage), since in purely lexicographical terms and regularly outside Paul and the NT φύσις simply means *nature*."<sup>29</sup>

### Exegetical comments on 1 Cor 11:3-16

To save some time and space I will offer *exegetical comments within* the Corinthian text. This can be a little confusing, but in a pericope as complicated as our text, this might be less confusing than an extended exegesis! We will depend on the comments of the major scholars of 1 Corinthians for guidance.

**1 Cor 11:3.** "*But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*

In this context the meaning of *kephalḗ*, *head*, is best understood in the *theological*; not the sociological sense. In the idea that in the *creative arrangement* the order is *God, Christ, man, woman*. In regard to the woman this does not infer an inferior role, it implies only the sense of theological line of religious framework. Some scholars see in *kephalḗ* a sense of theological *source*! God is the *source of order* of Christ; Christ of man; and man of woman. The importance of this verse is that it reminds the Corinthian Christians that there is a *theological order of respect* in the kingdom of God that supersedes the social Roman/Greek order.

<sup>26</sup> Oepke, A., καλύπτω, κάλυμμα, ἀνακαλύπτω, κατακαλύπτω, ἀποκαλύπτω, ἀποκάλυψις, Kittel, *TDNT*, vol. 3, p. 561.

<sup>27</sup> Thiselton, p. 823.

<sup>28</sup> Zodhiates, φύσις, *phúsis*.

<sup>29</sup> Thiselton, p. 844.

**1 Cor 11: 4.** “Any man who *prays or prophesies* with his **head covered dishonors his head**,<sup>5</sup> but any woman who *prays or prophesies* with **her head unveiled dishonors her head**—it is the same as if her head were shaven.”

We should remember that in the Corinthian context the synagogue was a prominent feature in the formal worship assembly and religious life. We can assume from the vast resources of literary references extant from that period<sup>30</sup> that this was also the case in the Roman/Greek temple formal worship services. In the synagogue and Roman cultus *men participated in prayers and prophesying without a head covering, but it was inappropriate for some reason, most likely cultural, but also possibly religiously, for women to lead or participate in prayers and prophesying with her head uncovered.* Paul does not explain a reason that was obvious to the Corinthians.

**1 Cor 11:6.** “For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. <sup>7</sup> For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.) <sup>10</sup> That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup> (Nevertheless, **in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman;** <sup>12</sup> for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. **And all things are from God.**)”

Thiselton, Oster, and Murphy-O’Conner hold that there is strong archaeological evidence that it was the practice in Roman worship situation for men to cover their heads in worship situations.

The *veil*, *katakalyptō*, something that hangs down from the head like long hair, or simply an adequate woman’s head covering, is a sign that she is a virtuous woman.

However, here in our text, Paul’s instructions were that in worship the men and women should display *different signs* on their heads. The point is one of appropriate relationships between men and women in spite of the fact that all are equal in the kingdom of Jesus.

In contrast to the local Roman practices men should not cover their heads *out of respect for God*, but *women should cover their heads!* The implication is one of demonstrating relationships between God, men, and women! *This was more of a cultural respect issue which had some theological implications, in Corinth!*

There is some indication from the Roman and Jewish background literature and archaeological evidence that a woman uncovered or shaved is a sign of prostitution or sexual looseness.

Paul argues that the veil on the women and unveiled head of the men are signs of an *appropriate relationship* between men and women, and God, in Corinth, which was apparently lacking in their Corinth sense of super spiritual equality. “*Because we have equal spiritual gifts we can discard the traditional signs of mutual respect!*”

Thiselton offers this sound advice regarding the above suggestions:

“This is confirmed by the comments of Murphy-O’Connor and others that (whether we are considering long, unbound hair or inappropriate head covering) what remains common

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *First Corinthians: New Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 1980; and Rick Oster, *1 Corinthians*.

to vv. 4–7 is *that which distracts attention from God or Christ in public worship by generating a discordant, semiotic clothing code or hairstyle code which inevitably draws attention to the self in a way which makes the person’s head a source of shame for his or her own self-respect, the respect of congregation, and the honor of the Lord who in public worship should be the central focus of thought and attention. In this context of worship.*<sup>31</sup>

**1 Cor 11:10.** Paul includes an interesting and challenging comment, the mutual covering business is “*because of the angels!*” Fitzmyer and others propose that this expression draws on both traditional Jewish and Qumran Dead Sea Covenanters’ traditions that angels were present in every sacred worship service.

“One final point may be made. Among the Jewish traditions which find their way into the NT, those in which angels are perceived as “guardians of order” as well as “participants in the church’s praise to God” provide the best clue to Paul’s meaning. Again, this element is noted in the Qumran writings by Fitzmyer, and the role of their “ordering” structures and nations has been emphasized by G. B. Caird, among others. In Gal 3:19 Paul observes that the law was put into operation “through angels by a mediator,” which coheres with Caird’s argument.<sup>32</sup>

Paul concludes this portion of his argument with the comment that “*Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman.*” We might add that this means in the *eschatological kingdom* of Jesus, men have no prior claims than men for neither is independent of the other in the kingdom.

**1 Cor 11:13.** “*Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, <sup>15</sup> but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup> If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.*”

Paul argues that *nature itself* has something to say about this! That is, *the normal ordinary practices*<sup>33</sup> in Corinth, the cultural norms, should provide direction regarding the appropriate behavior of Corinthians in the worship assembly, which appropriate behavior was missing!

The man’s uncovered head and the women’s long hair should be signs of mutual respect in Roman Corinth and the Corinthian congregation, notably on their assembled worship services which is the primary context of this discussion!

### **An exegetical/theological summary of 1 Cor 11:2-16: women and men in the Corinthian worship assembly service**

Our intention in this exercise has been to examine this pericope in the light of Paul writing *the letter to the church in Corinth, addressing issues of which he had become aware in the weekly Lord’s Day worship service.*

The behavior of the women and men, especially in their head coverings, indicated *a serious loss of respect for one another and their relationship with God in his eschatological kingdom.* We will see in 1 Cor 11:17ff and 1 Cor 12 which follow this pericope that there were serious

<sup>31</sup> Thiselton, pp. 827–828.

<sup>32</sup> Thiselton, p. 841.

<sup>33</sup> Thiselton, p. 844.

*worship assembly* liturgical issues relating to Holy Spirit giftedness *which demonstrated a lack of respect for one another*. This was apparently endemic in Corinth. The eschatological kingdom of Jesus runs according to different rules of behavior than the Roman/Greek customs of Corinth.

In our attempt to understand this fascinating pericope we have considered several important exegetical contexts; the original historical setting, Roman Corinth. The Corinthian Christians were manifesting more Corinthian cultural behavior primarily in their weekly congregational worship assemblies that were degrading the nature of true spiritual worship. The original literary Greek language context in which Paul wrote to the Corinthians impacts our understanding of some of the expressions adopted by Paul. Furthermore, the original sociological and cultural context of the Roman/Greek and Jewish Synagogue cultures in Corinth had some impact on the worshipful behavior in the Corinthian congregation.

Finally, in Paul's thinking, the teaching in this pericope was in accord with his standard instruction to all the churches of Christ for which he was responsible.

## Chapter 11: 1 Cor 11:17-34: Corinth and the Lord's Supper

### Introduction to this chapter

As a commentary this will be an exegetical model examining the text of 1 Cor 11:17-34 *in the context of the Church in Corinth*.

However, we will begin this chapter with an overview of how the Lord's Supper has been described and understood *in the broader Christian world*.

Particular attention will also be given to the celebration of the Lord's Supper *in New Testament churches of the first century*, and to *churches in the first and second centuries*.

### The Lord's Supper celebration in Christian churches today

Christian denominations in general use a variety of related terms to discuss the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The following terms are associated with the Lord's Supper as practiced in the different church denominations.

**Holy Mass.** This is the favored term adopted among Roman Catholics. The word mass derives from the Latin *missa* meaning to *be sent, dismissed*. The word *mission* is related. Its origin has to do with the priest dismissing people after the Eucharist.

**Communion.** Most evangelical protestant churches prefer this term, with some Churches of Christ following suit.

The word derives from *sharing together, fellowship* from the Greek *koinōnía*.

**The Eucharist.** Most "high churches"<sup>1</sup> such as the Church of England, Episcopal Churches, some Methodists, and Lutherans, prefer this term as it has a biblical reference. I will comment on this below in the study. Eucharist derives from the Greek *eucharistía* meaning *to give thanks* as used by Jesus and Paul in Matt 26:26ff and 1 Cor 11:17ff.

**The Lord's Supper.** Most Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and several Protestant evangelical churches prefer this term.

**The Sacrament.** This term is favored among Roman Catholics, Churches of England, Episcopalians, and "high churches." Few evangelical churches use this term. The term sacrament derives from the Latin *sacramentum, an oath that binds*.

### Some religious approaches to the Lord's Supper in different religious groups.

We will examine these theological concepts in some detail in a later lesson. At this point I merely mention them as a framework for the study which follows.

**Transubstantiation.** Favored by Roman Catholics with significant theological and liturgical implications in the practice of the celebrations. It refers to "the change of the substance of bread into the substance of the body of Christ and of the substance of wine into the substance of the blood of Christ". This change is brought about in the eucharistic prayer through the efficacy of the word of Christ and by the action of the Holy Spirit. However, "the outward characteristics of bread and wine, which is the 'eucharistic species', remain unaltered." "Defined by the *Fourth Council of the Lateran* in 1215".<sup>2</sup>

**Consubstantiation.** Favored by Lutherans and Episcopal churches. This represents the Doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It was associated with the theology of Martin Luther. It teaches that after the consecration the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ and the substance of the bread and wine *coexist* in union with each other. It originated as a reform of the Roman Catholic mindset of transubstantiation. an early Protestant Christian religious movement that existed took place in the 14th century and prevailed until the 16th-century in the English Protestant Reformation. It was initially led by John Wycliffe,

<sup>1</sup> I use the term high church to describe churches that follow a set liturgy in their worship services.

<sup>2</sup> *Compendium* of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

a Catholic theologian who was dismissed from the University of Oxford in 1381 for criticism of the Roman Catholic Church.

**Impanation**<sup>3</sup>. From the Latin: *impanatio*. Impanation advanced a theory of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the consecrated bread of the Eucharist. It does not imply a change in the substance of either the bread or the body. This doctrine, apparently patterned after Christ's Incarnation (God is made flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ), is the assertion that Christ's divine attributes are shared by the eucharistic bread. This view is similar but not identical to the theory of consubstantiation. It was favored by John Calvin. He believed in an actual participation of Jesus' body and blood in the elements. The final rejection by the Lutheran clergy against the Calvinistic theory of the Eucharist was that the Calvinists believe that Christ is present in the bread *only by faith*.

**A Memorial.** Favored by Huldrych Zwingli. A Memorial is a *term* favored in Churches of Christ. The practice of Churches of Christ Lord's Supper service follows this mindset. "*This do in remembrance of me*" which statement indicates a memorial approach. We will examine Scriptures relating to the institution of the Lord's Supper as a memorial in the New Testament.

We will examine this approach to the Lord's Supper in the First Century New Testament Church celebration.

This memorial emphasis places the Lord's Supper theologically at the center the church's Sunday worship assembly.

In regard to early church practice in the first century we will also comment on the *koinōnia* or *fellowship meal*.

### **An Introduction to the *Theology* of The Lord's Supper.**

While examining several terms we hope to introduce and study several important theological concepts that should shape our worship service and celebration of the Lord's Supper.

We will comment on the so-called *Agape* or *Love Feast* and mention why this was discontinued in the celebration of many early churches, but still remains in church life if not strictly related to the Lord's Supper in some churches.

The Lord's supper as a *memorial* likewise contains several important theological implications that should impact the celebration of the service.

As the *Eucharist*, a term not favored or used much by Churches of Christ, there are several helpful theological implications imbedded in the biblical term that help shape our thinking in the celebration of the Lord's Supper and in life in general.

The concept of the Lord's Supper as a *celebration* should impact our attitude and discussion, verbiage, and presentation of the service.

The Roman Catholic theological concept of the Mass as an *atonement sacrifice* at the altar is theologically misleading and deserves considerable discussion.

We will comment later on several common false conceptions in the celebration of the Lord's Supper that tend to be legalistic and unfortunate.

### **The Lord's Supper in the life of the Corinthian church**

1 Cor 11:17 and 1 Cor 11: 22 form an *inclusio*, beginning with "***I do not commend you***" and closing with "*shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.*" An *inclusio* highlights the content of a message and isolates it from the remainder of the pericope. The following pericope, 1 Cor 11:17-34, unlike the head covering, had no redeeming features!

The comment at 1 Cor 11:2 regarding the head covering discussion "***I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you***" held a positive

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<sup>3</sup> *Miriam-Webster Dictionary*; Wikipedia: *Impanation*

import; they had remembered the *tradition*<sup>4</sup> Paul had handed down to them, obviously an important religious tradition.

In contrast to this, the 1 Cor 11:17-34 pericope discussed a problem that *ran against every tradition* Paul had taught or handed on to them.

“<sup>17</sup> But in the following instructions **I do not commend you**, because **when you come together** it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup> For, in the first place, **when you assemble as a church**, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, <sup>19</sup> **for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.**”

Paul is addressing their Lord’s Day worship assembly service. The expression “*when you assemble as a church*” (“γὰρ συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ”) may be translated as “*when you come together in church.*” Paul obviously refers to the *church worship assembly*, for in vs. 20 he writes “*when you meet together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat!*” His implication is that they were in actuality not celebrating the Lord’s Supper but *simply eating a meal!*

Paul’s expression “*for there must be factions*” is interesting. Zodhiates explains the use of the imperfect verb δεῖ, δεῖ as “*it is necessary and is inevitable in the nature of things.*”<sup>5</sup> The divisive nature of the Corinthians referred to in 1 Cor 1:10 has implications far beyond their schismatic history! It has impacted their assembly *worship service in their celebration of the Lord’s Supper*, and must be corrected!

“<sup>20</sup> When you **meet together**, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> **For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk.** <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise **the church of God** and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? **Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.**”

By celebrating the Lord’s Supper as a common meal in which the wealthy or fortunate abused the poor, Paul charged that they were *despising* (καταφρονέω *kataphronéō*, *holding in contempt, looking down on*) the church of God, ἡ τῆς ἐκκλησίας. The definite article τῆς, *tēs*, *the*, before *ekklḗsías* suggests that we should translate *tēs ekklḗsia* here as *the church* of God, as do the RSV and ESV, not simply *an assembly*, but *the assembly* was also being abused!

Paul expresses only displeasure and disdain over the Christians in Corinth for the behavior at the Lord’s Supper, “*shall I commend you in this? No, I will not!*”

### Paul’s instruction concerning the celebration of the Lord’s Supper

“<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” <sup>25</sup> In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

**1 Cor 11:23.** Thiselton addresses the traditional formulae expressed by Paul, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you” explaining that this is a Jewish and Christian traditional expression referred to *dominical sayings* received from the Lord and handed down to the church. Thiselton observes:

“Over against the culture-specific issues which undermined the very purpose of sharing in the Lord’s Supper at Corinth (v. 17b), Paul appeals to the givenness and universality of a pre-Pauline tradition which originated with **the Lord himself** as a dominical institution and is transmitted as Christian *paradosis* in terms which soon became a formulaic liturgical narrative in the life of the churches ... The introductory formula ἐγὼ παρέλαβον ὃ καὶ παράδωκα ὑμῖν makes it clear that Paul has delivered this tradition to the Corinthians ...

<sup>4</sup> We are reminded that the biblical term used by Paul, παράδοσις *parádosis*, referred to a religious tradition, a doctrine or injunction delivered or communicated from one to another, Zodhiates.

<sup>5</sup> Zodhiates, δεῖ, *deí*.

The REB (similarly NJB) is entirely justified, therefore, in translating v. 23a as *For the tradition which I handed on to you...* Horsley and Schrage observe, “‘Received’ and ‘handed on’ in 11:23 (cf. 15:1–3) were virtually technical terms in Jewish culture for the transmission of important traditions ... Hellenistic philosophies used the same terms in transmitting their standard doctrines. To emphasize the authority of this central ... tradition Paul identifies it as having come ‘from the Lord’ ... focussed on Jesus’ death.” Moule regards the Greek terms as “naturally *apply[ing]* to the receiving and transmitting of traditions,” while Marshall also sees here “a liturgical formula which he had handed on to the church when it was founded ... a form of words which was regarded as authoritative in the church generally and was not Paul’s own composition.... The origin of the Lord’s Supper in the explicit command of Jesus as the Lord is thus emphasized.”<sup>6</sup>

The remainder of the paragraph written by Paul to the Corinthians, firmly fixed the Lord’s Supper tradition in Jesus’ Gospel last Passover supper with his disciples.<sup>7</sup>

*“For I received from the Lord what... the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’<sup>25</sup> In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”*

To provide a biblical reference to the discussion, I recount here Jesus’ discussion of the Lord’ Supper institution as recorded in Matt 26:26ff.

*“<sup>26</sup> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’<sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’”*

A point in Jesus’ institution which Paul does not repeat is Jesus’ expression, “*I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.*” The reason Paul did not discuss this expression is that the church by eating the bread and drinking the cup was already fulfilling Jesus’ statement by celebrating the Lord’s Supper with Jesus in the in the kingdom since he had inaugurated the church and eschatological kingdom in his death and resurrection.

We return now to Paul’s discussion of the tradition he had received. The little expression he had *given thanks*, εὐχαριστήσας, from *eucharistos*, to *give thanks*, is the reason many refer to the Lord’s Supper as the *Eucharist*. The Lord’s Supper is a *celebration of thanksgiving!*

The words “*this is my body*” and “*this is my blood*” have generated considerable discussion among Christian denominations.

Roman Catholics and others of similar persuasion interpret *this is* as *this becomes my body* in a doctrine of *sacramental*<sup>8</sup> *transubstantiation*. By a prayer offered by a priest, called the *epiclēsis*<sup>9</sup>, the bread and wine a *transformed* by the power of the Holy Spirit into the body and blood of Jesus. The Greek and Eastern Orthodox churches follow a similar practice believing that at the special prayer of dedication the wine and the bread become the blood and body of Christ.

<sup>6</sup> Thiselton, pp. 866–868.

<sup>7</sup> It is my opinion that in spite of some who question whether it was a Passover meal that our Synoptic Gospel sources record this accurately.

<sup>8</sup> Sacramental in regard to the theology or religion of the eucharist refers to the act of *infusion* or *connection point* of the *sacred* with the present *physical* element. It refers to the *infusion* of the *sacred power* with the physical element in the bread and wine. Combined elements from the Miriam-Webster Dictionary, Encyclopedia Britannica, and Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>9</sup> Epiclesis also spelled epiklesis; from the Greek epillēsis, meaning an “invocation” refers to the invocation that a priest invokes to the Holy Spirit (or the power of God’s blessing) upon the Eucharistic bread and wine in some Christian churches.

Several churches in the Calvinistic tradition; the Presbyterian Church, the Church of Scotland, the Church of England or the Episcopal church, and the Dutch Reformed tradition hold to a Calvinistic *consubstantiation sacramental* view in which it is believed that at the prayer of consecration, the *Epiclesis*, Christ is present in the emblems, by faith.

An excellent article in Britannica records the following explanation of the move from sacramental transubstantiation to eucharistic memorial:

St. Thomas Aquinas maintained that a complete change occurred in the “substance” of each of the species, while the “accidents,” or outward appearances, remained the same. During the Reformation, though the medieval doctrine was denied in varying ways by the reformers, it was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in 1551. Holy Communion was retained as a sacrament by most of the Protestant groups, except that those churches that see the supper solely as a memorial prefer to speak not of a sacrament but of an ordinance.<sup>10</sup>

Most Evangelistic Protestant Christian churches reject the doctrine of sacramental transformation, and see the word *is*, which is translated from the Greek ἔστιν, *estin*, from εἰμί, *eimí*, a verb, *to exist, to be, to have existence*,<sup>11</sup> meaning *this is*, with the natural meaning that the bread *represents* the *body* and *blood* as *symbols* of the *presence of Jesus by faith* in the bread and wine.

**1 Cor 11:23.** “*for this is my blood of the covenant.*”

Jesus’ statement regarding *his blood of the covenant* draws on the Jewish and ancient near-eastern traditions that covenants were sealed by a blood offering.

The setting of Jesus institution of the Lord’s Supper during the Passover feast is seen as a typological fulfilment of the Egypt Exodus Passover when under Moses direction from God the blood of a Lamb was spread on the house door lintel of faithful Jewish homes in Egypt. God made a covenant with Israel which was sealed by a blood sacrifice which became identified as a component of the Passover covenant.

Jesus’ blood sealed a *new covenant* which God had made not only with Israel, but also with all nations, cf. Gal 3:28, 29, “<sup>28</sup> *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* <sup>29</sup> *And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.*”

Like the ancient Passover sacrifice of Exodus 12, which led to covenant of freedom from slavery, the death of Jesus opened the way for a *new covenant*, which covenant is celebrated each week by Christians in the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper.

Thiselton has an interesting discussion of the role of covenants in God’s scheme of redemption:

“This brings us to a *major second point*. ... we cited ... *important argument that covenant constitutes “the key to Paul’s conflict with Corinth ...* We also noted that Bornkamm and Käsemann affirmed the centrality of covenantal considerations for 1 Cor 10:16 ... This achieves explicit formulation in the next clause of our verse: τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι. This reflects the common tradition which Mark 14:24 and Matt 26:28 express as *my blood of the covenant*, which Paul and Luke express as **the new covenant in my blood** (the wording is identical in Luke and Paul except for Luke’s omission of ἔστιν). The *new* finds expression in Mark 14:25 (cf. Matt 26:29) in the saying about “*new*” in the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God. Covenant holds together the role of divine promise with that of God’s faithfulness to the past and pledge of eschatological newness and well-being ... Yet it is no **less** true that the death of Christ also constitutes the ratification and validation of God’s promise...

