

1 Corinthians

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By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2020-06-21

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I. Introduction - 1) background and 2) theme: God's glory in His temple, the church

Let me give you a bit of background on 1 Corinthians. Paul planted the church of Corinth on his first missionary trip around AD 48 or 49 and spent one and a half years there (or 18 months, to be precise). He had plenty of time to teach and ground them in the faith. Acts 18:4 shows that the church was made up of both Jews and Gentiles, though that same chapter implies that it was predominantly made up of Gentiles (see Acts 18:6 with 13:46). It appears to have been a problem church right from the start, with at least some people resisting Paul's leadership. But he loved the church and felt that he had left it in good hands when he finished his first missionary trip.

However, on Paul's third missionary journey, toward the end of his three years of ministry in Ephesus (which are recorded in Acts 19), he received both an oral report from some messengers and an urgent letter from the Corinthian leaders asking for help to resolve a number of urgent problems that had developed. Let's look at some of the clues:

Take a look at chapter 5:9: "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people." Huh! So 1 Corinthians was not the first letter that Paul wrote to them. It is however the first letter to Corinth that God wanted inserted into the canon. Prophets frequently gave other prophecies that they knew would not be in the canon, but which would still be helpful for the church. Apparently in that previous letter Paul had told them not to associate with or eat with immoral people. They had misunderstood Paul and thought that meant they couldn't have anything to do with unbelievers who were immoral. So he corrects that misunderstanding in this chapter and makes clear he was talking about those under discipline in the church. You can't just ignore the eldership's call to shunning (a form of discipline before excommunication). Anyway, everyone agrees that they had misunderstood Paul. And I take comfort from that. If even the apostle could be misunderstood, I guess you and I shouldn't feel too badly when our words are interpreted wrongly. Communication is a tough thing, and there are advantages to face-to-face communication where you can instantly make those kinds of adjustments and corrections. Letters can be easily misinterpreted.

Anyway, how did Paul hear about this miscommunication? If you flip back to chapter 1:11, you will see that he tells us. “For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you.” He got some information from Chloe, a leader in the church that had taken the time to travel to Ephesus to talk to Paul. It appears that he also made Paul aware of the other issues in chapter 1-6.

It’s just a little point of information, but even this has good application. Notice that Paul didn’t say, “Someone mentioned that there are problems in this church. I won’t name names because I don’t want to get them in trouble.” That might be the way some American Christians would handle things. No. Chloe has the courage to let his name be known. He had probably already let the church know that he was going to involve Paul. If you are going to complain, have the courage to let your name be known. Apparently Chloe had tried to handle the problems and was unable, so he is appealing for Paul’s assistance. This is the method that all of us should use. If you have problems with what the leaders are doing, talk to the leaders, not everyone else behind the leader’s back. If you have problems with another family, talk to that family, not to the elders - unless of course you have already unsuccessfully done so. There are lots of tangential lessons we can learn in this book.

But there is a second source of information mentioned in chapter 7:1 - “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me...” There was a letter that the entire congregation sent along with a delegation. So this is all above-board; everyone knows what’s going on. That delegation is mentioned in chapter 16:17, where Paul says, “I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part, they supplied...” He is in effect saying, “I’m glad you sent these guys to talk to me about these things.” Most commentaries believe that they were the delegation who brought this letter and also filled Paul in on any other details that he needed. But this letter is referenced in chapter 7:1, 8:1, 12:1, 15:1, and 16:1.

So chapters 1-6 are in response to the issues that Chloe raised and chapters 7-16 are in response to the issues raised in the letter carried by those three leaders. So there was an oral report that chapters 1-6 deal with and a written report that chapters 7-16 addressed.

This means that 1 Corinthians is written in a totally different style than most of Paul’s epistles. Paul usually gives a boatload of doctrine in the first half of an epistle and then gives logical applications of that doctrine. But because

Paul just deals with question after question and issue after issue, many commentators view the book as a disorganized and ad hoc response, with nothing to unify it, other than perhaps the theme of unity (though some of the chapters don't deal with unity). So to this day there is controversy about the structure of the book or whether it even has any structure - or whether he just allowed their complaints and letter to structure the book.

But back in 2010, Ciampa and Rosner wrote a commentary¹ that many people are now referring to as having demonstrated quite well that unity is only one of the sub-themes in the book and that Paul weaves every argument through the lens of the church being God's new temple to show forth God's glory.² Paul brilliantly uses Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Malachi to show how the purpose of God's grace was to save people from their sins, to purify them and to make them ready to meet in the presence of God's glory as a unified people. The glory of God in His temple is the central theme that ties every sub-theme together - the glory of God in His temple.

And I'll just give you some examples of this theme since older books don't deal with this unifying theme very well. The whole of chapter 3 deals with God building a temple on the foundation of Christ. It is similar imagery to Ephesians 4. And his exhortation is, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you [plural]? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you [plural] are." (3:16-17) You divide and fight against the church? Then God will fight against you. He is jealous over His temple. If you destroy the church as God's temple, then God will destroy you. And that's a verse we can claim if persecutors try to destroy the church in America as a result of the Supreme Court decision - a decision that is inviting the LGBTQ+ crowd to come after Christians. Read Alito's opinion and you will see that this is indeed a possibility. Though he didn't write a commentary on 1 Corinthians, Meredith Kline's book, *Images of the Spirit*, does show how this verse is an explicit reference to the glory cloud imagery of the Old Testament.