In the Synoptic Gospels three of the four occurrences of διαθήκη belong to accounts of the *last supper*, and the fourth to God’s “remembering” his holy *covenantal promise* (Luke 1:72). In the major Pauline epistles *covenant* refers to the *continuity of God’s faithful promises* to Israel (Rom 9:4; 11:27 [from Isa 49:21]), to the *ratification of God’s promises* through the free gift of grace made operative in

<sup>10</sup> “Eucharist,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

<sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, εἰμί, *eimí*.

and through Christ (Gal 3:15, 17; 4:24), and to the glory of the **new covenant** (2 Cor 3:6, 14) ratified through *the blood of Christ* and visibly articulated in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:25).

Outside the Pauline corpus, the **new covenant** constitutes “a linchpin” without which the Epistle to the Hebrews would “fall apart.” There it denotes the irrevocable nature of the divine promise both in continuity with the OT and in contrast to it as “better” or fully efficacious (Heb 8:7–13; cf. Jer 31:31–34) ... It is precisely the death of Christ, **the new covenant in my blood**, *which establishes the assurance of redemption, and which permits believers to know where they stand with God, namely, in identification with Christ the vindicated Messiah and exalted Lord on the basis of God's promise duly ratified in the events of Calvary* ... **Covenant** also reflects precisely the major theme which persists from 8:1 to 14:40, namely, that of *constraint*, or the *free choice to forego one's rights*. For *God himself limits his own range of actions by free sovereign choice when he determines to act only in accordance with declared promises of grace. On such a basis Christian believers may be confident that they are redeemed and accepted*. Hence the unwillingness of many of the “strong” at Corinth to permit constraints of their own “rights” for the sake of the weak (cf. 8:7–13; 9:1–12) *contradicts not only identification with the Christ who shed his blood for others, but also the very principle of divine covenant in which the faithful God pledges his faithfulness and thereby also constrains his own “rights” by a voluntary decision of sheer grace.*<sup>12</sup>

**1 Cor 11:23-26.** The body of Jesus which is for you is remembered each Lord's Day during the Lord's Supper or eucharist:

“<sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup>and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” <sup>25</sup>In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

<sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

The words *my body* as in Matt 26:26 and 1 Cor 11:24, τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, is used *figuratively* to represent *the person*, or *the life* of the person, symbolized by the physical body of flesh. This is how it was use by Jesus to refer to *his body* given for the redemption of lost people. It referred primarily to his physical body crucified on the cross, but more profoundly *to the life he gave* as a *living example* and atonement for those condemned to eternal death because of sin.

A point of correction, Jesus did not say *my body which is broken for you*. He simply said *my body*, Matt 26:26. At 1 Cor 11:24 Paul interprets this as *my body which is for you*. The King James Version read “*this is my body, which is broken for you.*” The words *broken for you* are from a textual variant which is not considered the best manuscript evidence we have of Matthew; thus it is not found in the best manuscripts extant on Matt 26:26.

**1 Cor 11:25.** Paul's record of Jesus' instruction as “do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” became a veiled apostolic instruction, a *parádoxis*, or *dominical tradition*<sup>13</sup> handed down by Paul (he does not explain how he received this *parádoxis*) which became an explanation of what Jesus intended—a regular repeated celebration. Paul adds that this *parádoxis* was “*what I also delivered to you,*” explaining

<sup>12</sup> Thiselton, pp. 884–885.

<sup>13</sup> Zodhiates, *parádoxis* is the noun derived from the Greek παραδίδωμι, *paradidōmi*, which has reference to *instruction*, to deliver over or up to the power of someone, *spoken of persons and things delivered over to the charge, care, or kindness of someone, entrusting*. *παράδοσις parádoxis, a tradition, doctrine or injunction delivered or communicated from one to another, whether divine* (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6) *or human* (Matt. 15:2, 3, 6; Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8). In Mark 7:3, 5, the expression “the tradition of the elders” occurs. *The Pharisees delivered to the people by tradition their ancestors' many injunctions which were not written in the Law of Moses*. For this reason the sect of the Sadducees rejected them, saying that what was written should be esteemed obligatory, but that which came from oral tradition need not be observed.

how to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Paul's *parádoxis* reads in our text as *often*, which we see in the New Testament church's practice of the weekly Lord's Supper celebration!

Several texts in the New Testament reflect on this observance of a weekly church worship service; Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor 16:1,2. The first and second century Christian literature likewise testifies to such weekly congregational worship services in which the Lord's Supper was celebrated. A good example of this is the *Didache*, the document that records *the teachings of the Lord's disciples*.<sup>14</sup>

**1 Cor 11:27-32.** Eating the bread and drinking the cup in an unworthy manner.

*"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord."<sup>28</sup> Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.<sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.<sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.<sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged.<sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world."*

Paul chastises the Corinthian church for their abuse of the poor Christians, a Corinthian view of the lower class. In the context of the Lord's Supper this abuse of the poor amounted to profaning the Lord's body—*life and death—blood*.

Paul's point was that when we make a meal of the Supper, eating before those who are poor, and getting drunk over the wine, we are eating and drinking in a manner unworthy of the Lord's Supper's purpose, and in a manner unworthy of the Lord's death.

Each person must examine themselves regarding why they are celebrating the Lord's Supper!

Considerable discussion surrounds Paul's comment that abuse of the elements of the Lord's Supper can cause illness and death. Speculation extends from natural causes of gluttony to spiritual illness resulting from not discerning the real meaning and purpose of the Supper.

Fitzmyer, without providing any specific source of Paul's knowledge of the Corinthian situation, states that Paul was actually commenting on known physical effects, sickness and deaths, which had been experienced in the Corinthian congregation. Paul attributes these effects to the excessive gluttony having been demonstrated by some.<sup>15</sup>

Thiselton, reflecting the comments of Fee, Hays, Conzelmann, and others, observes:

*"Most commentators, however, perceive a causal connection with v. 29 which reflects, in the phrase used by Allo, a "terrible realism" concerning physical illness and death. Fee believes that Paul draws on a prophetic insight that actual cases of illness, some of them terminal, are linked to attitudes of self-indulgent, manipulatory uses of the Lord's Supper as occasions when they have despised the "have nots."<sup>234</sup> Since he earlier actually mentions *drunkenness* (11:21), it is just conceivable that a serious decline in health could result causally from excess in gluttony and drink which brought its own judgment, especially if a wealthy host saw an opportunity to masquerade sheer excess under the cloak of "doing the Lord's work" by hosting frequent "Suppers of the Lord."<sup>16</sup>*

**1 Cor 11:29.** Paul's reference to *the body*, τὸ σῶμα, in this text raises some interesting questions. What does he mean "*by the body!*" The Greek σῶμα, *sōma*, simply means *a body, an organized whole made up of parts and members*.<sup>17</sup> It can refer to *a human body* made up of several body parts, or it can refer to *a body of people* formed together into some organization. Context determines which kind of body is implied.

In this text, 1 Cor 11:29, Paul speaks of *discerning the body*. Does he mean *the physical body of Christ given for them*. Or *the spiritual body of Christ which is the church of Christ?*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. also Ferguson, Everett, *The Early Church and Today*;

*Backgrounds of Early Christianity; The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today; Early Christians Speak.*

<sup>15</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 447f.

<sup>16</sup> Thiselton, p. 894.

<sup>17</sup> Zodhiates, σῶμα, *sōma*.

In 1 Cor 11:24 he had *referred to Jesus' physical body given for them*, but now he speaks simply of *the body* that is being profaned! Which body does he mean?

The Corinthian Christians were not only *abusing Christ* in their disgusting gluttony when eating, gorging, and getting drunk at the meal. *They were also abusing their fellow Christians, the church*, by their mistreating them at the meal. Is there perhaps a double meaning here?

Thiselton expounds on this in considerable detail, certainly more detail than is necessary for this discussion!

“As Barrett observes, any thought that the ground of condemnation arises from failure to perceive a difference of substance between the eucharistic elements and ordinary bread “introduces a distinction that does not appear in the context.” Expressed differently, Horsley reminds us that the contextual issue remains that of “*certain Corinthians' sense of their own importance.*”<sup>216</sup> This, however, is not merely a “social” matter; as Conzelmann observes in v. 27, it is a matter of “*theologia crucis* as opposed to *theologia gloriae*,” in the sense in which Luther so finely expounds this.

Three broad traditions of interpretation reflect different understandings of the phrase in question ... Godet believes that even Reformed theology can find room for the view that Paul is concerned for *proper respect at the Lord's Table*, in contrast to merely social gatherings of Christians...

A reaction, represented by such writers as Bornkamm, Käsemann, Kümmel, Schweizer, and earlier Robertson and Plummer, tends, in effect, to understand *discerning the body* as referring primarily to *respect for the congregation of believers as the body of the Lord*. Bornkamm believes that Paul alludes to “the mystical body of Christ” of the congregation ... the [united] ‘body’ of the congregation.” ... it alludes to “the congregation” of the body of Christ. He approves Moffatt’s gloss “without a proper sense of the Body,” in the sense that “they forgot what the Body meant as they acted so selfishly towards their humbler fellow-Christians.” A flood of modern (often but not always evangelical Protestant) writers follow this approach ... One of the most detailed arguments in support of this comes from Fee, who claims that this verse “makes sense of what is otherwise an unusual short digression in 10:17,” where the “one loaf” is identified as *the participating solidarity of the community of believers*. In v. 29 Paul speaks of this “further sense, *the church as that body.*”

The Lord’s Supper, by underlining participation in, and identification with, *the cruciform Christ*, thereby *generates the social transformation*, which is Paul’s *second concern*. Nevertheless, he never leaves behind *the proclamation of the cross (1:18–25) as the ground of identity transformation*, and *it is of the very essence of the Lord’s Supper (and of baptism) to keep this anchorage in grace and in the cross in sharp focus.*<sup>18</sup>

Zodhiates observes regarding *the church* that it is often referred to as *the body of Christ*; Eph 1:22, 23; Eph 4:4; Col 1:24.

*Sōma* is also used in reference to Christ’s mystical body, His church (1 Cor. 12:12ff. [cf. Rom. 12:5]). Paul uses the figure of a body and its members to describe the relationship of Christians to Christ and to one another. Then in 1 Cor. 12:27 he definitely applies to the Corinthian church the name *sōma Christou*, body of Christ. Every local Christian church, i.e., regenerated believers who have been baptized into the body of Christ, constitutes part of His total universal body. In Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:12; Col. 1:18, 24 we have the universal Church called the body of Christ, with the def. art. He Himself is presented as the Head of the whole Church which is His body (Eph. 5:23, 24; Col. 2:19), the head being the vital and organic center of the whole body.<sup>19</sup>

In keeping with Paul’s primary argument in Corinthians, beginning at 1 Cor 1:10ff, the point is that in eating and drinking at the Lord’s Supper as though it was an ordinary meal denigrates the

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, pp. 892–893. Some of the emphases in italics is mine, IAF.

<sup>19</sup> Zodhiates, σῶμα, *sōma*.

spiritual fellowship among the believers which the Lord's Supper was intended to maintain. Certainly, the Lord's Supper was to be a "passover" reminder of the redemption God had created in Christ, and in their selfish gluttonous feasting the Corinthians had lost this understanding, but it is also clear that they were demonstrating total unconcern for the true meaning of Christian fellowship by treating the Super as a common meal.

Both the *spiritual Christ related themes of the body of cross*, and *congregational fellowship issues* within the body of the church were present in the Corinthian attitude at the Lord's Supper.

### The *Agapē* Love Feast

Although the *Agapē* Love Feast appears in several instances in the 1<sup>st</sup> century literature of the early church we find only one direct reference to a love feast in the New Testament, Jude 12, and another indirect reference at 1 Cor 11:17-34.

A further possible reference may be found at 2 Peter 2:13 depending of a textual variant which reads ταῖς ἀγάπαις, *tais agapais*, *the love feast*, in place of ταῖς ἀπάταις, *tais apatais*, *the sinful delusion*,<sup>20</sup> or as in the RSV translates this *their dissipation*, or the NIV *their pleasures* implying their *sinful pleasures*.

As we will notice below, I prefer the reliability of the textual reading ἐν ταῖς ἀπάταις, *sinful delusions*, as in the Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger *Nestle Aland Greek New Testament*, 27<sup>th</sup> edition, over the variant ταῖς ἀγάπαις, *love feast*, with the consequent translation that reads *sinful appetites*.

The reading ἀπάταις, *sinful appetites* or *dissipations* in the Greek text of 2 Pet 2:13, is stronger than the textual variant ἀγάπαις, *love feast* at 2:13, which introduces an interesting analogy that we find referenced at 1 Cor 11:17-34 where the presumed *love feast* had degenerated into *sinful indulgence* that abused the Lord's Supper.

An interesting point is introduced in the literary and textual parallels between 2 Peter and Jude. Scholars are challenged by the age-old question, "who copied whom," Peter copied Jude, or Jude copied Peter! This misses the point that both may have used a common source, with Jude's scribe copying ἀγάπαις, *love*, and Peter's scribe, copying ἀπάταις, *sinful desire*, *sinful deceit*, or *dissipation*.<sup>21</sup>

Richard Bauckham has an interesting comment regarding this variant:

"Although confusion of ἀπάταις and ἀγάπαις would have been a very easy scribal error, the change of pronouns makes it unlikely that the variant reading ἀγάπαις in 2 Peter is correct, or that the copy of Jude used by the author of 2 Peter already had the corrupt reading ἀπάταις. The author of 2 Peter must have made a deliberate alteration. It is possible that he wished to exclude any reference to the agapes ... but in that case it is odd that he has done so by substituting the similar sounding ἀπάταις for ἀγάπαις. The suggestion that he intended a deliberate pun is more likely, and he might have expected his readers to see the pun (συνευωχούμενοι ὑμῖν, "while they feast with you," would naturally suggest the agapes) even if they were not familiar with Jude's letter. The meals which were defiled by the gluttonous and riotous behavior of the false teachers could not be called ἀγάπαι, but they might be called "deceits" (the basic meaning of ἀπάταις)."<sup>22</sup>

Jude 12 is more direct, obviously being negative regarding what had transpired in his community regarding the celebration and abuse of the love feast: "<sup>12</sup>*These are blemishes on your love feasts, ταῖς ἀγάπαις, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; <sup>13</sup>wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.*"

<sup>20</sup> Zodhiates.

<sup>21</sup> This is not the place to explore the critical issues of the textual relationship between 2 Peter and Jude. I mention this interesting enigma only to comment on the reference to ἀπάταις in 2 Peter, *sinful appetite*. Furthermore, I do not support the view that the author of 2 Peter was a disciple of Peter and not Peter himself.

<sup>22</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, p. 266.

**1 Cor 11:17-34** ties in well with the reflection of Jude 12 and possibly 2 Pet 2:13 regarding the abuse of both the *Agapē* Love Feast and the Lord's Supper. We have above under the study of the Lord's Supper as Eucharist already commented on *how the Lord's Supper had been corrupted and abused in Corinth* with the result that Paul strongly advised separating the two. The result of these observations is that fairly early in the life of the church the holiness of both the *Agapē* and the Lord's Supper became corrupt, and at least the Pauline churches, the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the Love Feast were *separated*.

Nothing more is said in the New Testament regarding the *Agapē*. The literature of 1<sup>st</sup> century church does however indicate that the *Agapē* continued to be featured in the life of some churches.

### **Possible origins of the *Agapē* Love Feast**

We have also noted under the study of the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, that there are some indications in Luke's Book of Acts that the early Jerusalem church gathered together regularly for prayer, study, and fellowship, Acts 2:42-47:

*“<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

*<sup>43</sup> And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.*

*<sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

It is reasonable, as observed by most commentators on Luke's Acts, believe that *Luke was giving a summary of life in the early Jerusalem church* indicating the beginnings of the new Jewish Christian community that continued within the boundaries of the Temple confines to gather and be taught by the Apostles.

Recognizing their potential excommunication by the Jews for their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, they bonded together celebrating and benevolently taking care of one another. Their participating in common meals in which they would rejoice in their new fellowship would appropriately be referred to as love feasts, hence *agápē* feasts.

But this was nothing new, for as Jews they had already an established practice of gathering together as families to celebrate the several Jewish feasts such as Purim, Tabernacles, and the Passover.

Festive occasions and feasts were also part of the Graeco-Roman cultic life, so it was a natural step from their Jewish or Graeco-Roman cultic life for the Christians to gather for celebratory their cultic feast. The *Agápē* love feast would not have been a new innovation to the early Christians but would have been the beginnings of a new occasion for a festival and an addition to the Lord's Supper and Eucharist celebration.

### **The *Agapē* in the literature of the early church**

Most of the information we have on the *Agapē* feast we find in the late first and second century's literature of the church such as the *Didache*, and the early Church fathers Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Hippolytus.

Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, provides an excellent summary of the early practice of the *Agapē* love feast:

*“It seems that a meal provided the most convenient context in which the Lord's Supper was observed by the early Christians. At least this was the case at Corinth and provided the occasion for the abuses which developed there. The *Didache* also sets the eucharist in the context of a common religious meal (VIII.3). The Roman governor Pliny places the Christian gathering for a common meal at a separate time from their “stated” religious assembly (VII.1). By this time in Bithynia, it would seem, the Lord's*

Supper was separated from the meal. Even where an ordinary meal provided the setting for the Lord's Supper, there is no reason to think the latter was not distinct in its observance and meaning.<sup>23</sup>

Ferguson observes that although the terms Agapē, Eucharist, and Lord's Supper were on several occasions used synonymously they were not always in reference to the same celebration. He observes that "apparently the agápē was used for the meal, and the eucharist of the memorial for the Lord."<sup>24</sup>

Although not identical with Eucharist, the Agapē was nevertheless considered to be an important church function under the leadership or control of a bishop or another member of the "clergy" such as a deacon or appointed leader. Moral disorders during the celebration of the Agapē soon became a problem, hence the need of "official" control leading in many cases to the separation of the two meals. Although originally considered a deeply spiritual function associated with prayer, Scripture reading, and homily, the meal often degenerated into a benevolent secular function in which the needy were fed a meal and the focus was placed on the meal.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Agapē in contemporary church life**

Although not as common in the contemporary twenty-third century church as had been the practice in the past nineteenth and twentieth-century churches in the USA, the "dinner on the ground" functions, or similar contemporary fellowship meals, are not so much a benevolent occasion but more of a fellowship celebration. Many churches today hold special fellowship meals among the youth, the elderly, or special interest groups. In most cases these are more shepherding occasions than simply benevolent occasions.

I am reminded of an amusing yet touching occasion in a smaller rural church where my wife and I once worshipped. We did have a special *benevolent* case in which a particular lady, one step away from being homeless, would attend our fellowship meals. She would always station herself at or near the head of the food line, load her plate full, then head outside where she had a pickup truck which was her home, and in which she also housed two dogs, her special companions. She would feed the dogs, stash the left-over food, and head back into the fellowship hall and get in line for another plate full of food which she would eat, and then go back for "seconds"! This bothered some of our members until it was pointed out that in this case our fellowship meal was an *agápē* meal in which we shared our food with a needy lady and her two companions!

Another congregation where my wife and I worshiped met on Sunday evenings in small groups spread all over our extended church city community. The congregation leadership called these groups *Connecting Points*. Each group was left to develop their own curriculum. Some groups shared a meal each Sunday evening and then enjoyed a Bible study/discussion period followed by prayer. *We were encouraged to invite friends to these special fellowship love feasts!* Their real value was that they served as shepherding occasions for fellowship enrichment. In one sense they were informal *agápē* feasts through which we planned benevolent outreach opportunities especially during high occasions like Thanksgiving, or Christmas, and other special festive occasions. Our group also took these opportunities to provide benevolent collection opportunities for the needy.

I can imagine a small house group meeting in towns like Colossae in the first century of Christianity meeting in similar *agápē* feasts and enjoying benevolent opportunities in their communities, and through them witnessing for Christ. Possibly this is what Paul had in mind in his letter to Philemon, a Christian in Colossae when he wrote:

<sup>23</sup> Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, pp. 125ff.

<sup>24</sup> Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, p. 128.

<sup>25</sup> Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, p. 129.

*“<sup>4</sup> I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and all the saints, <sup>6</sup> and I pray that the sharing of your faith may promote the knowledge of all the good that is ours in Christ. <sup>7</sup> For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.”<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>26</sup> Philemon 4–7.

## Chapter 12: 1 Cor 12:1-31; 13:1-13: Abuse of spiritual giftedness

### Introduction

It will not be my purpose in this commentary to engage and debate the several charismatic gift issues we encounter in our contemporary religious world. The literature on that topic is replete and readily available.

My purpose in this study has been to write a critical exegetical commentary on the literature of Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians*. In this exegetical study we have attempted to identify certain fundamental theological principles, and leave it to the reader to make application of this study to their personal Christian commitment.

Obviously, we will examine the exercise of the Holy Spirit empowered gifts in 1 Cor 12 and 13, but we will do so in the context of the first-century church in Roman Corinth. We will attempt to define those theological principles that initiated Paul's concern with the practice of these gifts in the life of the weekly assembled church worship services.

Thiselton opens this chapter on spirit gifts with a pertinent observation worthy of our attention:

“Too many writers treat 12:1–14:40 as if it were simply an *ad hoc* response to questions about spiritual gifts (or spiritual persons) rather than an address to this topic within the broader theological framework of 11:2–14:40 in deliberate continuity with 8:1–11:1, and indeed ultimately with 1:1–4:21. The way in which some ranked their self-perceived “spirituality” or giftedness by the Holy Spirit so as to encourage superior status enhancement which resulted in the attitude “I have no need of you” (12:21–26) provides a close parallel to the status enjoyment of those who enjoyed the more comfortable location and better table fare than the latecomers at the Lord's Supper (11:21–22; see above) ... *This whole section (11:2–14:40) takes up, in turn, the theme of “respect for the other” which characterizes Paul's demand and plea for “the strong” to put themselves in a position of understanding and respect for “the weak” in 8:1–11:1.*”<sup>1</sup>

### An introductory rhetorical analysis

Several scholars have identified a rhetorical structure in 1 Cor 11:2-14:40. Such a structural analysis helps to identify what Paul was arguing in this challenging section of this epistle which although seemingly independent from the earlier pericopes actually reinforces the argument of super-spiritual issues running through the whole epistle.

The immediate context of 1 Cor 12-14 is obviously behavior in the regular weekly church worship assemblies. Repeatedly we will notice that Paul refers to situations “*when you are assembled as a church,*” 1 Cor 11:17, 18, 20, 1 Cor 14:23, 26, 34.

Our discussion of Holy Spirit giftedness in the Corinthian church lies in the heart of the discussion of worship in the church worship assembly from 1 Cor 11:2 to 1 Cor 14:40.

Turning to the discussion of *speaking in tongues*,

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<sup>1</sup> Thiselton, p. 900.

Thiselton<sup>2</sup> cites Joop Smit who points out that γλῶσσα (*tongues*) occurs twenty-one times in chs. 12–14, but not elsewhere in the epistle. Similarly, the group προφητεία, προφητεύω, προφήτης (*prophets etc.*) occurs twenty times, but otherwise only twice in this epistle (11:4, 5).

I have outlined below and interpreted Smit's analysis<sup>3</sup> of the section under discussion.

Smit regards 12:1–3, stating that the Holy Spirit is the power behind *true confession*. This serves as a succinct introduction to promote clarity to a primary principle in the discussion of 12:4–30, the Holy Spirit is the power behind true confession of Jesus the Christ. Claiming that Jesus is not the risen Christ cannot be the work of the Holy Spirit.

*“Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”*

Smit illustrates two rounds of argumentation in the overall pericope on spiritual gifts: vv. 12:1–3 serves as a concise introductory statement of the power of true confession which is fleshed out in two sections; 1 Cor 12:4–30 and 1 Cor 14:1–33a.

Within the first text, 1 Cor 12:4–30, 1 Cor 12:4–6 forms a succinct introduction to promote clarity for the *confirmation* of 1 Cor 12: 7–30 regarding the varied giftedness.

Then 1 Cor 14:1–5 outlines the key points and overall structure of the speech that follows in 1 Cor 14:6–33a.

1 Cor 13 is understood to be a *parenthetic* argument that emphasizes that *agápē*, love, is the key to maintaining an appropriate balance within the one body within a schismatic super-spiritualist congregation.

### 1 Cor 12:1-11. The varieties of Spirit-empowered gifts.

**1 Cor 12:1-3:** This pericope forms an introduction to the following section on Spirit giftedness. The Holy Spirit, who is the power of true confession in Christ, *does not speak in confusing or contradictory words of confession, notably concerning Christ.*

Paul will clarify later at 1 Cor 14:26 and v. 35 that the practice of speaking in tongues he was addressing *was in the church worship assembly.*

**1 Cor 14:26-35.** *“What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. <sup>27</sup> If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. <sup>28</sup> But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God. <sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup> If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged; <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. <sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.*

*As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. <sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Thiselton, pp. 900-902.

<sup>3</sup> Smit, J. F. M., “Two Puzzles: 1 Cor 12:31 and 13:3: Rhetorical Solution,” NTS 39 (1993): 246–64; Smit, J., “Argument and Genre of 1 Cor 12–14,” S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric and the NT*, JSNTSS 90 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 211–29.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Co 14:26–35.

**1 Cor 12:1-3.** Paul opens this discussion with the logical transitional preposition and conjunction, *Περί δὲ*, which leads into the discussion of concern, spiritual giftedness which as we have noted was creating a dysfunctional stir in the congregation's worship assembly. What was taking place in the worship assembly Paul likens to the heathen practices of idol worship.

*“<sup>1</sup>Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup>You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved. <sup>3</sup>Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.”*

**1 Cor 12:3.** Paul's introductory word to v. 3, *therefore, διό, dió*, continues the connection of Paul's previous issues with the Corinthians and the abuse of spirit giftedness of the super-spirituals referenced in v. 2. Balz and Schneider add that *therefore, “Διό serves to coordinate what follows with what precedes.”*<sup>5</sup>

Paul's expression *“no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.”* Outside of the congregational worship context this may have little meaning! However, with reference to the Corinthians it must have been critical or else Paul would not have expressed it so vigorously.

Jesus' comment to Peter at Caesarea in Matt 16:17 foretold of the divine empowerment of a confession *κύριος Ἰησοῦς, Jesus is Lord*, emphasizing that such confessions did not rise out of human wisdom:

*“<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”<sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.”*

The strangeness of Paul's comment in 1 Cor 12:3 suggests that this expression *may have been well known confessional statements regarding Jesus* in a Roman word where pressure to confess Caesar as Lord was refuted by Christian confessions that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus had promised his disciples that when under future pressure the Holy Spirit would be with them to strengthen them in their ministry and confessions. Below is a composite citation from John 14:16-17 and John 16:12 which prophesied what Paul was indicating in 1 Cor 12:3:

*“John 14:16. “And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, <sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you ...*

*John 16:12. “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the*

<sup>5</sup> Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary*, vol. 1, p. 336.

*things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”*

Paul clearly understood the importance in Roman Corinth of this confession regarding Jesus where the imperial cult was ever present, for he expressed this to the Romans at Rom 1:8-10:

*“But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); <sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.”*

Regarding the challenges of this short pericope at 1 Cor 12:3, Fee observes:

*“But what follows turns out to be one of the more difficult moments of the letter. In two nearly balanced clauses Paul indicates what one who is speaking by the Spirit *cannot* say, and contrariwise that only by the Spirit can one utter the primary Christian confession ... The problem itself is especially perplexing ...<sup>6</sup>*

Most likely, Paul was emphasizing the need for a correct understanding of the Holy Spirit’s activity in tongue speaking in Roman Corinth.

Everyone in Corinth would know about the Spirit empowering Christians to *faithfully confess Jesus as Lord!*

### **1 Cor 12:4-11: Unity in the diversity of giftedness**

*“<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*

The discussion of possibilities of the meaning of **1 Cor 12: 3, 4**, as Thiselton indicates in his commentary,<sup>7</sup> are as varied as could be in view of the fact that we have so little to relate to in the context of the pericope itself. However, ensconced within this paragraph are hints of Holy Spirit empowerment regarding the incorrect understanding and inappropriate use of these gifts among the Corinthian Christian. In Paul’s mind, this needed serious discussion and clarifying.

Fee concludes his discussion of this challenging paragraph with a noteworthy comment:

*“Whatever takes away from [the purpose of the Spirit’s power, IAF], even if they are legitimate expressions of the Spirit, *begins to move away from Christ* to a more pagan fascination with *spiritual activity as an end to itself.*”<sup>8</sup>*

Fee’s point is fundamentally in agreement with that of Thiselton and Cullmann, *the purpose of spiritual gifts should draw attention to a confession of Christ’s lordship, and not the individual performing the gift!*

<sup>6</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 643.

<sup>7</sup> Thiselton, pp. 900 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 645.

Paul's focus in this paragraph is not simply the gifts, but the source of the gifts, *the godhead who inspires all gifts*.

**1 Cor 12:4-6.** Diversity in gifts. Paul argues that there are varieties of spirit empowered gifts, but only one source of the gifts, *the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God; the one divine godhead*. The repetition of the words *the same* in the three statements emphasize *the unity of the godhead's* purpose,

*“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone.”*

Paul's opening words to this discussion, Περὶ δὲ, are emphatic and intended to focus not simply on the variety of gifts already introduced in 12:1, but the *one godhead, Spirit, Lord, and God* who had a purpose in empowering and inspiring the Corinthians.

A more precise reading of 12:1 and 12:4 would be *“now, concerning the varieties of gifts, let me correct you, on the contrary to your behavior, there is one Spirit, one Lord, and God!”* As he will shortly note, God is not the author of confusion, 1 Cor 14:33!

Thiselton notes regarding this emphasis on *variety* and *unity*, *the emphasis is on the unity intended by the godhead*.

*“Interpreters differ in placing emphasis on unity or on diversity in this chapter. But Dale Martin, Harrington, and Lategan argue convincingly that in these verses, at least, Paul places his emphasis on the unity of source which lies behind a diversity of phenomena ... Martin observes, “Thus in 12:4–11 Paul continually stresses unity in diversity.”<sup>9</sup>*

It is imperative that we pay attention to what Fee says regarding this chapter and the discussion of the Holy Spirit and the varieties of giftedness. *The context responsible for this discussion is abuse of spirit powered giftedness in the worship assembly*.

*“Two concerns also emerge in this confession. First, as before ... Paul is dealing with matters of corporate worship. This is specifically indicated by the language “in the church” and “when the whole church comes together” (vv. 18-19, 23, 26); it is otherwise implied throughout. Second, the correctives are all aimed at the abuse of tongues in the assembly, which seems to have been both singular in its emphasis and disorderly in its expression (14:22, 23, 33, 40).”<sup>10</sup>*

Paul's opening word, *now*, δὲ, at 12:1 and 4 is an interesting particle that can *continues a point previously discussed*. Zodhiates describes it as a logical connective conjunction where Paul had in several contexts shown disdain for the superior super-spiritual attitude manifest, mostly by the wealthy, but not exclusively so, in the Lord's Supper worship assembly. Zodhiates observes, *“δέ, dé frequently denoting transition or conversion, [or] serving to introduce something else, whether opposed to what precedes, or simply continuative or explanatory of a point. Generally it has the meaning of “and, or also, namely.”<sup>11</sup>*

So, we can read between the lines here! *Now concerning the abuse of Spirit gifts, you need to know that in spite of the numerous gifts, there is one godhead; one Spirit, Lord, and God who are concerned with creating unity within diversity and not in empowering individuality!*

Paul was tying the discussion of Holy Spirit giftedness back to earlier discussions of Corinthian problems of *abusing giftedness in the worship assemblies*.

<sup>9</sup> Thiselton, p. 928.

<sup>10</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, p. 633. Italics emphasis, IAF.

<sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, δέ, dé.

It is imperative that we keep our discussion of this text in the context of the Corinthian church worship assembly with its super-spiritual mindset in which the Corinthians were using spiritual giftedness as a vehicle for establishing an order of spiritual superiority and super-spiritual importance within congregational life, *notably in the public worship assemblies.*

**1 Cor 12:7–11.** provides a controlling dynamic to the whole discussion, notably in the context of schismatic super-spiritual malfunction.

*“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”*

A key to understanding this Spirit giftedness pericope is Paul’s qualifying expression, “*to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.***” This emphasizes the point that Fee and Thiselton have stressed, the gifts were *not for self-aggrandizement*, but *for the common good of the congregation.* The gifts were to *build up the faith* and understanding of God’s *missio dei* eschatological kingdom ministry of the local congregation.

In **1 Cor 12:10** we are introduced to a concept or word that will become a major point of discussion later at 1 Cor 14:2, 6, 12, *tongues*, γλῶσσα, *glōssa*. Suggestions as to what is meant by this term ranges between *ecstatic utterances*, *inspired messages* that need interpretation, and *known dialects*. We will examine the possible several meanings of the word γλῶσσα *glōssa*, *tongues* and Paul’s objection to the use of *tongues in the corporate worship service* at 1 Cor 14:6, “*Now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how shall I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?”*

**1 Cor 12:11.** Paul provides a decisive comment on the *provision* of the gifts. They were not provided “on demand” by the Corinthians but were at the discretion of God through his Holy Spirit, “*All these are inspired by one and **the same Spirit**, who apportions to each one individually **as he wills.**”*

In his letter to the Ephesians, Eph 4:11, Paul wrote along similar lines. We could almost imagine Paul having 1 Corinthians open when he wrote to the Ephesians about five years later:

*“<sup>11</sup>And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.”*

Paul’s next comment in 1 Cor 12:12ff emphasizes a major purpose of the Holy Spirit’s activity; *providing unity among the believers and maintaining unity within the congregation.*

### **1 Cor 12:12-26. Holy Spirit gifts and church unity**

Paul explains that the church is not comprised of a group of individuals who stand alone in their “glory,” but the church is *one body of members closely associated and dependent on one another.*

The body of Christ is provided by the Spirit of God with magnificent gifts; *knowledge, tongues, miracles, healing powers, prophetic powers*, but not to magnify one member over others, but *for the purpose of serving others and building up the church/body in a spirit of unity.*

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single organ, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

Paul’s composition of this pericope, almost a poetic elegy on the function of the Holy Spirit, had a deep theological foundation reaching back to Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus at **John 3:1-8** where *being born of the Spirit* was included in Jesus’ eschatological kingdom message to Nicodemus.

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Peter’s Pentecost Day sermon, Acts 2:17-42, should be a highlight worth remembering. Peter included *the gift of the Holy Spirit* as a participant of God’s soteriological process.

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.” <sup>40</sup> And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were

*added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."*

Although Paul was not present when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, he might have heard Peter's Pentecost sermon. He certainly referenced early in his ministry the role of the Holy Spirit in God's soteriological plan. Possibly in his second letter to his churches, Second Thessalonians, he demonstrated that he knew that the Holy Spirit was deeply imbedded in God's eschatological soteriological purpose. At **2 Thess 2:13-15** he wrote:

*"<sup>13</sup> But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Paul knew it was imperative that the Corinthian Christians have a clear understanding that the function of the Holy Spirit in God's eschatological plan. The purpose of Holy Spirit giftedness was *definitively not to develop or empower Christians* to perceive themselves as *super-Christians*. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that whatever function the Holy Spirit had in their experience it was *not to glorify them but to glorify God*, something they apparently had not learned.

The Corinthians had all *been baptized by the one Holy Spirit into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit, to glorify God in Christ*. Their giftedness was *not self-empowered!* They should have known full well that their giftedness came *through the empowerment of the Spirit*.

It might have served the Corinthians well to have been able to read what Paul later wrote to the Ephesian Christians at **Eph 1:3-14** where he definitively announced the source and purpose of everything they had experienced.

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. <sup>5</sup> He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us. <sup>9</sup> For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

*<sup>11</sup> In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."*

**1 Cor 12:12-13.** In a superb analogy Paul compared the church, the body of Christ, to the human body.

*"<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."*

Paul began his next two points regarding the church as a body with the particle *for*, γάρ, gár, a causative logical explanatory particle;

“which when standing after one or more words in a clause *expressed the reason* for the gifts. The *for*, γάρ, *gár*, has the sense of *because, namely, to wit*, it serves to strengthen a clause, *therefore*. Γάρ generally indicates a *causal relation* between two statements, whereby *the second statement gives a reason for or explains the first*.”<sup>12</sup>

The Free Online Dictionary has the following helpful comments on the word *therefore*, one of the meanings of γάρ, *gár*.

“It can mean *thus, hence*. It is used to *mark an inference on the speaker’s part*. It can also be rendered *consequently, as a result ...*”<sup>13</sup>

“So, καθάπερ γάρ, *just as the human body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with* Christ’s body, the church.” The church has many members with a variety of gifts, *but they are united in one-body, one church, by the one Spirit!*

**1 Cor 12:13** is a powerful, insightful text, loaded with theological implications.

“<sup>13</sup> *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*” Paul clearly understood the relationship between baptism and the reception of, and soteriological activity, of the Holy Spirit.

In several symbiotically interrelated texts the New Testament Apostolic witness demonstrates that Christians are *united with Christ in one body by baptism*, noting that *in baptism the Holy Spirit is active*. These texts *connect baptism and the Holy Spirit in a mutually interdependent relationship* creating a unity within the body of Christ.

**Gal 3:26-29**. To the Galatian Christians Paul discussed the unity of Jew and Gentile in the family of God, the one body of Christ, the one church.

“<sup>26</sup> *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.* <sup>27</sup> *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* <sup>28</sup> *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* <sup>29</sup> *And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.*”

**Eph 2:13-18**, To the Ephesian church Paul explained God reconciling both Jew and Gentile Christians in Christ. He closed the pericope with the comment that *they both have access in one Spirit to the Father*, that is, *through the working of the one Spirit*.

“<sup>13</sup> *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ.* <sup>14</sup> *For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility,* <sup>15</sup> *by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,* <sup>16</sup> *and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.* <sup>17</sup> *And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near;* <sup>18</sup> *for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*”

**Rom 6:1-11** is possibly one of the most revealing and important Pauline expressions of what occurs in baptism:

“<sup>1</sup> *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* <sup>2</sup> *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* <sup>3</sup> *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* <sup>4</sup> *We were buried therefore*

<sup>12</sup> Zodhiates, γάρ, *gár*; Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 238.

<sup>13</sup> “Therefore,” *The Free Dictionary*, www.thefreedictionary.com.

*with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

*<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For he who has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup> But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. <sup>9</sup> For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup> The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*

**Col 2:12.** The Colossians needed to know that being a Christian meant dying to your old life and culture, and being born into a new life connected closely to Christ. This happens where all Christians are united in Christ through their faith and baptism into Christ;

*“<sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. <sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; <sup>12</sup> and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”*

**Eph 4:1-6** is possibly the capstone text regarding becoming one body in Christ through the working of the one God, the one Christ, and the one Holy Spirit:

*“<sup>1</sup> I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.”*

### **1 Cor 12:27-31: Special ministry gifts; apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, and speakers in tongues**

*“<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”*

Paul clearly states that in the body of Christ there are *many members each with gifts*, mostly of *ministry services to or for others*. His main theme is that such gifts are *services or ministries* in the overall fellowship of the body or church *with the purpose of building up the body of Christ*.

The challenging discussion in this paragraph pivots around *what appears* to be a ranking of offices or ministries. This *apparent* list ranking ministries in this text has generated considerable discussion. Thiselton observes:

“This verse is an exegetical and lexicographical minefield. These key questions loom large: (1) do (first, second, third, etc.) πρῶτον ... δεύτερον ... τρίτον ... ἔπειτα ... ἔπειτα ... denote gradations of rank, importance, or indispensability, or simply ways of checking off a

long list? (2) While the meaning of ἀποστόλους ... προφήτας ... δυνάμεις ... ιαμάτων, and γένη γλωσσῶν ... has been discussed in detail above, we have yet to examine more fully διδάσκαλοι ... *Does the enumeration or sequence imply any kind of “ranking”?* F. F. Bruce argues that enumeration first ... second ... third ... “mark these out as exercising, in Paul’s estimation, *the three most important ministries*. In Eph 4:11 these are also enumerated, together with evangelists, in the order (a) apostles, (b) prophets, (c) evangelists, (d) pastors and teachers, as given by the ascended Lord *to equip his people ‘... for building up the body of Christ.’*”

To those who know at first hand of the work of “the judicious Richard Hooker” it may come as no surprise to learn that he interprets this verse in terms of a “middle” position. *The “Apostles [are] first because unto them was granted the revelation of all truth from Christ immediately.”* *Prophets, he argues, had “some knowledge” of the same kind, and teachers are necessary to build and to instruct.* But otherwise “nothing is meant but sundry graces, gifts and abilities which Christ bestowed,” and *Paul does not have in general view “questions about degrees and offices of ecclesiastical calling.”*

Fee rejects Dunn’s inclusion of “passing on the tradition” as part of the teaching office. But in this lies the clear and fundamental difference between *prophets* and *teachers*. It is not the case that the first is “spontaneous” as against the second, the result of reflection (still less that the second is also sometimes “spontaneous”). Rather, *prophets perform speech-acts of announcement, proclamation, judgment, challenge, comfort, support, or encouragement, whereas teachers perform speech-acts of transmission, communicative explanation, interpretation of texts, establishment of creeds, exposition of meaning and implication, and, more cognitive, less temporally applied communicative acts.* Dunn recently rightly reaffirms his emphasis upon “*retaining, passing on and interpreting the congregation’s foundation traditions.*” This helps to explain why Paul uses first ... second ... third ... of these first three gifts, roles, or functions.”<sup>14</sup>

Working through the many interesting observations regarding Paul’s “ranking” of these primary ministries in this text we conclude that he was not listing them as a rank of office or importance, for Paul was aware of the fact that Jesus had taught that in the kingdom *no such ranking was possible* for all the disciples were to be servants with the lowest in social structure, children, to be the highest in the kingdom. In his great lesson recounted by Matthew at Matt 18:1-4 and 20:20-27 Jesus had taught a great lesson on humility and service in the eschatological kingdom, the church.

**Matt 18:1-4.**<sup>1</sup> *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”* <sup>2</sup> *And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them,* <sup>3</sup> *and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* <sup>4</sup> *Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>5</sup> *“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; <sup>6</sup> but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”*

It is possible that the child in this message of Jesus represents a humble disciple!<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Thiselton, p. 1013-1017.

<sup>15</sup> Hagner, Donald A., *Matthew 14-28*, pp. 517, 518.

**Matt 20:20-28.** Jesus said in response to the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee responded:

*“<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. <sup>21</sup> And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” <sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” <sup>23</sup> He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” <sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Paul’s reference to apostles, prophets, teachers, then workers of miracles, etc. is *not a ranking order*, but one that *differentiates the type of ministry of communication they deliver*.

The *apostles* received their truth from Jesus himself and the indwelling *paraklētōs, counselor*, the Holy Spirit and laid the foundation of preaching the gospel truth. They could be perceived as the *primary communicators*, laying the foundation of the church of which Jesus was the chief cornerstone.

The *prophets* built on the apostolic foundation of the message, on occasion receiving supernatural help from the Holy Spirit. We might accurately say that their message was oversaw by the Holy Spirit enabling them to communicate the message accurately.

The *teachers* were the tertiary communicators, primarily the congregational teachers and communicators who taught the gospel message to the congregations, building up the church.

Paul’s purpose in listing all of the service ministries in this pericope was to show that *the church is served by different types of servant-ministers, all empowered in some manner, as the Holy Spirit determines, all equally important to building up the church*. Not all serve in the same ministry, *but all are equally important to building up the church*.

In a profound pericope in another epistle, Ephesians, Paul elaborates on the function of the several ministries God had given through Jesus and the Spirit to the church.

**Eph 4:7-17.** *“But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”*

*<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every*

*joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.”*

The final verses of this remarkable pericope summarize the purpose of all spiritual gifts:

*<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.”*

### **Gal 5:13-26. To the Galatians, Paul spoke of the higher gifts?**

One could almost imagine Paul having written the same Galatian text to the Corinthians who were more set on carnal self-aggrandizement than on living by the Spirit!

*“<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.*

*<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

*<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.”*

### **1 Cor 13:1-13: Love; the more excellent way**

At the close of our 1 Corinthian 12 pericope on spiritual gifts Paul encouraged the Corinthians to seek the higher gifts.

**1 Cor 12:31.** *“But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”*

Paul then wrote what has become the most popular elegy to love which we often quote, even from memory, yet frequently out of context.

#### **1 Cor 13:1-13.**

*“<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; <sup>5</sup> it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*<sup>8</sup> Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is*

*imperfect; <sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. <sup>13</sup> So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

It is noticeable that in the first paragraph, in three verses, Paul uses the word *if* five times! In fact the first clause is loaded! The Greek reads Ἐὰν ταῖς γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων λαλῶ καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων.

The Greek adverbial conjunction ἐάν together with the verb λαλῶ in the *present active subjunctive* mood<sup>16</sup> implies *possibility*, not *certainty*; “*even if I might speak, not with certainty, but phrased in a possibility*” without love I am just making a noise! Paul was not saying *when I speak without love*, which would be true, however, he was speaking in the *mood of possibility*, not *certainty*. *He was simply making a statement in the subjunctive mood of possibility*. His point is, *even when I speak without love I am nothing*, 1 Cor 13:13.

Thiselton expresses this interesting and important *subjunctive* discussion well:

“Although λαλῶ and ἔχω could be indicative (*if I speak ... if I do not have*), the use of μή rather than οὐ, coupled with ἐάν rather than εἰ, establishes that Paul *uses the subjunctive*. The hypothesis is *indefinite* rather than *contingent ... ἀγγέλων*.”<sup>17</sup>

Paul implies that even if he might speak in tongues without love it has no meaning and amounts to nothing! He includes *tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and faith* under the umbrella of *love*. *Without being motivated by love, I am nothing*, a guarded blow to the super-spirituals in Corinth!

But all of this hinges on the meaning of *love*, a noun *agápē*, and the verb, *agapáō*! *What does this kind of love mean?*

Again, this is a quote too often cited without the understanding of the full meaning of love! *Paul is not speaking of an emotional love! Agápē is a decisive cognitive decision to seek the best for others.*

Thiselton, in his introduction to the word *agápē*, *love*, comments on the work of C. Spicq:

“Any translation must allow the emphasis to fall upon ἀγάπην (with δέ and μή): *but if I had not love*. In the index to his second volume of *Agapē in the New Testament*, which is almost entirely on the Pauline corpus (with Hebrews and 1 Peter), *Spicq lists over a hundred “activities,” qualities, or effects of ἀγάπη*. The vast majority of writers agree that the noun ἀγάπη, *love*, is relatively rare in Greek literature outside the NT and early Christian writings.<sup>18</sup>

[Regarding our pericope], “Spicq observes that this chapter “contains the word *agápē* ten times” and “is undoubtedly the most important in the entire NT concerning *charity*,” but the question is what was its role in the Corinthian issue?”<sup>19</sup>

Thiselton provides us with an excellent discussion of the development of the use of *agápē* in Paul and the New Testament.

“We have cleared the way, however, *to appreciating why Paul wishes to disengage ἀγάπη from the sensual, emotive, erotic, or even ecstatic nuances which the noun ἔρωσ,*

<sup>16</sup> Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, pp. 170ff.

<sup>17</sup> Thiselton, p. 1032.

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, p. 1033.

<sup>19</sup> Thiselton, p. 1027, Spicq, C., *Agapē in the New Testament*, vol. 2:139–81. Eng. trans., London and St. Louis: Herder, 1963, 2:139–81.

*passionate love*, and less often the verb ἀγαπᾶν can convey in secular or non-Christian religious Greek texts. ἀγαπᾶν enters Paul's thinking as the usual LXX translation for Heb. אָהַב ('*ahab*), *to love*, of which Hatch-Redpath cite around 130 occurrences in the LXX, and the noun ἀγάπη translates אַהָבָה ('*ahabah*), *love*, sixteen times in the LXX. In an interesting research article B. Gerhardsson sees ch. 13, especially 13:8–13, *as a rhetorical-didactic poem* (not a hymn) drawing on wisdom traditions associated with אָהַב ('*ahab*) mediated through rabbinic tradition associated with Hillel. Even more ingeniously, M. Fishbane argues for midrashic wordplays in 13:12 reflecting Ezek 43:3 and Num 12:8, which we shall consider when we comment on that verse. Together with the OT tradition, however M. M. Mitchell argues forcefully that while Paul may distance himself from Gk. ἔρως, one strand in Greek uses of ἀγάπη or ἀγαπᾶν remains closely relevant to 1 Cor 13:1–13. She provides instances where φιλία and other words for love denote the mutual respect or reconciliation which follows the restoration of concord after division and strife. This may well contribute to Paul's use of the word, in which ch. 13 belongs integrally to 12:1–14:40.

Nevertheless, whereas Nygren's otherwise excellent work risks our reading too much into every use of the word ἀγάπη, in our view Mitchell's correct attempt to contextualize the meaning of **love** in 1 Corinthians 13 risks, equally, narrowing it too specifically. Clearly it is *much deeper and more fundamental in theology* for Paul than any *rhetorical* context about concord might suggest. At least two themes determine a distinctive theological emphasis which the word itself carries in 13:1–13.

*First, love* represents “the power of the new age” breaking into the present, “the only vital force which has a future.” **Love** is that quality which *distinctively stamps the life of heaven, where regard and respect for the other dominates the character of life with God* as the communion of saints and heavenly hosts. *The theologian may receive his or her redundancy notice; the prophet may have nothing to say which everyone else does not already know; but love abides as the character of heavenly, eschatological existence.*

*Second, as we have noted, love (ἀγάπη) denotes above all a stance or attitude which shows itself in acts of will as regard, respect, and concern for the welfare of the other.* It is therefore profoundly *christological*, for *the cross* is the paradigm case of the act of will and stance which *places welfare of others above the interests of the self.* Here Moltmann and Jüngel rightly relate this to the *self-giving grace of the cruciform, Christomorphic God.* We cannot read the Johannine “God is love” onto Paul, but in fact it is already there in Paul, and the biblical exegete has no need to compromise the distinctive witness of each biblical source or tradition.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus, from what we learn from the original use of the noun ἀγάπη, *agápē*, or the verb ἀγαπάω *agaráō*, *agápē* was not considered an *emotional appeal or act*, but a *cognitive decision to act in behalf of others in the best interest of others.* It might originate in an attitude of grace or mercy, but is a *decisive cognitive decision to act for the good or best of others.* Our common expression of *tough love* defines this attitude of *agápē*.

*Agápē*, however, is not without an emotional aspect, but *focuses more on the cognitive decision rather than an emotional.* It is in some ways related to the Greek verb φιλέω, *philéō* or the noun φιλία, *philia* which is defined as *filial, family, or friendly, love.* Out of our *filial, family or friendly love* for someone, *philos*, we decide what is best for the family member, *agápē*, and *act cognitively in manner which is best for them.*

<sup>20</sup> Thiselton, p. 1034-1035.

The word group we encounter in 1 Cor 13 is not φιλία *philia*, but ἀγάπη *agápē*, a cognitive unselfish love for others in their best interest. The Corinthians, full of their self-aggrandizement and super-spirituality were *thinking of their own interest and not of the well-being of others* with presumably lower giftedness; of the poor. Their attitude in the Lord's Supper indicated a complete lack of interest and concern for others!

In his beautiful poem of love which follows, Paul defines in active terms the true meaning of *agápē*.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; <sup>5</sup> it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Each of these definitions of love is a direct reference and *condemnation* of the *Corinthian Christians' behavior!*

### 1 Cor 13:8. Paul follows this poem of love with a series of statements defining what love is not!

He begins with the statement that *love is permanent, it never ends*. The remaining spiritual gifts, although wonderful, are *imperfect and will end*, being only a part of the full spiritual blessings Christians enjoy in Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; <sup>10</sup> but **when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away**. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.”

1 Cor 13:10. The statement regarding ‘*whenever the perfect, τέλειος, comes*’ in v. 10 is interesting and challenging! The question is, what does τέλειος, *τέλειος, perfect*, mean, or refer to?

Zodhiates observes that τέλειος has a wide range of meaning according to its context, which is not unusual!

“τέλειος *τέλειος* .... from *télos* ... goal, purpose, that which has finished, that which has reached its end or its term, its limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing.

*Tó téleion*, perfect, in the neuter means the complete one in contrast with *tó ek mérour* ... a part, that which is in part. *Tó téleion*, therefore, indicates the ultimate goal of heavenly perfection as contrasted with the immediate and merely partial experience of saints on earth (1 Cor. 13:10).”

Regarding 1 John 4:18 *hē teleía agápē* (love), “the perfect love. Zodhiates refers to the perfect love as the love which is mature, not lacking boldness or confidence and therefore not hampered by the insecurity or anxiety which are characteristic of immature love.<sup>21</sup>

However, Paul does not insert the word *agápē* after *τέλειον* at 1 Cor 13:10! This indicates that he is not referring to a perfect love! We should not insert 1 John into Paul's text, which is what many do, referring to a perfect love in 1 Cor 13:10. Paul does not qualify *τέλειον* but leaves

<sup>21</sup> Zodhiates, τέλειος *τέλειος*.

it the context to provide the sense of *a teleological final goal-oriented end*. When that which has reached its *téleios*, its end, its teleological purpose.

1 Cor 13:10 anticipates Paul's statement at v. 13, "So faith, hope, love *abide*," (μένει, μένω, *ménō, remain*.) Of "these three; faith, hope, love, the greatest of these is love" because it remains. Paul is saying that *whenever that which has teleological intent comes*, (the eschatological messianic age) *love will be present, and will remain* while the other gifts are temporal and will end.

It seems most likely that *téleios* here in v. 10 has a *teleological*, forward-looking goal, implying that the Judeo-Christian age, the *eschatological age*, the *final last days*, *hē hēmerais eschatais*, the *age of Christ*, (Heb 1:1, 2, Acts 2:17) *has a purposeful teleological meaning and end*. Being *téleios*, it has a *pre-determined goal*. *It will not change*, like knowledge and prophecy. Jesus eschatological kingdom has an end, it lasts until its end, until Jesus' second coming.

In comparison to the eschatological kingdom, the gifts are *temporal, partial, incomplete, passing*.

The word used by Paul at 1 Cor 13:10, to express *when* or *whenever*, is *ὅταν, hotan* as in the expression "but **when** the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away." It is interesting when used with a *subjunctive verb* as in this sentence it implies a *temporal possibility* and reads as *whenever* the teleological end comes the temporal imperfect gifts will pass away.<sup>22</sup>

Whenever the *téleios* (that which is *perfect*) *might come*, *ἔλθῃ*, is interesting, since *ἔλθῃ* is an aorist *subjunctive verb*<sup>23</sup> of *ἔρχομαι érchomai*, which expresses the thought "whenever the end *téleios might come*," that is, "when that which has a teleological end *might* arrive, then the *imperfect, μέρος, méros, partial, will pass away*. The Greek *καταργέω, katargéō, is rendered inactive, idle, useless, or ineffective*.

The point Paul is making is *a generic statement of common sense, in comparison with that which has an end goal or purpose*, that is, the eschatological kingdom of Christ, the *impartial or ineffective gifts have an end*.

In comparison with that which is *téleios, has a teleological purpose*, whatever that may refer to, *the gifts being partial are to be rendered useless* and come to an end.

In comparison to the *perfect* eschatological kingdom of Christ, the gifts being *imperfect* will cease, come to an end.,

We have some additional thoughts to cover regarding the contextual meaning of *téleios, perfect*. We must see it in the context of Paul's Judeo-Christian *eschatological* theology.

The overarching emphasis is on the resurrection of Jesus and the saints, and the general resurrection of all believers when Christ returns. In the kingdom of Christ Christians live between two resurrections, Christ's first resurrection on the first day of the week as described in Matt 28:1, and the second coming of Jesus and the general resurrection at the end of time which Paul will recount in 1 Cor 15:51-58, and 1 Thess 4:13ff.

<sup>22</sup> ὅταν *hotan*; a conjunction or a preposition denoting a supposition, wish, possibility, or uncertainty. When, with the accessory idea of uncertainty or possibility, meaning *whenever, if ever, in case that, so often as*. Construed regularly with the subjunctive, referring to an often repeated or possible action in the present or future time. With the subjunctive ... In reference to a future action or time: with the present subjunctive ..., *then, at that time*, corresponding (1 Thess. 5:3).

<sup>23</sup> We must remember that the subjunctive mood of a verb expresses possibility not certainty. In this case we read whenever the *téleios might come*.

But suffice it for now to define *téleios* as referring to *that which has a teleological eschatological end purpose, that which has teleological end.*

In regard to the statement that *faith, hope, and love abide, or remain*, it is most likely that Paul is speaking of *téleios* as a *temporal eschatological concept*. Faith, hope, and love will abide until the very end of the kingdom.

So, to put this simply, the exegete has to make the choice of reading *téleios* as a *reference to love* which is out of the context of 1 Cor 13:10, or *téleios*, the *eschatological teleological age* which has a *lasting téleios*, a *teleological purpose* and has no end!

We will read *téleios* as stating that “*in comparison to the Christian eschatological age which has a lasting no-end purpose, the redemption of man,*” the spiritual gifts which are helpful but are impartial and have an end to their *purpose are inconsequential in comparison to love.*

[Cf. the detailed discussion below on *téleios* and Pauline eschatology by Thiselton, Balz and Schneider, Zodhiates, and Delling.]

**1 Cor 13:8.** “*Love never ends.*” *Ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πίπτει*, from “*πίπτω, ρίπτῶ*,” “*love will not fall, collapse, become invalid.*”<sup>24</sup> “*But prophesy, knowledge, tongues, and miracles will pass away, end,*” *καταργηθήσονται*.

Many scholars correctly see in Paul’s discussion of *that which will not pass away*, a teleological eschatological kingdom statement. The present eschatological age of the church, which has a teleological purpose, will end only when Christ returns. The Judeo-Christian eschatological age has great blessings in Christ, such as *prophecy, miraculous knowledge, tongues, wisdom*, but this *temporal stage of gifts* will end when Christ returns.

We will refer to the “*perfect*” as referring to *the eschatological teleological process* which will not end until Christ returns. Then *when Christ returns, faith, hope, and love will not be needed* for we will be in the presence of God and Christ. In comparison to the saving process contained in the eschatological redemptive age in Christ, the spiritual gifts are impartial in comparison to love.

But of all the great spiritual gifts contained in Christ, including faith, hope, and love, of these three *the greatest is love*. This fits in Paul’s discussion on the *partiality* or *secondary importance* of the spiritual gifts which are *temporal* at best, but the permanence of love.

It is imperative that we maintain our exegesis of this great text in the context of what Paul was discussing with the “*Corinthian*” Christians in Corinth, ca 55 CE. Paul was disturbed that they were using their spiritual giftedness as a means of ranking their importance in the life of the church, and setting themselves up as the mature super-spirituals of the congregation. But, of all the wonderful gifts they had, *one gift was lacking*, an attitude of *serious concern for others*, especially the less fortunate, *that was love*.

Consequently, in our text Paul encouraged, even charged, the Corinthians to *seek for love* which is far more important than *all other spiritual gifts*, for *love characterizes the believers as God’s people, and Jesus’ disciples*.

Jesus had been clear on this in his parting discourses with his disciples as recorded by the Apostle John in his Gospel, at John 13:31-35 and *passim*:

“*Jesus said, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; <sup>32</sup> if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup> Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ <sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you,*

<sup>24</sup> Balz and Schneider, *πίπτω, ρίπτῶ*.

*that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

In the context of the Corinthian church in 55 CE what was lacking and of most importance was a *mature love* which endures throughout *the Messianic age until the end*, the *τέλειος*. Of all spiritual gifts the most important gift is a genuine love and concern for others, a love just like God’s and Jesus’ love.

I love this great Pauline text in Rom 5:6-11:

*“<sup>6</sup> While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. <sup>8</sup> But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.”*

The important theological principle we can learn from this pericope is *to love one another and be like God and Christ in concern for the well-being of others*. Paul explains that *faith, hope, and love* will last to the end of the Christian age *when all other temporal gifts have passed away*. Faith, hope, and love will last until Jesus returns to receive his people (1 Thess 4;13-19) and hand over the kingdom to God, which Paul will discuss at 1 Cor 15:51-58 regarding the resurrection of the body and the coming of the Lord Jesus.

### **That which is perfect, *τέλειος*.**

#### **Detailed scholarly comments on *τέλειος*, and the eschatological theology of Paul.**

**Before we engage Thiselton, Balz and Schneider, and Delling I want to explain in a little detail what we mean by the Christian age being *the eschatological age*.**

Theologically we hold that the Judeo-Christian age is *the last or final age* (the Greek *éschatos* meaning *last of final*) of redemption planned in his scheme of redemption which Paul in Eph 1:3-14. Peter preached that the final age was breaking into human experience on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the Jewish disciples, Acts 2). At Acts 2:17 Peter proclaimed that the Pentecost experience was the *fulfillment* concerning *the last days* (*hē hēmerais eschatais*) of Joel’s prophesy at Joel 2:28. *The eschatological last days of redemption were breaking in.*

The writer of Hebrews at Heb 1:1, 2 wrote *“<sup>1</sup> In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; <sup>2</sup> but in these last days (ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων) he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”*

Paul inherited his eschatological theology from his understanding the Jesus had fulfilled all the Jewish promises of a future last kingdom age of redemption by dying on the cross and being raised from the dead by the power of God and the Holy Spirit.

In Christian theology *any divinely authorized event* that occurs after Jesus’ death and before his second coming is referred to as an *eschatological last days, final age event*. *Faith* in Jesus, *repentance* of sin, *baptism*, *congregational worship*, the *Lord’s Supper*, experiencing Holy Spirit inspired gifts, are all eschatological events.

This eschatological age is *permanent*, it cannot be destroyed by human activity, it is the *final teleological téleios* event in God's redemptive scheme before the second coming of Christ.

I will note below an eschatological comment by Wolfhart Pannenberg, which I have paraphrased, that *in the eschatological age the appearance of the present is but the anticipated arrival of the future end.*<sup>25</sup>

Thiselton observes regarding v. 10, and the word group surrounding *perfect*, τέλειος, *téleios* is informative, but in itself challenging! Paul's sentence at v. 10 is ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον, τὸ ἐκ μέρους καταργηθήσεται, literally, *when it has come, that is, the perfect, the mature, final form, the completed end.*

Zodhiates defies the wide range of τέλειος, *téleios*, as follows, *goal, purpose, finished, that which has reached its end, term, limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing.*<sup>26</sup>

Balz and Schneider offer an extended summary of the word in its various contexts. *Of primary interest is their comment on the neuter form τὸ τέλειον as found in 1 Cor 13:10 in an eschatological context.*<sup>27</sup>

Gerhard Delling in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* in an extended section observes three considerations of import to the context in which Paul uses the term in 1 Cor 13:10.

*The End in Jewish Apocalyptic.*

The lack of unanimity in Jewish *expectation of the future finds reflection in the varied use of the term "end,"* In ... The latter denotes primarily "the time which follows," Gn. 49:1; Nu. 24:14; Dt. 31:29 (with a ref. here to the exile), "the latter days," Jer. 48:47; 49:39. But already in Nu. 24:14 it is natural to think of the "*last time*," and there are many instances of this, Jer. 23:20; 30:24; Ez. 38:16 (cf. *at the "end" of the years*, 38:8); Dt. 4:20 (time of the return of Israel to Yahweh and of final salvation as in Hos. 3:5; Is. 2:2 [Mi. 4:1]), and Da. 10:14. *Many later writers ... eschatologically in many passages outside Da., cf. esp. Ez. 21:30, 32; 35:5; Hab. 2:3.*

*As the "goal" (→ 50, 1 ff.) of the instruction imparted to the community (→ V, 764, 12 ff.) active love is mentioned in 1 Tm. 1:5, obviously in opposition to certain speculations, v. 4, 6f. In this the community finds its fulfilment, which is thus radically outside itself. According to 1 Pt. 1:9 the telos of faith in Christ (v. 8) is eschatological salvation, v. 5. In 1 C. 10:11 the context (→ III, 623, 34 ff.; 625, 14 ff.) suggests that τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων refers more precisely to "the aims of the times." Of these times an especially prominent one was the wilderness age of Israel (vv. 1–10). They find fulfilment in the present events determined by Christ.*<sup>28</sup>

In the Pauline corpus the meaning "whole" is suggested at 1 C. 13:10 by the antithesis to ἐκ μέρους. Spiritual gifts—γῶσις and prophecy are mentioned—do not give full knowledge<sup>45</sup> of God → IV, 596, 22 ff. *This will be granted to the Christian only with the immediacy of face-to-face, v. 12.*<sup>29</sup>

25 Ian A. Fair, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg as a Reaction to the Dialectical Theology*, PhD. dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 1975; Pannenberg, "Appearance as the arrival of the future," *New Theology No. 5*, 1968; Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History," *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, 1960.

<sup>26</sup> Zodhiates, τέλειος, *téleios*.

<sup>27</sup> Balz, and Schneider, vol. 3, p. 343.

<sup>28</sup> Delling, G., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8, p. 75). Eerdmans.

<sup>29</sup> Delling, G., vol. 8, p. 54.

Thiselton discusses the full range of meanings in τέλειος, *teleios* with good comment on the neuter form τὸ τέλειον:

“The climactic τὸ τέλειον includes the double meaning the *complete* (NRSV) and *wholeness* (REB). Depending on the specific force required by the context the word may also mean *perfection* (NIV, NJB) or *perfect* (AV/KJV, RV). On the lexicography of the word, see above on 2:6, where it clearly carries the different sense of *mature* (usually of persons), as it does in its one remaining use in this epistle, ταῖς δὲ φρεσὶν τέλειοι γίνεσθε (14:20). However, here there is also a further hint of τέλειος as denoting a goal. For just as in 2:6 the wisdom for *the mature* is not for those who exhibit childish self-centeredness and immediacy, even so here Paul is about to draw the same contrast with being *infantile* or *childish* or *childlike* in v 11a and the *goal* of mature adulthood. Hence it combines the two related notions of fulfillment or goal and the completed whole. No English word alone can fully convey the meaning in this context. To translate solely as *the end* (Collins) is barely adequate.

Paul does not wish his readers to be deceived by the apparently immanent process which ἔλθη, comes, might be thought to imply on its own. *Human persons do not simply “progress” to perfection or completion, as gnostics might propose; for the eschatological act of definitive divine judgment which evaluates everything in the light of the whole does away with piece-by-piece knowledge in a cosmic act of God.* Thus in this context καταργηθήσεται (future passive of the intensive compound καταργέω) has its full force. *Moltmann expresses this issue clearly in a way which reflects Paul’s eschatology accurately: “What is new announces itself in the judgment of what is old. It does not emerge from the old; it makes the old obsolete. It is not simply the old in new form. It is also a new creation.” Revelation in history and in Christ offers an “anticipatory reaching out to the new future which God has promised to create. ... The category novum dominates the eschatological language of the whole NT.”* Like the resurrection of Christ and of believers, this new wholeness “does not develop ...,” even though continuity coexists with contrast. Harrisville has well expounded this principle, and Paul will do so throughout much of ch. 15 on the resurrection.”<sup>30</sup>

Thiselton comments favorably on Wolfhart Pannenberg’s eschatology regarding his view of the present being the anticipation of the future:

“Pannenberg faithfully reflects Paul when he urges that we find a dialectic in which, on one side, we ‘find in the history of Jesus an answer to the question of how ‘the whole’ of reality and its meaning can be conceived;’ but on the other side, also ‘without compromising the provisionality and historical relativity of all thought ... on the way and not yet at the goal,’ but awaiting its fulfillment, telos, in the future at the end of the eschatological age.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Thiselton, pp. 1065–1066.

<sup>31</sup> Thiselton, p. 1065.

## Chapter 13: 1 Cor 14:1-40: The use of spiritual gifts in the assembly

### Introduction

Careful reading of this chapter reveals that Paul is still setting his discussion in the context of the church as the body of Christ *gathered in the Sunday worship assembly for corporate worship*.<sup>1</sup>

His repeated comments “*he who prophesies edifies the church ... so that the church may be edified, strive to excel in building up the church... If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, ... and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad,*” support this point. His comment at 1 Cor 14:34 would make no sense if removed from the context of the church and its public worship assembly, “*For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*”

While general principles regarding spiritual gifts may be found in this chapter, *the context of Paul’s concerns and arguments must be kept within the issues related to the corporate worship assembly which Paul has been addressing since 1 Cor 11:2.*

Richard Hays identifies this chapter under the topic Paul had been addressing since 1 Cor 12:1; *the public worship service:*

“The final section of *Paul’s treatment of community worship deals with the issue of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian worship assembly.* Some of the Corinthians have placed inordinate emphasis on showy displays of spirituality, especially the gift of speaking in tongues; *it seems that some of them are disrupting or dominating the church’s meetings by disorderly spirit-inspired utterance that is unintelligible to other members of the community.* The length of Paul’s response, extending from the beginning of chapter 12 to the end of chapter 14, suggests that he considers this matter highly important and perhaps rather sensitive; as we shall see, he exercises considerable pastoral tact in dealing with this topic.”<sup>2</sup>

Teachers and commentators too often overlook the larger context of Paul’s discussion and *focus* their dialog on those items discussed in this pericope independently of both their primary and immediate context. Paul certainly is centering on the Corinthian super-spiritual attitude, but the issue remains *abuse of giftedness in the corporate worship assembly*, not in the general public domain.

Thiselton insightfully opens this section, 1 Cor 14:1-40, with the following comment:

“The key to an accurate understanding of Paul’s arguments and declarations in this chapter depends on a full appreciation of two factors initially. (a) vv. 1–25 relate integrally to what Paul has said about *love* in 13:1–13; (b) vv. 26–40 reflect the concerns about *differentiation and ordering* which Paul has expounded in 12:4–31. The first section concerns respect for the needs of *others*; the second half explicates the differentiation and order which characterize the activity of God himself as one God, one Lord, and *one Spirit* (12:4–6).”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 722; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 629; Ellingworth, Hatton, and Ellingworth, *A Handbook on Paul’s First letter to the Corinthians*, p. 306

<sup>2</sup> Hays, Richard B., *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton, p. 1074.

Thiselton recognizes that the issue relates to the discussion reaching back beyond 1 Cor 13 to 1 Cor 12:1ff.

Paul's major concern in this chapter is on two of the many spirit inspired gifts that he has already introduced in 1 Cor 12, *speaking in tongues* and *prophecy*.

His concern is the Corinthian Christians pervasive *misunderstanding of the purpose of tongues and the use of these to draw attention on their own super giftedness*. His point is that *tongues do not edify the congregation, they cause confusion, and encourage the non-Christians to deride the church*.

*In contrast to this, prophecy informs, educates, and edifies the members gathered for worship.*

### **1 Cor 14:1-25: Prophecy versus speaking in tongues in the assembly**

*“<sup>1</sup> Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup> For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. <sup>3</sup> On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. <sup>4</sup> He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. <sup>5</sup> Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how shall I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? <sup>7</sup> If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? <sup>8</sup> And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? <sup>9</sup> So with yourselves; if you in a tongue utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup> There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning; <sup>11</sup> but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup> So with yourselves; since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.*

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore, he who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. <sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> For you may give thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. <sup>18</sup> I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all; <sup>19</sup> nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

*<sup>20</sup> Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature.*

*<sup>21</sup> In the law it is written, “By men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” <sup>22</sup> Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. <sup>23</sup> If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? <sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, <sup>25</sup> the secrets of his heart are*

*disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.”*

**1 Cor 14:1a.** The opening statement in Greek reads Διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην. Zodhiates observes regarding the expression *make love you aim*:

“Διώκετε, *diōkete* is from διώκω, *diōkō*, to pursue, to follow or press hard after, to pursue with earnestness and diligence in order to obtain, to go after with the desire of obtaining.<sup>4</sup>

Διώκετε, *diōkete* is a present active hortatory imperative verb which implies *you should continue*, or, *you need to continue pursuing love*, that is cognitively seeking the best of others, implying a *continued action* in keeping with 1 Cor 13.

**1 Cor 14:1b.** Note the emphasis on continuing and earnest desire to experience the spiritual gifts, “*and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.*” After all, the spiritual gifts were a spiritual blessing from God with a purpose, edifying the congregation, v. 4, 5, 12, for “*he who prophesies edifies the church.*”

**1 Cor 14:2-5.** *Speaking in tongues may be helpful to the individual, but not to the congregation!* Prophecy is much better because *it speaks to the congregation and builds them up*, a major concern for Paul!

“<sup>2</sup>*For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.* <sup>3</sup>*On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.* <sup>4</sup>*He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.* <sup>5</sup>*Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.*”

**1 Cor 14:6-12.** **Paul questions and refutes the Corinthians speaking in tongues in the worship assembly.**

Paul opens the discussion by emphasizing the need for edification through speaking in tongues *in the corporate worship assembly*.

He likens speaking in tongues to a musical instrument whose message has no meaning if it gives an indistinct note, or unclear messages! *The tongues Paul is addressing are obviously unclear to the speaker as well as to others and need some interpretation!*

“<sup>6</sup>*Now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how shall I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?* <sup>7</sup>*If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played?* <sup>8</sup>*And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?* <sup>9</sup>*So with yourselves; if you in a tongue utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.* <sup>10</sup>*There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning;* <sup>11</sup>*but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.* <sup>12</sup>*So with yourselves; since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.*”

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<sup>4</sup> Zodhiates, διώκω, *diōkō*.

**1 Cor 14:6.** Paul's opening two words, Νῦν δέ, *nun de*, actually read, "but now, brothers ..." There is a *mild chastisement* in the *but now* since δέ, *dé*, is a particle standing after one or two words in a clause, is *strictly adversative*.<sup>5</sup>

Paul introduces an interesting *subjunctive possible* analogy, not a *certainty*, with the expression, "if I." The Greek εἰν ἔλθω πρὸς ὑμᾶς γλώσσαις λαλῶν is composed with a subjunctive verb, ἔλθω, which reads "even if I might come ..." Fitzmyer explains it in this way, "the I is really *rhetorical* as in 13:1, *passim*," which Fitzmyer explains at 13:1, as "far less likely is the *autobiographical meaning* that the seven things mentioned in vv. 1-3 are anchored in Paul's own 'apostolic behavior'."<sup>6</sup>

Paul is merely inserting a *rhetorical argument*, not a real fact, into his discussion. "Even if it were possible that I speak in tongues, it would still be unhelpful and out of place to you if you could not understand what I was saying."

**An interesting thought is surfaced here! What does the word tongues, γλῶσσα, glōssa, refer to?**

Joop Smit has written extensively in γλῶσσα, *glōssa*, *tongues*.<sup>7</sup> Smit observes "that γλῶσσα (*tongues*) occurs twenty-one times in chs. 12–14, but not elsewhere in the epistle. Similarly, the group προφητεία, προφητεύω, προφήτης (*prophets etc.*) occurs twenty times, but otherwise only twice in this epistle (11:4, 5).

However, in addition to our Corinthian text, when used regarding languages or spoken words, γλῶσσα, *glōssa*, is used *once* in Romans, *once* in 1 Timothy, *once* in Mark, *five times* in Acts, *eight times* in Revelation, but seldom in the Gospels or other Epistles.

It is obvious that outside of our pericope in the context of the church worship assembly speaking in tongues was not a primary issue.

**Acts 2:1-13.** Luke's use of γλῶσσα, *glōssa*, in Acts is interesting and in some respects both informative and possibly definitively. Acts 2:1-13 is helpful in *seeing how Luke understood the term*:

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling **in our own tongues** the mighty

<sup>5</sup> Zodhiates, δέ, *dé*.

<sup>6</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 492.

<sup>7</sup> Smit, J. F. M., "Two Puzzles: 1 Cor 12:31 and 13:3: Rhetorical Solution," *NTS* 39 (1993): 246–64; Smit, J., "Argument and Genre of 1 Cor 12–14," S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht (eds.), *Rhetoric and the NT, JSNTSS 90* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 211–29.

*works of God.*"<sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"<sup>13</sup> But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

At Acts 2:6 Luke recorded the Jews hearing words spoken in *their own dialects, languages*, τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ<sup>8</sup> λαλούντων αὐτῶν. Likewise at Acts 2:8 he wrote that the Jews from all over the world heard words spoken in *their own dialects, languages*, ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν!

We can at least begin our study of the meaning of the word *tongues*, γλῶσσα, *glōssa*, in Luke, a Greek writer of some education, defining *tongues* in Acts as *dialects, known languages!*

When we turn to tongues in 1 Corinthians the picture is not as clear! The meaning is hidden somewhat by the fact that the context in 1 Corinthians is one of the *Supers-spirituals abusing the tongues in the church worship assemblies* in a manner that was *confusing* the audience and *needed interpretation or correction*.

Thiselton has written extensively in considerable detail on γλῶσσα, *glōssa*. Unfortunately, following his work and style of commenting on almost every scholarly work since the second century is as difficult to follow as one can find, and not particularly useful in a church-related commentary. It is useful as a scholarly resource for *academic* research, but not for *church* teaching resource! It is a goldmine for those interested in a history of the interpretation of *glōssa, tongues*, but not very helpful in understanding what Paul had in mind when writing 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

Fee's study is also extensive, but more useful in that he maintains his discussion mainly within the *Corinthian issues experienced during the church assembly worship service*. In addition to his earlier commentary, Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1987, his massive and definitive study of the Holy Spirit, *God's Empowering Presence*, 1994, is most helpful. In his exegetical study of 1 Corinthians in this major study of the Holy Spirit Fee's scholarly skills rise to the surface in that he establishes the fact that *the study must be made addressing the issues of the misunderstanding of the Corinthians regarding Holy Spirit giftedness and speaking in tongues in the church worship assembly*.

"Our present letter [1 Corinthians] is especially crucial in this regard, since much of what Paul says about the Spirit is *purposely corrective* to some *misunderstanding* on the part of the Corinthians."<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the *tongues* of 1 Cor 12 and 14, Fee is of the persuasion that the tongues spoken in the *Corinthian church* were not distinct languages or dialects, but were some form of Spirit inspired tongues that the Corinthians were experiencing and using in their worship assemblies. Fee questions whether they were ecstatic utterances as proposed by some commentators.

However, in deciding whether a tongue is an ecstatic utterance one must clarify the meaning of ecstatic which in itself covers a broad range of definitions.<sup>10</sup> Paul explains that the *tongues*

<sup>8</sup> Zothiates, διάλεκτος, diálektos ... Language spoken by a people or province, ethnic language, dialect.

<sup>9</sup> Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> Dictionary: "Ecstatic, excessive emotional non rational experiences involving an experience of mystic self-transcendence"; *Miriam-Webster Dictionary*, Ecstatic has been used in our language since the late 16th century, and the noun ecstasy is even older, dating from the 1300s. Both derive from the Greek verb existanai ("to put out of place"), which was used in a Greek phrase meaning "to drive someone out of his or her mind." That seems an appropriate history for words that can describe *someone who is nearly out of their mind with intense emotion*. In early use, ecstatic was sometimes linked to *mystic trances, out-of-body experiences*, and temporary madness. Today, however, it typically implies a state of enthusiastic excitement or intense happiness."

“spoken” by the Corinthians were nevertheless not what God intended to be used in the worship assemblies, for as we will observe shortly, they were not of any help to either the visitors or the members attending the worship service, especially since they could not be interpreted. *Even if*<sup>11</sup> the tongues were used in prayer by the Corinthians, only God would be able to understand the prayers which would be of no real help to the one praying or the others hearing the prayers.

Fee acknowledges that the tongues the Jews heard in Jerusalem during the Day of Pentecost activities (Acts 2) were obviously *dialects* understood by those from the wide range of the diaspora present in Jerusalem.

I have such appreciation of Fee as a scholar that I find it difficult to disagree with him at this point, but I believe Fitzmyer has a more reasonable approach and solution to these *tongue-prayers* or *tongue-speaking* issues as described by Fee. *That some form of tongue speaking was taking place one cannot deny, and it was for this reason that Paul wrote these chapters.* The issue we can gain from these texts, in the context of their church worship assemblies, was that *their use or practice was contrary to the purpose of the “building up” role of the public worship assembly, and were not spiritually formative or edifying to the congregation, or others.*

Fitzmyer in his commentary on *First Corinthians*, 2008, observes in an introduction to 1 Cor 14:

“Paul returns to the discussion of *pneumatika*, begun in chap. 12, where he related them to *the body of Christ* or *the church*. Now after the climactic treatment of love in chap.13, which is more valuable in Christian life than any such spiritual gift, he treats in particular two *pneumatika*, speaking in tongues and prophecy, and their relation to each other, *especially when the Christian community gathers in worship service.* As is evident from this passage, he thinks more highly of the latter than he does of the former, even if he never forbids speaking on tongues, but recognizes it as a gift of the spirit and does not speak of it as a “problem,” ... That phenomenon seems to have been the major reason he broached the topic of spiritual gifts in general in his letter to the Christians in Roman Corinth.”<sup>12</sup>

**1 Cor 14:6.** Fitzmyer notes that Paul introduced *three didactic arguments in analogies* to describe the issues of the *merits, or demerits, of speaking in tongues and prophesying in the public worship assembly.* Primarily his point was that “unless speech communicates intelligibly, it accomplishes nothing.”

“Paul’s *first analogy* refers to *his own ministry*, observing that Paul’s use of “I” is really a rhetorical statement. I have above discussed the use of the Greek ἐὰν ἔλθω πρὸς ὑμᾶς γλώσσαις λαλῶν in which ἐὰν with the aorist subjunctive verb ἔλθω expresses *probability, not fact.* His point being, “*even if I might come to you speaking in tongue how would that benefit you unless I also bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?*”

Without intelligent communication, which was obviously lacking in the Corinthian’s speaking in tongues, any tongue speaking would be inconsistent with God’s purpose of edification in the public worship service. This is a point that Paul will continue to stress in 1 Corinthians. In the verse immediately preceding 1 Cor 14:16, namely v. 5, make this statement: “*Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.*”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> We will discuss the *if* at a later point under Fitzmyer.

<sup>12</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 512..

<sup>13</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 512.

**1 Cor 14:7-9** presents Paul's *second analogy, the musical instrument*. His point is that if lifeless instruments give an indistinct sound their tune or message is useless.

“**So** [οὕτως, *so also, thus, in this way*]<sup>14</sup> *with yourselves; if you in a tongue utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.*”

**1 Cor 14:10** is Paul's *third analogy*.

“<sup>10</sup> *There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning; <sup>11</sup> but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.*” Paul gives this verse an interesting twist! He does not use the word *glōssa* for *tongues*, but uses the word *phōnḗ*, τύχοι γένη φωνῶν! “*Phōnḗ*, from φωνή, *phōnḗ*, refers to a *sound* or *tone* made or given forth.”<sup>15</sup>

The implication is that the tongues spoken by the Corinthians are nothing other than ἄφωνον, *soundless, meaningless voiceless sounds*,<sup>16</sup> they are not enlightening and *the church is not edified!*

**1 Cor 14:11**, “*but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.*”

**1 Cor 14:12**. “*So with yourselves; since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.*” The Greek expression for “*so with yourselves*,” οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, means, “*so, in the same way with yourselves, strive for the upbuilding of the church*, not self-gratification.

### **1 Cor 14:13-25. Paul's concluding argument against speaking in tongues.**

**1 Cor 14:13-19**. In the following pericope I have inserted exegetical comments in the text in [...] for clarity and brevity.

“<sup>13</sup> **Therefore** [διό, *dió*, “for this reason”], *he who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret.* <sup>14</sup> *For if I pray* [subjunctive again, “if I might or should pray”] *in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.* <sup>15</sup> **What am I to do?** *I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.* Paul's point is that *he will pray with the spirit but with the mind also; in an intelligent manner.*

<sup>16</sup> **Otherwise**, [on the contrary]<sup>17</sup> ἐπεὶ ἐὰν εὐλογῆς [ἐν] πνεύματι [subjunctive again] *if you [should bless] with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?* <sup>17</sup> *For you may give thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.* <sup>18</sup> *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all;* <sup>19</sup> **nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.**”

**1 Cor 14:20-25**. Paul sums up his argument! *Do not act like children, act like mature adults!*

A scathing admonition to those who thought they were super-spirituals!

“<sup>20</sup> **Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature.** <sup>21</sup> *In the law it is written, “By men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners*

<sup>14</sup> Zodhiates, Balz and Schneider, οὕτω, οὕτως.

<sup>15</sup> Zodhiates, *phōnḗ*.

<sup>16</sup> Zodhiates, ἄφωνος, *aphōnos* ... Voiceless, dumb, not having the power of speech. Spoken of beasts (2 Pet. 2:16); of idols (1 Cor. 12:2 [cf. Ps. 115:5; Hab. 2:18, 19]). Mute, silent, as in patient suffering (Acts 8:32 quoted from Is. 53:7). Metaphorically, meaning unexpressive, i.e., without expression, not having the power of voice (1 Cor. 14:10, 11).

<sup>17</sup> Balz and Schneider, ἐπεὶ *epēi*.

*will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers.<sup>23</sup> If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?<sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all,<sup>25</sup> the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.”*

### **A brief positive discussion of *the gift of prophecy*; 1 Cor 12:10, 13:9, 14:6, 22.**

**1 Cor 12:4-11.** Among the variety of gifts Paul mentions in this pericope he highlights *prophecy*. He stressed that the gifts were *for the common good*, no personal gratification. Prophecy would benefit the hearer, edify them, and enlighten to gathering in the worship assembly.

*“<sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;<sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;<sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone.<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.<sup>8</sup> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,<sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another **prophecy**, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.<sup>11</sup> All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”*

The Greek background for *prophecy*, προφητεία, *prophēteía*, is significant in its relationship to both the New and Old Testament use for *the particular ministry of speaking God’s message to the people*. The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* introduces the topic:

*“Prophecy. Term, along with its English cognates (“prophet,” “to prophesy,” “prophetism,” and “prophetic”), derived from a group of Greek words which, in pagan Greek, mean “speak forth,” “proclaim,” “announce.” In biblical Greek, however, these terms always carry the connotation of speaking, proclaiming, or announcing something under the influence of divine inspiration.”<sup>18</sup>*

Zodhiates defines the word προφητεία, *prophēteía*, in the broad sense of both inspired prediction and inspired preaching of God’s message as:

*“Particularly prediction, the foretelling of future events, including the declarations, exhortations, and warnings uttered by the prophets while acting under divine influence; of the prophecies of the OT (Matt. 13:14; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21); the revelations and warnings of the Book of Revelation (Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19, equal to marturia [3141], witness, as in Rev. 19:10. See also Sept.: 2 Chr. 15:8). In 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14, prophēteía refers either to the prophetic revelations or directions of the Holy Spirit by which persons were designated as officers and teachers in the primitive church (cf. Acts 13:2; 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:4–8ff.; 14:24, 30, 31), or to the authoritative declaration made by the presbytery of the fitness for ministry of one whom they are ordaining.*

*Prophecy, meaning the prophetic office, the prophetic gift, spoken in the NT of the peculiar charisma or spiritual gift imparted to the primitive teachers of the church (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10; 13:2, 8; 14:22). See *prophētēs* (4396).*

<sup>18</sup> Elwell and Beitzel, “Prophecy, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1768.

*Metonymically a prophesying, the exercise of the prophetic office, the acting as an ambassador of God and the interpreter of His mind and will.”<sup>19</sup>*

### **1 Cor 14:22. Paul clarifies the difference between tongues and prophecy.**

*“Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers.<sup>23</sup> If, therefore, **the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?**<sup>24</sup> **But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all,**<sup>25</sup> the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.”*

### **1 Cor 14:26-33a: Some remarks regarding the use of spiritual gifts, tongues and prophecy in the congregational worship assembly.**

*“<sup>26</sup> What then, brethren? **When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.**<sup>27</sup> If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret.<sup>28</sup> **But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God.**<sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.<sup>30</sup> **If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent.**<sup>31</sup> **For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged;**<sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.<sup>33a</sup> For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. Paul clarifies that a major purpose of the assembly when you come together*

### **1 Cor 14:33b. The role of women in the congregation worship assembly**

This pericope has unfortunately led to much discussion, confusion, and division in Christian churches from day one in Corinth, through almost two thousand years of Christianity.

Too often, the pericope, or sections of it, are discussed *out of context*, not remembering that the discussion is concerning *super-spirituals in the Corinthian church*, both men and women, *and notably in the church worship assembly*.

Thiselton notes that the exegetical issues surrounding this pericope are complex, and expensive. He then spends twenty-five pages discussing the many possibilities and challenges one faces when advancing this pericope! No wonder it is a problem! The following is an introduction to Thiselton’s comments.

*“The translation and exegesis is immensely complex. Contextual factors are vital, including presuppositions about what the addressees were *assumed* to understand by language of which we know only Paul’s part of the dialogue. Nevertheless, *the main themes of “controlled speech” and “order” (14:24–40) continue.* We also note below the problems caused by issues of whether parts of these verses are un-Pauline, either by interpolation of by allusive quotation.”<sup>20</sup>*

Fitzmyer covers the same ground, but in a much more workable manner. He opens his comments on the issues surrounding these verses with this observation, *“These verses are, however, the subject of much controversy because of several difficulties that one encounters in*

<sup>19</sup> Zodhiates,

<sup>20</sup> Thiselton, p. 1146

*this passage.*<sup>21</sup> Contra to Thiselton, Fitzmyer then in three pages *concisely* outlines the major concerns found in this text.

Basically Fitzmyer determines the major concerns to be:

- 1) Is this pericope part of the original text from Paul or some form of later interpolation?
- 2) Is it misplaced in its position, or should it follow v. 40 at the end of this discussion?
- 3) Is Paul quoting a position adopted by the men in the Corinthian Church?
- 4) Is this text a marginal comment by Paul inserted at a later point in his message in order to clarify some concern or issue?<sup>22</sup>

Addressing the complexity and difficulty of this pericope surrounding 1 Cor 13:32, 33, and 34, some scholars<sup>23</sup> prefer to connect all of v. 33 to the previous paragraph, attaching it to v. 32, thus making the instruction “*as in all the churches of the saints*” apply to “*God not being the order if confusion in as all the churches of Christ.*” This option “conveniently” removes the wording “*as in all the churches of the saints*” from the instruction of *the women keeping silent in the churches* in v.34.

Some commentators,<sup>24</sup> however, hold that v. 33 should be spilt into two paragraphs as in the major English translations, the KJV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NIV, REB, and as presented in the Nestle-Aland Greek text citing sound manuscript and textual critical evidence. The issue is compounded by the fact that the ancient Greek manuscripts did not include punctuation which was supplied by the textual critics presenting the manuscripts.

If the paragraphs are punctuated as in most modern English translations, then the expression *as in all the churches of Christ* makes the comments regarding *women keeping silence* a church universal one. We will discuss this further below en commenting on the behavior of women in the church worship assembly.

On the credibility of maintaining 1 Cor 14:34 as an integral part of Paul’s discussion following v. 33, and not a displacement found after 1 Cor 14:40 as Fee favors, Curt Niccum has strongly supported the reliability of reading the Greek text as presented in our Nestle-Aland and other major New Testament Greek texts. Thiselton offers approval of Niccum’s approach to this text:

“The debate has become intensified by two highly detailed and meticulous studies by Philip Payne (1995) and by Curt Niccum (1997), each of which reaches different and opposing conclusions: Payne argues on the basis of the Vaticanus “bar umlaut and/or umlaut text-critical sigla ... of the textual variations” that new textual and internal evidence “strengthens an already strong case that 1 Cor 14:34–35 is an interpolation”; Niccum reviews every aspect of the debate (including Wire and Payne), and concludes, “No extant MS offers evidence for an original omission of 1 Cor 14:34–35.... No other reading has claim to being ‘original’ other than that of preserving the traditional sequence of verses.” Payne urges that Metzger overlooked the textual evidence of Codex Fuldensis as an important witness to the omission of the verses. Niccum attacks Payne’s appeal to “bar umlauts” marks as at best confused and as postdating the fourteenth century. The earliest known witness to a transposition of sequence in the passage is Ambrosiaster (late fourth

<sup>21</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 529.

<sup>22</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 529f.

<sup>23</sup> Including Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 527, Fee, 1 Cor 14:34-35 after 1 Cor 14:40, treating it as a separate “displacement.”

<sup>24</sup> Among them, Collins, Bruce, Conzelmann, in Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p.527; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 664; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, pp. 1145ff.

century). He cites good reasons for a later reapplication of “in all the churches.” Niccum’s pages are packed with powerful and succinct arguments which prove convincing.”<sup>25</sup>

### **1 Cor 14:33b-36. Overview of women speaking in the worship assembly**

Fundamentally, the discussion relates to *appropriate behavior in the Christian congregation’s worship assembly*, for *God is not the source of disorder, but of order and peace*. As described in 1 Cor 14:21. *Is this message and instruction intended only to the Church in Corinth, then how is it universally understood?*<sup>26</sup>

Is this text and its message relevant *to only the specific worship assembly or also to Christian Roman Corinthian public life*. Obviously, we will learn that there are some cultural moral principles referenced in the text that would also relate to public life, in Roman Corinth. Is so, how should we handle this in our contemporary cultural contexts, only in the worship assembly, or also in public?

Christians examining these verses, and seeking to apply them in their own church and cultural lives, should seek to identify the *theological principles* Paul was expressing in this pericope, addressed to circumstances prevalent in Corinth, and seek to apply them in their own cultural and church life situations.

**1 Cor 14:33b.** “*As in all the churches of the saints,* <sup>34</sup> *the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says.* <sup>35</sup> *If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.* <sup>36</sup> *What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?*”

With his opening expression to this paragraph, Paul clearly states that what he is about to explain is a *theological principle* that is broader than only relevant to the Corinthian church. “*As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches*” implies that this statement is a *universal principle* that should apply wherever Christians *gather in a church assemble to worship on the Lord’s Day*. Consequently, the women in the church in Corinth should honor this universal principle.

We will note below that Fitzmyer claims that this “*silence is to be general and absolute.*” Paul was certain in regard to his instruction.<sup>27</sup>

If we tie this in to the previous clause, v. 33a, even if we recognize that a new paragraph is intended, we get the sense that *maintaining peace and order in all churches relates directly to what God has in mind for his churches*, and the women fit in somewhere in this equation, but where and how?

### **1 Cor 14:34-36. Paul’s instruction that the women should keep silent**

A survey of scholarly comments of the “command” by Paul to be *silent* is so enormous that it exposes one to more confusion than apparently even the Corinthian church was experiencing!

Thiselton, in his usual style, has provided us with an extensive survey of such opinions.

For those inclined to more detailed research on this pericope I have enclosed below in a grey box an edited extraction of Thiselton’s nine-page survey of scholarly opinion. This will provide some context of the extensive options presented by reasonable scholars, who in my opinion, are excellent scholars, without agreeing with them at all points! The scholars referenced by Thiselton

<sup>25</sup> Thiselton, p. 1149; Niccum, C., “The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14:34–35,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 242–55.

<sup>26</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 527f.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 531.

are Ben Witherington, C. K. Barrett, David Garland, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Richard Oster. I hold them all in high esteem. I have *italicized* certain sections for additional attention.

What seems surprising is the extent to which writers tend to over specify the particular aspect of boundaries of “order” *which Paul has as his main concern*: husbands versus wives; public space versus the home; *speech versus silence; controlled speech versus uncontrolled “inspired” or “ecstatic” speech* ... A. C. Wire is surely right to identify the very large issue of *whether “order” still applies to a charismatic gospel community. In the eyes of many at Corinth, it did not; in Paul’s view, such a claim undermines the very unity of God by making the God of the Spirit of the new age contradict the God who revealed his ordered ways through scripture* ...

All of these points seem to substantiate our understanding and translation of ὑποτασσέσθωσαν as *let them keep to their ordered place* ... Kistemaker rightly understands the issue as one of “respect” in God’s order, in which, Witherington observes, “women are not being commanded to submit to their husbands, but to the principle of order” (although he unduly adds, “in the worship service”). The proof of the permanence of the principle of *order* even within an eschatological mode emerges in 1 Cor 15:28. When everything has been properly ordered (ὑποταγῆ ... τὰ πάντα, Jesus Christ, *the Son, will also resume his ordered place* (ὁ υἱὸς ὑποταγήσεται) *in relation to the God who orders all things* (τῷ ὑποτάξαντι ... τὰ πάντα). *This exhibits an “ordered” Trinity, not a “subordinationist” Christology.*

(d) *The Church and Speech*

Wire is right about Paul’s concern that Corinth does not make unilateral local decisions which are at odds with *all the churches* since these are no less the *one holy people of God*. The context makes it quite clear why Paul uses ἁγίων ... In contrast to Babel, the Spirit of God brings God’s people together as one holy people. Paul anticipates the later so-called “marks of the church” in classical theology as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” as many confess Sunday by Sunday in the Nicene Creed. This verse looks back to 1:2, “called as holy (κλητοῖς ἁγίοις) with *all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place—their Lord as well as ours.*”

It is essential to ask what Paul means by *speaking in this context* of church practice. Since Paul expresses no reservation at all about a woman’s praying (προσευχομένη) or using prophetic speech (ἡ προφητευσσα) in 11:5, *speaking* cannot denote *speaking of any kind without qualification*. It is possible that the universal practice was more “strict,” and that Paul cites it with broad approval, subject to the qualification enunciated in 11:5 ... However, it is likely that the *contextually presupposed* understanding which does not need to be explicated for the addressees is either *a failure to stop speaking ... or more probably the disruptive sifting of prophetic speech (as in v. 29), which might involve (1) repetitive interruption with questioning; and (2) the possibility of wives cross-examining their husbands, especially if, as is developed in the Didache, issues of contextual lifestyle are part of the sifting.* This scenario becomes more plausible when we review the remaining issues ...

If we concur with Witherington and others that what is at issue is *not “speech” as much as “abuse of speech,”* a probable scenario begins to emerge. *All of Paul’s language is context-specific,* although he also appeals to the established tradition of the churches in general that respect for order entails silence in the kind of context that is under discussion ... This is a possibility, but it remains an unnecessary hypothesis in the light of our discussion above on the relation between *the law* and *respect for order which permeates the Pentateuch*. There is nothing whatever “un-Pauline” about the allusion to *the law*, once we have grasped the exegetical issues ...

Most of the hypotheses about “reconciling” 11:5 with 14:33b–36 remain unnecessary. The widespread notion that whereas 11:2–16 speaks of prophetic speech, the use of λαλεῖν refers to *chatter* in these verses *ignores first-century lexicographical evidence and the context of discussion in 14:27–40*. Deluz writes: “Paul, then, is not forbidding women to undertake ‘ministry of the word;’ he is forbidding them to indulge in feminine chatter which was becoming a considerable nuisance.”

Moffatt asserts, “*Keep quiet* means even more than a prohibition of chattering. *Worship is not to be turned into discussion groups...*” C. K. Barrett, however, soundly dismisses the faulty lexicography to which such interpretations of *λαλεῖν* often appeal. The meaning *to chatter* does occur in classical Greek of the earlier centuries, “*but in the NT and in Paul the verb normally does not have this meaning, and it is used throughout chapter 14 (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27, 28, 29, 39) in the sense of inspired speech.*”

A short research article by D. J. Nadeau (1994) reminds us that in this polemical and contextually constrained situation Paul is deeply concerned to avoid any confusion between the emerging Christian churches and marginal Graeco-Roman or Asian cults in which women exercised more prominent roles than in the synagogues which formed the Jewish roots of the churches. Paul expresses his missionary or evangelistic concern in his allusions to what unbelievers will make of tongues (14:23) and his hopes for their conversion under sober prophetic communication (14:24, 25). In 9:19–23 he has stated that he himself is willing to undergo voluntary restraint and control, even of that to which he has a “right,” if it enhances his attempts to win others for Christ. Controlled speech reflects the traditions of the Bible, the synagogue, and the early churches ... Nadeau has well noted one major strand in Paul’s concerns, although he has not set forth the whole picture, as Paul’s unqualified support for prayer and prophetic speech by women in 11:5 demonstrates. However, if a form of speech or timing of speech other than prayer or proclamation is involved which may generate more hellenistic than Jewish resonances, then Nadeau has taken us forward in some measure.

With Witherington, we believe that the speaking in question denotes the *activity of sifting or weighing the words of prophets, especially by asking probing questions about the prophet’s theology or even the prophet’s lifestyle in public*. This would become especially sensitive and problematic if wives were cross-examining their husbands about the speech and conduct which supported or undermined the authenticity of a claim to utter a prophetic message, and would readily introduce Paul’s allusion to reserving questions of a certain kind for home. The women would in this case (i) be acting as judges over their husbands in public; (ii) risk turning worship into an extended discussion session with perhaps private interests; (iii) militate against the ethics of controlled and restrained speech in the context of which the congregation should be silently listening to God rather than eager to address one another; and (iv) disrupt the sense of respect for the orderliness of God’s agency in creation and in the world as against the confusion which preexisted the creative activity of God’s Spirit.

Most of the fundamental exegetical issues have already been discussed above. In different ways Stephen Barton and Antoinette Wire clarify the importance of boundaries between public and private space in relation to the issues under discussion ... For Paul, however, the concern is not to disempower women, but (i) to reflect in life and worship the dialectic of creativity and order which reflects God’s own nature and his governance of the world; (ii) to keep in view the missionary vision of how any Christian activity, whether corporate or individual, is perceived in the world still to be reached by the gospel (cf. 9:19–23; 14:23–25); and (iii) to avoid a merely localized or brazenly unilateral self-regulation which nurtures the false sense of corporate self-sufficiency of what Calvin calls here “a church ... turned in on itself, to the neglect of others.” This verse thus comes in between the allusions in vv. 33b–34 to *all the churches of God’s holy people (v. 33) and when congregations meet in public (v. 34) ...*

If, as we believe, Witherington is right in asserting that the context of discourse refers most particularly to the *sifting, weighing, testing, or discerning* of prophetic speech, it has even been the case that “a prophet is not without honour except in his own homeland and in his own home” (ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ, Matt 13:57) ... The fact that this saying occurs in all four Gospels (cf. Luke 4:24; John 4:44), and that a version of the axiom seems to occur also in the *Gospel of Thomas* 31, suggests that an early authentic saying of Jesus may have become virtually a proverb in the early church as the experience of the fate of Jesus was replicated for early Christian preachers. On Matthew ... We have only to recall the debates at Corinth about the status of “people of the Spirit” as against those

who were deemed “ordinary” to understand the immense piquancy and sensitivity when a person uttered *prophetic speech*, and as it was *sifted*, or even perhaps to initiate a “sifting,” *a wife or close relation might interrogate the speaker in public about how the prophets matched their spiritual state or their lifestyle in daily situations as part of the “testing.”* ...

We therefore suggest that ἐπερωτάωσαν means something more than *let them ask their (own) husbands* (NRSV, REB, NJB). In Mark 14:60–61 the high priest *cross-examined or interrogated* Jesus (ἐπηρώτησεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν) while in v. 61 the same verb moves from judicial investigation to virtual accusation. In hellenistic literature the word may be used of questioning the gods sometimes in the LXX sense of inquiring into God’s will. Even in examples concerning *asking questions* in everyday life. Grimm-Thayer note the mood of *interrogation* which can still apply in their first entry: *to accost one with an enquiry, to put a question to ... to interrogate ...* Thus the noun ἐπερώτημα oscillates between *inquiry* and *demand*, with overtones of *earnest intensity*. By contrast, without the directive compound, the *simple* verb ἐρωτάω means more generally *to ask*, in an “open” sense.

In contrast to the *honor* which Jesus associated with the recognition of a prophet (see above), the embarrassing and humiliating cross-examination or *interrogation* of a prophet by a close relative (especially in Jewish or Jewish and Roman cultural context by a wife or close relative who is a *woman*) brings not *honor* but humiliation and *disgrace*. The importance of the honor-shame universe of discourse for first-century Corinth ... stands in the foreground here... Over the centuries, however, *shame* has become almost merged into *guilt*, in contrast to more public or intersubjective aspects of the *respect, approval, or disapproval of others*, especially in the family, community, or state. The best equivalent in modern English is to *win approval or disgrace*. If we restructure the adjective αἰσχρός, *shameful, disgraceful, dishonorable, unbecoming*, the force of Paul’s words may be most accurately conveyed by *to speak thus in public worship ... brings disgrace*. Paul emphasizes *disgrace* by placing αἰσχρόν as the first word of v. 35b ...

We may note in passing that whether or not the allusions to *silence* and to *disgrace* in Titus 1:11 consciously look back to our verses, those who are enjoined to be *silent* in Titus 1:11–13 are the broader category of the *leaders* rather than the *women*, even if the issue of disruption and disgrace remains the same. *A loud mouth and insistent, polarized argumentation confound the force of the gospel and undermine mutual respect* when what is required is a lifestyle which respects the need for self-control in the ethics of speech. Once again, I have elaborated this point with reference to Titus 1:12 and 13 or elsewhere, since the role of these verses in relation to the argument of the epistle is often misunderstood. *Kierkegaard comments on these verses to extol the virtue of silence in just such a broader context: “Silence is just what is needed so that the Word of God may work its work in us... We can only hear the word of God in silence.”*<sup>406</sup> Witherington also broadens the issue to all people: *“The Corinthians should know that the OT speaks about a respectful silence when a word of counsel is spoken (Job 29:21).”* ...

36 Witherington offers two useful observations on v. 36. *First*, he perceives the point of Paul’s rhetorical questions to lie in the scenario that *“it appears the Corinthians are trying to make up their own rules, and perhaps thinking their own word is sufficient or authoritative or even the word of God for themselves (cf. v. 36)”* ... Fee rightly adds, *“Has God given them a special word that allows them both to reject Paul’s instructions ... and to be so out of touch with the churches?”*<sup>410</sup> *Second*, a further affinity between v. 33 and v. 36 exists in the contrast between *all* and *only you*. Thus Witherington comments, *“This summary statement [question] applies to all, not just women, for he [Paul] uses the word μόνου instead of μόνας probably to indicate a mixed audience.”* ... This accords, again, precisely with Paul’s overture to the whole letter in 1:2: *called ... with all who call upon the*

*name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place—their Lord and ours too! Hence, has Christ been apportioned out? (1:13).”<sup>28</sup>*

**1 Cor 14:34.** Paul speaks out with what appears to be *apostolic authority*, “women should keep silence in the churches.” In the expression *should keep silence*, *silence*, *σιγάτωσαν* *sigatōsan* is a hortatory imperative intended to encourage a certain response.

This raises possible questions we have already alluded to above. Is Paul merely repeating a Corinthian statement back to the Corinthians, something he has heard they were saying? Or is this statement part of a later textual interpolation? Or is Paul addressing a problem he had heard or read of in a letter that stated that some women were apparently creating a scene in the worship assembly in Corinth?

The statement seems a little more strident than quoting something merely the Corinthians were stipulating. The Greek is in an *imperative* rather than merely repeating a Corinthians saying. The Greek reads αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις σιγάτωσαν, with the verb *σιγάτωσαν*, a *present active imperative* from *σιγάω sigáō*, instructing the women in the assembly *to be silent*, *be still*.<sup>29</sup> Louw and Nida add that “*σιγάω, sigáō*, means *to keep quiet, or be quiet*, with the implication of *preserving something which is secret—to keep quiet about, to say nothing about ...* [Luke records] *‘they kept quiet (about all this) and told no one,’* Lk 9:36.<sup>30</sup>

Fitzmyer adds that “*the silence is to be general and absolute, nor merely while someone else is speaking.*”<sup>31</sup>

The difficult aspect of this *imperative* statement is *understanding the context* which triggered it in Paul’s mind.

Could the present active imperative *σιγάτωσαν* be a *hortatory imperative*, “*let the women keep silent in the church,*” or “*the women should keep silence in the churches,*” or a *dominical command imperative*, “*the woman must be silent in the church?*”<sup>32</sup>

Garland sees this as a *command imperative*, “*must keep silent*” but has difficulty with 1 Cor 11:5 and Paul’s approval of women *prophesying* and *praying* in the assembly. Garland observes that the context of 1 Cor 11:5 and 1 Cor 14:34, although on the surface similar relating to God, Christ, man, and women relationships, the discussions are different.<sup>33</sup>

The comment of 1 Cor 11:5 is an approval of women speaking, prophesying, and praying *if done in a respectful manner* in the presence of God, Christ, and men with an appropriate head covering.

The context of 1 Cor 14:34 addresses the *disorderly behavior the woman*, obviously a wife, *in regard to her husband in the worship assembly*. The context is not imply woman speaking, *but women speaking disrespectfully in regard to her husband in the worship assembly*.

Garland correctly proposes that this command must be seen in the context of the woman’s, or wife’s, *unruly disrespectful* behavior toward her husband in the assembly.

The sense of Paul’s comment that follows this imperative seems to justify this husband-wife concern for *respectful relational rapport*; “*but [the wife] should be subordinate*, (*ὑποταστέσθωσαν, hupotassthōsan*, a present passive imperative verb implying what *should be*,

<sup>28</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 1154–1162.

<sup>29</sup> Zodhiates, *σιγάω sigáō*.

<sup>30</sup> Louw, and Nida, *σιγάω sigáō*, Greek English Lexicon, vol. 1, p. 401.

<sup>31</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 531.

<sup>32</sup> For the different moods of the imperative verb cf. Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p.174f.

<sup>33</sup> Garland, 1 Corinthians, pp. 667f.

not what *must be*) as even the law says. <sup>35</sup> *If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*”<sup>34</sup>

Garland adds:

“Paul disallows speech in the assembly that would suggest that a wife is being insubordinate toward her husband, whether it is [either] an interpretation or a challenge to a prophetic utterance. The delicate relationship between husband and wife is imperiled by the wife’s public questioning, correcting, or challenging.”<sup>35</sup>

Garland concludes his argument that Paul’s concerns were conditioned by the social realities of the Corinthian context:

“I conclude that Paul’s instructions are conditioned by the social realities of his age and a desire to prevent a serious breach in decorum. *The negative effect that wives publicly interrupting or contradicting their husbands might have on outsiders* (let alone the bruising it would cause to sensitive make egos) *could not be far from his mind*. Paul may fear that the Christian community would be “mistaken for one of the orgiastic, secret, oriental cults that undermined public order and decency” (Schussler Fiorenza, 1984:232) in which women exercised more prominent roles. To forestall this impression, he presents the practice of the Palestinian communities as a model to be imitated (see Nadeau 1994).<sup>36</sup>

Garland cites R. B. Hayes, *First Corinthians*, p. 245, and D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians*, p. 121, with approval.<sup>37</sup>

“Hayes, “Order is necessary only to *constrain self-indulgent abuses* and to create an atmosphere on which *the gifts of all can work together to build a community in love.*”

“Carson, “Wise and biblically informed Christian worship” will not pursue “freedom at the expense of order, or unrestrained spontaneity at the expense of reverence.”

Zodhiates adds an interesting comment regarding Paul’s statement of *not permitting woman to speak* that may add some clarity to the discussion regarding the Greek word λαλεῖν. The normal word for *speak* is λέγω *légō*, but here in 1 Cor 14:34 Paul uses λαλεῖν!

“λέγω *légō*; originally to lay or let lie down for sleep, to lay together ... Finally to lay before, i.e., to relate, recount; and hence the prevailing Attic and later meaning of to say, speak, i.e., to utter definite words, connected and significant speech equal to discourse.”<sup>38</sup>

“λαλέω *lalēō*; to talk at random, as contrasted with *légō*... which involves the intellectual part of man, his reason. It is used especially of children with the meaning of to talk much. The dumb man is *álalos* ... mute (Mark 7:37; 9:17, 25); when restored to speech, he is said to *elálēse*, the aorist of *lalēō* (Matt. 9:33; Luke 11:14), emphasizing the fact of *speech versus speechlessness*. When reference is made to those who spoke in tongues, whether foreign languages or the Corinthian unknown tongue, it is always referred to as *lalēō glōssais* (*glōssa* ... tongue), to speak in tongues (Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:30). This emphasized *not the content of the speech, but merely that they uttered sounds* as far as the hearers were concerned ... The same word *apophthéggomai* is used in Acts 2:4, certifying that the other languages which the Holy Spirit enabled the Jews gathered at Pentecost to speak were other ethnic languages, not the unknown tongue of the Corinthians. ... The idea here is that the Holy Spirit gave the ability to these Jews at Pentecost to say

<sup>34</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 667.

<sup>35</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 671.

<sup>36</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 673.

<sup>37</sup> Gerland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 674, 675.

<sup>38</sup> Zodhiates, λέγω *légō*.

certain things in languages other than their own *with sounds that were not gibberish but were well formulated syllabic utterances which could be understood by others.*<sup>39</sup>

Zodhiates, in a long discussion adds additional comments on 1 Cor 13:34 and women speaking, λαλεῖν, that was not permitted by Paul in Corinthian worship assembly.

“*Lalein* has several applications; of speaking in a childlike manner, talking excessively, or speaking in a disorderly manner. In regard to the context of 1 Cor 14:34, it seems that Paul had in mind *disrespectful questioning of the husband*, or idle chatter, λαλεῖν, *lalein*, demonstrating *disorder* in the process of *learning in the assembly*.<sup>40</sup>

“*For they are not permitted to speak*, λαλεῖν, from λαλέω, *laleō*, to *talk at random*, as contrasted with *légō* ... which involves the intellectual part of man, his reason. *It is used especially of children with the meaning of to talk much ... or of one teaching, meaning to teach, preach, used in an absolute sense* (Luke 5:4; 1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Pet. 4:11)”<sup>41</sup>

**1 Cor 14:34.** “*As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence (σιγάω<sup>42</sup>) in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak (λαλεῖν), but should be subordinate, as even the law says.*<sup>35</sup> *If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*<sup>43</sup>

In addition, or clarification to their *not speaking*, *laleō*, Paul adds they “*should be subordinate, as even the law says.*” To *subordinate oneself* is from ὑποτάσσω, ὑποτάσσω, *hupotássō* ... *to place in order, to place under in an orderly fashion, to subject oneself, to place oneself in submission.*”<sup>44</sup> It refers to an attitude of *not putting oneself over others*, either men or women.” *Aggressive speaking* in the context of *husband-wife relationships in the assembly* was *disorderly or shameful, indecent, dishonorable* (αἰσχρὸν<sup>45</sup>), and *not permitted*.

There are questions as to *which law Paul was referring*, Roman law, synagogue law, or Torah law. He simply does not clarify this, believing the Corinthians would know what he meant. Regardless of which choice one makes, the point remains, there was in Corinth some behavioral awareness of laws regarding “*subordination-relational*” principles; the Corinthians would have understood Paul’s meaning.

### 1 Cor 14:37-40. Paul’s concluding observation

“*If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.*<sup>38</sup> *If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*<sup>39</sup> *So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues;*<sup>40</sup> *but all things should be done decently and in order.*”

Garland observes that J. Smit offers an interesting observation regarding this closing paragraph of the extended discussion ranging from 1 Cor 12:1 through the discussion of spiritual gifts in the corporate worship assembly in Corinth to 1 Cor 14:36. Garland quotes Smit:

“Smit identifies 14:37-40 as the *peroratio*<sup>46</sup> of the speech that began in 12:1. The *peroratio* “closes the discussion on the subject and exerts pressure on the audience to take

<sup>39</sup> Zodhiates, λαλέω *laleō*.

<sup>40</sup> Zodhiates, λαλέω, *laleō*.

<sup>41</sup> Zodhiates, λαλέω, *laleō*.

<sup>42</sup> Zodhiates, σιγάω, *sigáō*; ... *silence, to be silent, still, keep silence.*

<sup>43</sup> 1 Co 14:34–35.

<sup>44</sup> Zodhiates, ὑποτάσσω, *hupotássō*.

<sup>45</sup> Zodhiates, αἰσχρός *aischrós*, *indecent, indecorous, dishonorable.* It refers to the inappropriate conduct...

<sup>46</sup> Peroratio: the concluding part of a speech, typically intended to inspire enthusiasm in the audience.

the intended decision.” If this conclusion is correct, it means the phrase “what I am writing to you” does not refer to the immediate context (14:25-36) but to the entire passage beginning in 12:1. The *peroratio* emphatically drives home the point with no beating around the bush. It is short and not necessarily sweet. The polite speech which Paul begins in chapter 12 is now put aside for direct, blunt, speech. An imperative appears in each verse ... Paul states the overarching principle that should govern the expression of spiritual phenomena in worship. Everything must be done in an orderly manner.”<sup>47</sup>

**1 Cor 1:14:37.** *If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual* (obviously the Corinthian super-spiritual), *he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord* (since he claims he speaks by the Spirit from the Lord). <sup>38</sup> *If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized.* <sup>39</sup> *So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues;* <sup>40</sup> *but all things should be done decently and in order.”*

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<sup>47</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 673, 674.

## Chapter 14: 1 Cor 15:1-58: The resurrection of the body

At long last, we close the discussion of spiritual giftedness in the public worship assembly and turn to a primary Corinthian Greek problem, the resurrection of Jesus and the body, introduced in 1 Cor 1:19ff. Possibly indicating how primary the doctrine of the resurrection is to Paul's theology, he spends fifty-eight verses in five sections, prefaced by an introduction to explain the fundamental soteriological and eschatological doctrine of the resurrection!

The major reason for the Corinthian problem with a resurrection was their historical Platonic world view that rejected any resurrection of a body since the body was partial, corrupt, and doomed to cease to exist.

The following is a brief summary of those aspects of Platonism that impact our study in 1 Corinthians and the Christian theology of the resurrection. Plato's view of man was dualistic; man has an eternal immortal soul, which Plato identified as form, which soul is captive in a physical temporal body which is partial, corrupt, doomed to decay, and mortal.

Any idea of resurrecting a body to the ancient Greek was foolishness, hence around the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus we have Paul's opening discussion of the wisdom of God and the foolishness of man in 1 Cor 1:18-25.

### 1 Cor 15:1, 2. Paul's introduction to the resurrection message

*"<sup>1</sup> Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain."*

Paul obviously believed he had previously taught the Corinthians the primary resurrection soteriological doctrine of the Christian faith, and kingdom reality. He even refers to the doctrine of the resurrection by the term *gospel* which had by CE 55 become a technical term for the message of salvation relating to Jesus death and resurrection. He had mentioned this in his opening chapter of this letter at 1 Cor 1:17ff. and 2:1ff

*"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

*<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written,*

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart."*

*<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God ... When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."*

An interesting point unfolds here! You cannot preach Jesus crucified in the *gospel* message without attaching to it Jesus' resurrection!

In the introduction to his letter to the Romans, Rom 1:16, Paul spoke clearly of *the power of our salvation, it is the gospel of Christ* which in Corinthians he explains as achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**Rom 1:16, 17.** “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*”

### **1 Cor 15:3-11. The facts of the resurrection**

“*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> **Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.** <sup>9</sup> *For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.* <sup>10</sup> *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.* <sup>11</sup> *Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*”*

**1 Cor 15:3.** Without question, in Paul’s mind and theology, the resurrection was of *first* (πρῶτος, *prōtos*, *first in order*<sup>1</sup>) or of *prime* importance! Thiselton cites the Revised English Bible with approval, “REB’s **first and foremost** well captures the logical rather than temporal force of ἐν πρώτοις in this context ...”<sup>2</sup>

Paul’s argument on the factuality of the resurrection of Jesus stresses the progressive physical historical support and evidence for the reality of the resurrection of Jesus.

*First*, it was not a new idea that Paul was preaching! It was in *accordance with the Scriptures*. The word in *accordance* is implied from the Greek κατά, *katá*, with the primary meaning of *down, down from, in conformity to* the Scriptures.<sup>3</sup> The death and resurrection of Jesus were what Scripture was all about!

I like an oft quoted saying by Oscar Cullmann, “*Christ is the mid-point in time,*”<sup>4</sup> in other words, *Christ is what time and history are all about*. Everything in Scripture hinges around Christ, his incarnation, death, and resurrection.

The editorial comment on the book cover to Cullmann’s *The Christology of the New Testament* reads,

“In Cullmann's view, *Heilsgeschichte* (i.e., the *story of God's self-revelation and saving action*) is the unifying thematic center of the entire Bible. The midpoint and consummation of salvation history is discernible in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This "Christ event" establishes meaning for all that comes before (the period of Israel) and

<sup>1</sup> Zohhates, πρῶτος, *prōtos*, figuratively of rank, dignity, meaning first, chief.

<sup>2</sup> Thiselton, p. 1186.

<sup>3</sup> Zohhates, κατά, *katá*, metaphorically, as expressing the relation in which one thing stands towards another, thus also everywhere implying ... in accordance, conformity, to a norm, rule, standard of comparison meaning according to, conformable to.”

<sup>4</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, SCM Canterbury Press, 1971, *passim*.

all that follows (the period of the church). The coming "eschaton", says Cullmann, is *the fulfillment of the decisive eschatological event in the death and resurrection of Christ.*"<sup>5</sup> Thiselton observes regarding the comment "*in accordance with the Scriptures*":

"The key points in the phrase according to the scriptures, as Barrett observes, are (1) the continuity of the cross of Christ with the history of the saving purposes of God as revealed in the Old Testament, which find their climax and fulfillment in the saving work of Christ; and (2) understanding the meaning of the saving role of the death of Christ by means of "interpretation in OT categories—for example, of sacrifice ... atonement ... sufferings ... the good time to come." The work of C. H. Dodd in this area remains of permanent value. Blomberg comments that "the first Christian writers saw all of the Scripture pointing to Christ."<sup>6</sup>

*Second*, Paul records "*that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*" We should note that Paul does not say that Jesus appeared *first* to Peter, only that he appeared to Peter and then the twelve. We know from Mark 16:1-13 that Mark gives us a record of the women coming to the tomb and finding Jesus not there, and Mary Magdalene being the first to see Jesus resurrected and alive:

*<sup>1</sup> And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. <sup>3</sup> And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; —it was very large. <sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you."*<sup>8</sup> *And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.*

*<sup>9</sup> Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. <sup>10</sup> She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. <sup>11</sup> But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.*

*<sup>12</sup> After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. <sup>13</sup> And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them."*

John, the Apostle, fills in more details of other interesting facts that confirm the story Mark records of Mary Magdalene being the first to see the resurrected Jesus. John tells us that Mary Magdalene told Peter and "the disciples Jesus loved, John that Jesus was alive. They also went to the tomb to see Jesus and found that he was not there." On that occasion they did not see the resurrected Jesus; John 20:1-18. John's continuing narrative of Jesus appearing to the disciples is worth reading, confirming that the resurrected had appeared to the disciples.

Paul does not record the details of this amazing series of events but firmly establishes the apostolic narrative and tradition of Jesus resurrection and appearances, "*he appeared to Peter and then the twelve.*"

<sup>5</sup> Book cover comment from Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, Westminster John Knox, 1959.

<sup>6</sup> Thiselton, pp. 1190–1191.

*Third*, Paul adds one of the most impressive proofs of the resurrection. Jesus resurrection appearances were not limited to his chosen few as some critics who deny the resurrect argue, he appeared to *over five hundred people*, many of whom in CE 55 *were still alive* and could verify the apostles experience. The resurrection of Jesus was not a secret experience for the chosen few! 1 Cor 15:6. “Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.”

We have here one of the interesting points regarding the early Christian’s lives and faith. Almost as soon as the church and Christianity were founded persecution broke out, first by the Jews in Jerusalem, by Saul of Tarsus for instance, then by the Jews at large. Cf Acts 8;1-5:

*“<sup>1</sup> And Saul was consenting to his death.*

*And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

*<sup>2</sup> Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*

*<sup>4</sup> Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. <sup>6</sup> And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did.”*

Persecution and the threat of death could not threaten Christians who had seen Jesus alive after his death to deny the resurrection of Jesus! They held fast their faith in Jesus and his resurrection.

*Fourth*, for some reason Paul added James to the list of those who saw Jesus resurrected, *“<sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.”* Most commentators believe this James was the brother of Jesus. Thiselton adds:

*“Most writers consider it virtually certain that the James in question is James the brother of Jesus. There is no explicit reference to this *appearance* (ὄφθη, again) in the canonical Gospels, although the group to which Acts 1:6–9 alludes may have included James. Paul speaks of him as “the Lord’s brother” (Gal 1:19); as a “pillar” of the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9); and as a participant in the conference (conferences?) at Jerusalem (Gal 2:1–10; cf. Acts 15:1–20). It is widely agreed that the figure described in Galatians 1 and 2 is the James of Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18 (also Mark 6:3; par. Matt 13:55; Jas 1:1).”<sup>7</sup>*

*Fifth*, Paul refers to his own resurrection experience, *“last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”* Paul’s miraculous *resurrection experience* on the Road to Damascus as recorded in Acts 9:1-9. That experience *changed his life completely*:

*“<sup>1</sup> But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. <sup>4</sup> And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” <sup>5</sup> And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; <sup>6</sup> but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.”*

<sup>7</sup> Thiselton, p. 1207.

**1 Cor 15:10-11.** Paul clearly attributes the grace of god and the power and energy of his and the apostles' ministry to their resurrection experience.

<sup>10</sup> *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.*

*On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."*

Note how Paul connects these verses to v. 12, "now if *Christ is preached as raised from the dead*, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead."

### **1 Cor 15:12-19. The necessity of a resurrection**

<sup>12</sup> *Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied."*

**1 Cor 15:13** is possibly the heart of Paul's argument in this chapter, "<sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." If there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ is still dead, and the whole system is a myth. In many ways, which is the shaky view of those who deny Jesus was raised *in history* from the dead!

By "*in history*" we mean *was raised as a historical event that can be substantiated by historical evidence*. Wolfhart Pannenberg's research and publications argue effectively for view of history as a real-time eschatological event different from that of nineteenth century and neo-orthodox theology's negative view of history.<sup>8</sup> Liberal theology of the nineteenth century argued that the resurrection of Jesus was nothing other than the frustrated attempts of the disciples "resurrecting" their faith in their dead crucified messiah.

Years ago when I was enrolled in a divinity seminary in South Africa, I was in a cohort of thirteen ministers preparing for ordination in their denominations. I was fortunate to be included with them, not as an ordination prospect, but as one was preparing for a master's degree in New Testament. Three major Protestant denominations were represented by the group, in addition to one Baptist minister, and me.

When our professor mentioned the historical nature of Jesus' resurrection, eleven of the thirteen ministry students, all ministers or ministers in preparation for ordination, were alarmed and seriously questioned whether a historical view of the resurrection of Jesus was valid.

Our Professor, Dr. Victor Bredenkamp, a minister for the local High Epworth Methodist church, defended his claim for a historical resurrection, and recommended that the students read up on the writings of Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg, of the University of Munich, who had in 1968 seriously challenged the non-historical views of theology taught by Karl Barth and Rudolf

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<sup>8</sup> Ian A. Fair, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg as a Reaction to Dialectical Theology*, University of KwaZulu Natal, 1975. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead", *New Testament Issues*, SCM Press, 1970; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, McMillan, 1968; Wolfhardt Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History", *Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, SCM Press, 1960; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Heilsgeschichte und Geschichte", *Kerygma und Dogma*, Vol 5, 1959, pp 271-237 and 259-288; *et al.*

Bultmann. Pannenberg outlined and defended a historical view of the resurrection claiming that his theology was predicated on a true “scientific” *historical theology* of the resurrection.

When I received my post-graduate seminary Bachelor Honors Degree in Theology from the university of KwaZulu Natal, Professor Bredenkamp recommended that I do research for a master’s degree in New Testament on the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. He advised that I do this in three contemporary New Testament theologians of international recognition. I chose Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg, Professor Willi Marxsen, and Professor John A. T. Robinson. My research and master’s degree established the validity of Professor Pannenberg’s arguments, and seriously questioned the accuracy and reliability of Professors Marxsen’s and Robinson’s theology.<sup>9</sup>

The interesting point to this discussion is that prior to Pannenberg’s critical research and publications such as *Revelation as History*, 1968, most Protestant ministers spoke of Jesus’ resurrection as a *non-historical myth*. For instance, John A. T. Robinson published two-million-dollar best-selling books, *God is Dead* and *That I Can’t Believe*, speaking of the *mythical nature of the resurrection of Jesus*. Robinson, and others of his persuasion believed when Jesus died on the cross, God died. He held that a real resurrection of Jesus was a myth supporting a biased or failing religion. Man, having come of age in the secular world, did not need a god to lean on! Amazingly, Robinson was a bishop in the Church of England at Woolwich, England, and Dean of Trinity College at Cambridge University!

Subsequent to Pannenberg’s publications in 1968 most evangelical scholars<sup>10</sup> moved away from Robinson, Marxsen, and Bultmann, and have been willing to speak glowingly of the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection.

Paul’s argument at 1 Cor 15:13, 14 speaks clearly of the importance of the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus.

**1 Cor 15:13-17.** Paul’s argument was both incisive and assertive, “*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*”<sup>15</sup> *We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*”

### **1 Cor 15:20-28. The assurance of a resurrection**

“<sup>20</sup> *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> “For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection under him,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. <sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone.*”

<sup>9</sup> Fair, *An Examination of the Interpretation of the Resurrection of Jesus by Some Contemporary Biblical Scholars*, 1972, Cum Laude, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, McMillan, 1968; *et al.*

<sup>10</sup> N. T. Wright, D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, Anthony C. Thiselton, Gordon D. Fee, David. E. Garland.

**1 Cor 15:20** reads, “*but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.*” The Greek reads “*Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων ...*” make a strong assertive fact! The verb ἐγήγερται is a *perfect passive indicative verb* implying that a *strong event has taken place in the past which effect is still active in the present*. The *νυνὶ δέ* adverbial clause is *emphatic*, it reads “*but now in fact*” stating a reality not a possibility.<sup>11</sup> Thiselton translates this as “*In reality, however, ...*” He adds:

“BAGD confirm with examples that the adverb *νυνὶ* may be used to denote not only a temporal or a logical *now* but also “introducing the real situation after an unreal clause or sentence, *but as a matter of fact*” (Heb 9:26; 1 Cor 5:11; cf. NRSV, *But in fact*, REB, *But the truth is ...*). The further contrastive *δέ* calls for a *clear marker*, e.g., **however** ... Paul continues to use the *perfect passive*, as Dahl, Barrett, ... and others emphasize.<sup>12</sup>

Paul adds that Christ’s resurrection was “*the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep* (τῶν κοιμημένων from κοιμάω, *koimáō*, a euphemism for *have died.*”<sup>13</sup>

The term *firstfruits*, an *Old Testament Mosaic sacrificial term*, introduces an important *theological eschatological concept, that which begins in Jesus is the guarantee of future resurrections and lasts until his second coming*. Jesus resurrection has end of the age implications since when he returns all of the dead will be raised, some to life, others to death. In Wolfhart Pannenberg’s terms, *the resurrection of Jesus is the arrival of the future resurrection, the end!*

Notice how Paul introduces the importance of the resurrection of Jesus as *firstfruits*.

Thiselton observes:

More relevant to this verse, M. C. de Boer and Joost Holleman regard the word in this verse as *pivotal for Paul’s Christology and for his argument in this chapter*. De Boer argues that the image of **the firstfruits** is “derived from the OT where it denotes the first portion of the crop (or flock) which is offered in Thanksgiving to God. As such, the term signifies the pledge of the remainder, and concomitantly, the assurance of a full harvest ... the first instalment and that part which includes, as by synecdoche, the whole” (my italics). Holleman goes further. *Firstfruits* in v. 20, he argues, embodies two ideas: a temporal logic and a representative logic. As firstfruits Christ is the “first one” to have been raised: “the first or best part of belongings or possessions” in lexicographic usage (vv. 20–23). As such, however, Christ is also “a representation of the rest” ... This prepares the way for Paul’s theology of Christ as the last Adam (vv. 21–22).<sup>14</sup>

The death and resurrection of Jesus inaugurated the eschatological kingdom in human experience with Jesus reigning as God’s regent until God determines that the eschaton will be

<sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, *νυνὶ, nuní*; adverb, identical to *nún ...*, *now*, strengthened by the *demonstrative i (iota) for emphasis*. *Just now* (Rom. 6:22; 7:6, 17; 15:23, 25; 1 Cor. 5:11; 12:18; 13:13; 14:6; 15:20; 2 Cor. 8:11, 22; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:21, 26; 3:8; Phile. 1:9, 11; Heb. 8:6; 11:16). With *dé* ... and, but (Rom. 3:21; 6:21; 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Cor. 8:11; Phile. 1:11).

<sup>12</sup> Thiselton, p. 1223. BAGD refers to the Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.

<sup>13</sup> Zodhiates, *κοιμάω koimáō* ... to lie outstretched, to lie down. To cause to lie down to sleep. In the NT, generally in the mid. *koimáomai* or *koimómai*, with the fut. mid. *koimésomai*, to fall asleep, to sleep. Used intransitively... Spoken of the sleep of death, to die, be dead (Matt. 27:52; John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13–15; 2 Pet. 3:4; Sept.: 1 Kgs. 2:10; 11:43; Is. 43:17).

<sup>14</sup> Thiselton, pp. 1223–1224.

ended. This pivotal dramatic event will occur when Jesus returns to receive his people for God. Cf 1 Thess 4:13-18.

*1 Cor 15:24-28.* “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> “For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection under him,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. <sup>28</sup> When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone.”

It is natural that all Christians, Jew and Gentile, ancient or contemporary, would have questions regarding this triumphant event which certainly lies beyond human experience. Paul had earlier explain these events to the Thessalonian Christians in two letters, 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Note 1 Thess 4:13-5:23 which does not speak of some “rapture”, but speaks clearly of Jesus second coming and the final resurrection of the dead:

*“<sup>13</sup> But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; <sup>17</sup> then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

*<sup>5:1</sup> But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> When people say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. <sup>4</sup> But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

*<sup>12</sup> But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, <sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. <sup>14</sup> And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. <sup>15</sup> See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. <sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray constantly, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit, <sup>20</sup> do not despise prophesying, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good, <sup>22</sup> abstain from every form of evil.*

*<sup>23</sup> May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

### 1 Cor 15:29-34. The Logic of a resurrection

“Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? <sup>30</sup> Why am I in peril every hour? <sup>31</sup> I protest, brethren, by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! <sup>32</sup> What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” <sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” <sup>34</sup> Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”

Most scholars observe that there are “a plethora” of interpretations of this text, especially the comment on being *baptized for the dead*. Thiselton, in his usual style, lists at least eleven different approaches to interpreting this comment. He observes:

“Verse 29 is a notoriously difficult crux: the most “hotly disputed” in the epistle (Conzelmann); “it is not clear precisely what this practice was” (Dale Martin); “everything must be understood as tentative” (Fee); a variety of understandings emerge “given the enigmatic nature of the practice” (Collins).”<sup>15</sup>

Fee, Fitzmyer, and Garland observe that possibly the best approach is to take Paul’s comment seriously, there were some Corinthian Christians who for some poorly informed reason were practicing such a baptism.<sup>16</sup> Fitzmyer observes that there are two *ad hominem* arguments in this pericope which both argue against the false view of the resurrection held by those Corinthians; *baptism for the dead* which makes no sense if there is no resurrection, and Paul’s *faithful struggles with suffering and persecution* for his faith. Why would he be ready to suffer and die for something in which he did not believe?

Fee, Garland, and Fitzmyer observe that the practice of baptism for the dead was so contradictory to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith that Paul espoused and taught, that he was using this Corinthian practice to demonstrate the absurdity of the practice. Nowhere does he approve of the practice! Furthermore there is no evidence in Scripture to support this practice. The absurdity of the practice is highlighted by the argument, “why practice this baptism if you do not believe in a resurrection of the dead”?

Finally, the pericope appears in the form of an *inclusio* with the *first* point being balanced or negated by the *last* point! “Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? ... <sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” <sup>34</sup> Come to your right mind, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”

### 1 Cor 15:35-50: The nature of the resurrection

“But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” <sup>36</sup> You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. <sup>39</sup> For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup> There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. <sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

<sup>15</sup> Thiselton, p. 1240.

<sup>16</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, pp. 845ff; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 577f; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 716ff.

<sup>42</sup> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is **perishable**, what is raised is **imperishable**. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in **dishonor**, it is raised in **glory**. It is sown in **weakness**, it is raised in **power**. <sup>44</sup> It is sown **a physical body**, it is raised **a spiritual body**. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. <sup>50</sup> I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

<sup>51</sup> Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep [die], but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this **perishable nature must put on the imperishable**, and this **mortal nature must put on immortality**. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

<sup>55</sup> “O death, where is thy victory?

O death, where is thy sting?” <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

<sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

**1 Cor 15:35-41.** Paul’s argument is succinct, especially for those of a Platonic background who recognized that there were two kinds of body, the *formal* and the *partial*, the *formal* seen in the *soul* being *imperishable*, and the *partial* in the *physical* body which is *perishable*. However, Paul turns this on its head! For God, who had made both earthly and celestial bodies, had reversed the Platonic understanding of the body being perishable, for the body being partial is *transformed* in the resurrection into an imperishable *immortal* body!

**1 Cor 15:38.** Paul points to a fact that the Corinthians would recognize. Different bodies have different seeds. God created them that way. “*But God gives the body a seed he has chosen, and to each kind of body its own seed.*” When a wheat seed matures it transforms from a seed kernel into a growing plant. That is what God has determined to take place. The seed of the human body is what God has given it, but he has the power to transform that body around its seed from a perishable body to an imperishable one.

**1 Cor 15:42-50.** The *perishable* physical body is transformed into an *imperishable* body by the power of God. Paul dramatizes this in four transformations, the *perishable* into an *imperishable* body, the *dishonorable* body into one of *glory*, the *weak* body into one of *power*, the *physical* body into a *spiritual* body.

**1 Cor 15:44b-50.** Paul introduces an interesting analogy of Adam, the *first* Adam, and Jesus, the *last* (*éschatos*, the last, the eschatological Adam). Both were created by the power and will of God. Each Adam had a unique character, the *first* Adam was a *living being or person*, the *last* or *eschatological* Adam was a *life-giving spirit*. The word being is ψυχήν, a soul, a *living person*. The *first* Adam was a *living person*, the *last* Adam a dynamic *eschatological life-giving spirit*. There is a difference between the two Adams. There is a difference between the two bodies, the first a living being, the second resurrected body an *eschatological kingdom being*.

*“If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. <sup>50</sup> I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”*

**1 Cor 15:49, 50** move the narrative from earthly carnal and physical life to the *divine eschatological kingdom life*. Those restricted to or defined by the *earthly* life have no part in the *eschatological kingdom of God*. The perishable life that not transformed in Christ to the eschatological life will *only inherit a perishable existence*.

**1 Cor 15:52.** *“For the trumpet (of final judgment) will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. The word *changed*, from ἀλλάσσω, *allássō*, means to change the form or nature of a thing, to transform ... (Gal. 4:20) ... (1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Septuagint: Jer. 13:23).<sup>17</sup> The dead body will be transformed by the power of God into a new spiritual immortal body.*

**1 Cor 15:53-58** provides the capstone meaning to the whole chapter. Something must happen to bring this wonderful narrative of the gospel of Christ to a theological close, or *denouement*:

*“For this **perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality**. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

*“**Death is swallowed up in victory.**”*

<sup>55</sup> *“O death, where is thy victory?*

*O death, where is thy sting?” <sup>56</sup> **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

<sup>58</sup> ***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**”*

### **Rom 7:7-8:4. Paul, on law, sin, death, and grace**

In this, the high point in his discussion of the results of law, sin, death, and the grace of God, Paul lays out a challenging but most encouraging point. Because of the sin the law will kill, you, but because of, Christ will give you life!

<sup>7</sup> *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” <sup>8</sup> But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. <sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; <sup>10</sup> the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. <sup>11</sup> For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me. <sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.*

<sup>13</sup> *Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. <sup>14</sup> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I*

<sup>17</sup> Zōdiates, ἀλλάσσω, *allássō*.

want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.

<sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

<sup>8:1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

## Chapter 15: 1 Cor 16:1-24: Giving and Mission

Two topics are discussed in this chapter that in some way define the character of Paul's ministry. *First*, his emphasis on the spiritual gift of *benevolent giving*, and *second*, the nature of his itinerant mission. Both of these have deep roots in the traditions of Israel and the Greeks.

### 1 Cor 16:1-4: The contribution for the poor

<sup>1</sup> *Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.* <sup>2</sup> *On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come.*

<sup>3</sup> *And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.* <sup>4</sup> *If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.*"

The expression *now concerning*, Περὶ δὲ, is a favorite term used by Paul in this epistle introducing a new topic. Thiselton observes:

"On the introductory phrase περὶ δέ, see above on 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1. In this chapter Paul uses it here and at 16:12, relating to the Apollos issue ... Here it introduces a new topic and is chosen at this "intersection of rhetorical and epistolary employment."<sup>1</sup>

The leading point to notice in this text is that Paul was not mandating a tithe or general contribution to carry out the work of the congregation. This contribution was for a *benevolent* as well as a *theological* purpose; *first*, to take care of the needy, and *second* a benevolent-missionary concern for the saints in Jerusalem.

**1 Cor 16:2.** The suggestion that this collection, ἡ λογεία, *hē logeía*, be made on *the first day of the week*, κατὰ μίαν σαββάτου, during or at the *weekly worship assembly*, is interesting.

Thiselton observes:

"Verse 2 provides a very early explicit reference to **every Sunday** as a worship day (strictly, *every first day of the week*; Gk. κατὰ μίαν σαββάτου). In accordance with regular LXX rendering of the Semitic idiom in the Hebrew text, Paul uses the cardinal numeral μίαν in place of the more strictly correct ordinal πρώτην. Similarly, the Synoptic Gospels allude to Mary Magdalene and the other women visiting the tomb of Jesus τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων (Mark 16:2; cf. Luke 24:1). κατὰ occurs in its distributive sense to denote **every** (as in καθ' ἡμέραν elsewhere). σαββάτου more usually occurs in the plural to denote *week* (as in Mark 16:2), but sometimes the singular form is used elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Luke 18:12, νηστεύω δις τοῦ σαββάτου, *I fast twice a week*)."<sup>2</sup>

This was a convenient proposal, but also a hortatory imperative, the verb involved for *be made*, ποιήσατε from ποιέω ποιέω is an aorist active imperative that most likely, by context, works a *hortatory imperative* implying that *this is what they should do*, as it is translated by Thiselton, Fitzmyer, and Garland.

The subjunctive exhortation that follows keeps the *contribution/collection* in the context of what *they should be doing*, as *they might be prospered*, ὅ τι ἐὰν εὐδοῶται. The verb *prospered* is a present subjunctive of εὐδοῶ, *euodōō*.

Thiselton in one of his extensive comments explains the *contribution* term, ἡ λογεία:

<sup>1</sup> Thiselton, pp. 1317–1318.

<sup>2</sup> Thiselton, p. 1321.

“The genitive which follows *περὶ δέ*, namely *τῆς λογείας*, is of particular interest, ἡ *λογεία*, *the collection* (i.e., of money), is found only in papyri and inscriptions, and only here in the New Testament. Moulton-Milligan confirm A. Deissmann’s research on the use of a word in the papyri to denote *financial contributions*, especially “irregular local contributions as opposed to regular taxes.

This research is not simply of interest to lexicographers. It suggests that Paul avoids more usual words because he wishes to avoid any implication that it is to be regarded as a kind of “tax,” and certainly not as a repeated tax. It is possible that the term was used by the Corinthians themselves; but Paul chooses his words for **the collection** carefully. Sometimes Paul refers to this **collection for God’s people** in Jerusalem as a gift of kindness or of generosity (*χάρις*, v. 3; and 2 Cor 8:7); sometimes as an act of service (*διακονία*, 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13; Rom 15:25, 31); sometimes as an act of fellowship, partnership, sharing, or solidarity (*κοινωνία*, Rom 15:26); sometimes as bringing a blessing (*εὐλογία*, 2 Cor 9:5); and yet further as an act of service to God (*λειτουργία*, 2 Cor 9:12).

A whole theology of giving is implicit both in these terms and in their various contexts. As Collins observes, each of Paul’s longer or major epistles refers to giving, finance, and collecting contributions (1 Cor 16:1–4; Rom 15:25–28; 2 Corinthians 8–9; Gal 2:10). In Gal 2:10 it expresses tangibly a recognition of mutual care, responsibility, and sharing on the part of different ethnic or economic statuses within the worldwide church (Jew and Gentile). This “sealed” the agreement with James of Jerusalem, Peter, and John about the Gentile mission (Gal 2:1–10).

In this light, it is theologically entirely appropriate to speak of **the collection** not as a mundane chore of “maintaining” the church in any routinized mechanistic sense, but of “maintaining” (in the sense of *nurturing*) others by passing on *freely received grace*, *χάρις* (see above); by tangibly and publicly expressing mutuality and reciprocity in *κοινωνία* or *partnership*; and by *serving* (*διακονία*) others, even as Christ has yielded up his riches *to serve*. All of this brings *blessing* (*εὐλογία*) alike to the one who gives and to the one who receives, “for it is more blessed (even) to give than to receive.” Again, in 1 Cor 16:1–4 *περισσεύω*, *to abound more and more*, is picked up from 15:58. “All human relations of reciprocity are relativized by the God who ‘enables every grace to overflow into you, so that you in every way ... may overflow into every act of goodness’ (2 Cor 9:8) [as] The embodiment of grace is Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

Giving in the form of tithes and taking care of the poor and those with special needs was deeply imbedded in Israel’s religious traditions.<sup>4</sup>

Thiselton adds that such a benevolent giving called for by Paul in 1 Cor 16:1 was true to the form of Jewish benevolence:

“Two points, however, remain historically significant. First, *Jews* made charitable provisions and *collections* for *impoverished Jews*, and as a witness to Jews (if for no other reason) it would be unthinkable for Christian believers to do any less for Jews in Jerusalem who were also believing Christians, and therefore no longer able to receive support from

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton, pp. 1318, 1319; cf also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 751ff.

<sup>4</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 752.

fellow Jews. Second, as Weiss observes, the voluntary selling of possessions to which Acts 4:32, 34–36 refers would have entailed the ruin of many small businesses in the Jerusalem area, thereby impoverishing not only the donors but the whole church there of income from its own charitable members. That this “obligated” other churches to help them is true only in the sense that any inequality has to be addressed. As Dieter Georgi argues, here a link with the resurrection chapter emerges in two ways: (a) “bodily” existence entails taking responsibility for the corporeity of believers in the everyday public domain; and (b) a debt to the communities founded by the first witnesses of the resurrection may be implied by the moral debt to their “founding” role.”<sup>5</sup>

Brendon Breed in an article in *Huffpost* has provided a helpful introduction to Israel’s tradition of caring for the needy:

“In fact, ancient Israel stood out among its ancient Near Eastern neighbors *precisely because* its legal traditions assume that the entire community is responsible for the welfare of the poor and vulnerable. In the epilogue to the Code of Hammurabi, the king of Babylon pledges to take care of the widow and the orphan—yet those vulnerable people are not protected by the body of the law code itself. In the Law of Moses, by contrast, the widow and orphan are explicitly protected by legislation (Exod 22:22) and given economic provision in the law code (Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:17-21). Moses also mentions “the poor” (Exod 22:25; 23:6, 11) and “the aliens” (Exod 23:9; Deut 24:14), classes of people not even considered in any other ancient Near Eastern law code. While ancient Babylonians certainly considered it a nice thing to take care of vulnerable people, they never legislated it. For them, taking care of the vulnerable was a matter of personal responsibility, and the community should be left out of it.

Israel’s biblical texts, on the other hand, legislate communal provisions for the vulnerable. In Exodus and Deuteronomy, God and the entire community of Israel enter into a legally binding agreement—a covenant. Deuteronomy in particular is a political document that discusses the judicial system (Deut 16:18-20), the military (Deut 20), and royal authority (Deut 17:14-20). And in it, Moses says to the community of ancient Israel: “I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land’ “(Deut 15:11). The “you” mentioned in this passage is *the entire community of Israel*, and this is a stipulation of a legally binding communal contract.

Moses commands all Israel: “Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns... the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake” (Deut 14:28-29; 26:12). This law creates a social safety net for all the vulnerable in the community, and it has nothing to do with personal responsibility or charity.”<sup>6</sup>

The New Testament is replete with comments and instruction regarding taking care of the needy. In addition to texts like James 1:27 “*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world,*” we have Luke in Acts 2:43f, 4:32ff, 6:1-6 describing how this benevolent ministry defined the character of the early church in Jerusalem.

<sup>5</sup> Thiselton, p. 1320.

<sup>6</sup> Brennan Breed, Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary and Wister Cook Theologian-in-Residence at The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/biblical>.

Paul's contribution to the practice of contributing to the needs of the poor, elderly, and indigent added a new dimension to this ministry. He introduced a contribution collected among the Gentile churches *for the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea who were experiencing persecution and hardship. He referred to similar instructions he had given to the Gentile churches in Galatia.* Luke refers to this at Acts 24:16-21 as he recorded Paul's defense to the Roman proconsul Felix.

<sup>16</sup> *So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men.*

<sup>17</sup> *Now after some years I came to bring to my nation alms and offerings.* <sup>18</sup> *As I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—* <sup>19</sup> *they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, if they have anything against me.* <sup>20</sup> *Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council,* <sup>21</sup> *except this one thing which I cried out while standing among them, 'With respect to the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you this day.'* <sup>7</sup>

Thiselton mentions this Galatian contribution as follows:

“Paul's allusion to his directions (διέταξα) to the churches of Galatia establishes not only the solidarity between those who give and those who receive *but also the co-solidarity of the wider community of givers* in their common recognition of the need for support for the Jerusalem church. Galatia almost certainly means the Roman Province of Galatia, which included the communities founded by Paul in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe during his so-called First Missionary Journey (Acts 13–14).”<sup>8</sup>

In an extended comment at the conclusion of his letter to the Romans while mentioning his missionary itinerary, Paul wrote at Rom 15:22-33:

<sup>22</sup> *This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.* <sup>23</sup> *But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you,* <sup>24</sup> *I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little.* <sup>25</sup> *At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints.* <sup>26</sup> *For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem;* <sup>27</sup> *they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.* <sup>28</sup> *When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been raised, I shall go on by way of you to Spain;* <sup>29</sup> *and I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.*

<sup>30</sup> *I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,* <sup>31</sup> *that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,* <sup>32</sup> *so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.* <sup>33</sup> *The God of peace be with you all. Amen.”*

**1 Cor 16:3, 4.** “*And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.* <sup>4</sup> *If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.”* In these two verses, Paul was obviously establishing the credibility of the purpose, and its destination.

**2 Cor 8, 9.** We learn from Paul's “second letter” to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, that he was pleased with the response of the Corinthians to this benevolent action.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 24:16–21.

<sup>8</sup> Thiselton, pp. 1320–1321. Italics IAF.

“<sup>1</sup>We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup>for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. <sup>3</sup>For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, <sup>4</sup>begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—<sup>5</sup>and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. <sup>6</sup>Accordingly we have urged Titus that as he had already made a beginning, he should also complete among you this gracious work. <sup>7</sup>Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us—see that you excel in this gracious work also.

<sup>8</sup>I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup>For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich ...

<sup>9:1</sup> Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the offering for the saints, <sup>2</sup>for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. <sup>3</sup>But I am sending the brethren so that our boasting about you may not prove vain in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; <sup>4</sup>lest if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. <sup>5</sup>So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren to go on to you before me, and arrange in advance for this gift you have promised, so that it may be ready not as an exaction but as a willing gift.”

### 1 Cor 16:5-12: Paul’s itinerary

“<sup>4</sup> will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, <sup>6</sup>and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may speed me on my journey, wherever I go. <sup>7</sup>For I do not want to see you now just in passing; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. <sup>8</sup>But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>9</sup>for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. <sup>10</sup>When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. <sup>11</sup>So let no one despise him. Speed him on his way in peace, that he may return to me; for I am expecting him with the brethren.

<sup>12</sup>As for our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brethren, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.”

Paul mentions two of his fellow missionaries who had joined with him in his missionary enterprise, sometimes travelling with him, or independent to encourage the Christians in the new areas of Paul’s missionary activity.

Timothy and Apollos were obviously well known to the Corinthians. We can only guess what lay behind Apollos’ reticence!

**1 Cor 16:8.** The mention of *adversaries*, ἀντικείμενοι from ἀντίκειμαι, *antikeimai*, stresses the dangers Paul and his contemporary Christian missionaries faced in the Gentile world.

Thiselton comments well on this:

“The ἀντικείμενοι πολλοί may be related to 15:32 (“fought with wild beasts at Ephesus”), the ... riot narrated in Acts 19. As a noun ἀντικείμενοι denotes *those in opposition, adversaries, opponents*. But the forces of the components ... clearly transparent

to readers, mean *forces of opposition lined up against me*. Bengel observes that as often as there is good, evil arises against it at the same time.”<sup>9</sup>

**1 Cor 16:6, 11.** The word *speed*, προπέμψητε from προπέμπω, *propémpō* in v. 6 and 11 is a technical term associated with *travel assistance* often implying denoting funds “*help on one’s journey*” with food, money, by arranging for companions.<sup>10</sup>

### **1 Cor 16:13, 14. Paul’s exhortation, greetings, and benediction**

“Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. <sup>14</sup> Let all that you do be done in love.”

**1 Cor 16:13.** Paul was very aware of the dangers the Corinthians faced from their powerful cultic neighbors in Corinth. In addition to the normal Roman Greek pagan religious cults, evidence is replete of the presence and influence of the mystery religions in a multi-cultural commercial maritime city.

The subtle influence of some of these through family and business contacts prompted Paul to stress the need for *constant watchfulness*. In the face of powerful governing and commercial influences *Paul encouraged a courageous faithfulness and spiritual strength*.

**1 Cor 16:14,** “*Let all that you do be done in love*” summarizes the fundamental thought and dynamic needed be the Corinthians; **personal humility, agápē love, and respect for one another, and others!**

*Tetelestai*<sup>11</sup>

“Soli Deo Gloria”

<sup>9</sup> Thiselton, p. 1330.

<sup>10</sup> Zodhiates, προπέμπω *propémpō* “To send on before, send forward or forth. In the NT, to send forward on one’s journey, bring someone on his way, especially to accompany for some distance in token of respect and honor.” Thiselton, p. 1328; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 618; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 757.

<sup>11</sup> Greek, the book, *it is finished!*