And since the glory cloud was such a central aspect of the Old Testament temple, it is no surprise to see God's glory cloud and other aspects of God's

- 1 Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010).
- 2 A fuller statement is given by them on page 52: "Paul's attempt to tell the church of God in Corinth that they are part of the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation of worldwide worship of the God of Israel, and as God's eschatological temple they must act in a manner appropriate to their pure and holy status by becoming unified, shunning pagan vices, and glorifying God in obedience to the lordship of Jesus Christ."

glory being woven skillfully throughout 1 and 2 Corinthians. Christ is the Lord of glory and the Spirit is the glory of Christ inhabiting the temple.

So, for example, you cannot understand even Paul's discussion of long hair and headcoverings in chapter 11 without looking to the laws of the temple of what must be in place in the presence of God's glory. Most interpretations of 1 Corinthians 11 cannot show any connection to the Old Testament whatsoever. That ought to seem strange right on the surface since Acts says that Paul never taught anything without basing it in the Old Testament (Acts 26:22; 17:10-11). There was not a single doctrine that he did not root in the Old Testament. And the same is true of long hair and head coverings. You see, temple law dictated that when you entered God's temple, all glory but the glory of God must be covered. Since the woman is the glory of man (v. 7), she must be covered with her long hair. Since her hair itself is the glory of the woman (v. 15), the hair too must be covered. Since man is the glory of God (v. 7), he must not be covered. Those three concepts of glory and covering are clearly laid out in the temple laws of the Old Testament as well as in the very unusual temple predicted in Ezekiel. And I've written a book called *Glory and Coverings* that shows this connection.³ And there are many other references to God's glory and other temple imagery scattered throughout 1 and 2 Corinthians.

For example, why does he emphasize the fact that their children were no longer unclean, but were both sanctified and cleansed? Because the Old Testament says that nothing unclean can come into His temple - and says the same thing about his eschatological temple (Is. 52:1). Being sanctified and cleansed are concepts borrowed from the Old Testament temple.

Paul contrasts the temple prostitution that was rife in Corinth with the absolute purity demanded in God's temple.

Even the resurrection chapter (chapter 15) ties in with Christ's body being the temple of God, and those who are united with Christ in His death and resurrection being a part of that temple. In fact, he says that our very bodies must properly reflect God's glory and be treated in a way that is consistent with them being part of the temple of the Holy Spirit. As Paul words it, "do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"

It's impossible in one sermon to highlight the many ways that Paul weaves His answers to the troubles of Corinth around the theme of the glory of

3 It can be found here <https://kaysercommentary.com/booklets.md>

God's temple, but Ciampa and Rosner have made major contributions to the studies of 1 Corinthians.⁴ And others are building on those insights and making them more consistent - I think their book needed to be perfected. These commentaries show how every single theme of this new temple is focused on and explained by Christ - the Lord who sits on the throne of the temple. Likewise, Paul rejects the wisdom and culture of the world and seeks to show how the Messiah of the prophesied temple will replace all pagan cultures with a culture built entirely upon God's grace and His Word and in subjection to His throne.⁵ So there is competition between the cultures that flow from the pagan temples and the unified culture that flows from God's temple. So even the culture around the temple is to be transformed. Paul even ties his discussion of tongues (believe it or not) in with Isaiah 28, a passage that deals with God's destruction of the Old Temple and Israel (because of its defilement) and His prophecy of a new temple. Well, that's got an ominous tone to it on what could happen to Corinth if they do not repent.

OK, enough by way of introduction. I just wanted you to be aware of the central unifying theme that the most modern commentators have begun to recognize. Let's do a survey of the book as a whole:

- 4 Even the four major themes of "the lordship of Christ, worldwide worship, the eschatological temple, and the glory of God" are rooted in the Old Testament. p. 33. Here is a sample quote of how they seamlessly tie these themes together: "The expression echoes Malachi 1:11 LXX,111 which (in a context of frustration over the way the Lord is being worshiped in Jerusalem) prophesies a future time when God would be worshiped by Gentiles "in every place": "From the rising of the sun until its setting my name will be glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name and a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles, says the Lord Almighty." Similarly, Haggai 2:7 anticipates a time when the Gentiles will glorify God in his temple: "all nations will come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts." The echo of Malachi 1:11 in 1 Corinthians 1:2 suggests that the Corinthians are part of the fulfillment of God's plan to be worshiped among all the Gentiles and that it is Paul's ultimate purpose in writing to them to see them play their part in fulfilling this world-wide eschatological vision by glorifying God (see 6:20b and 10:31b)." p. 34.
- 5 "If the Corinthians' problems can be attributed to their cultural background, Paul's various responses may be ascribed to his understanding of the crucified Christ and his lordship over against all human and spiritual powers; in almost every case Paul pits Christ against the prevailing culture. He appeals for unity in the name of Christ (1:10), who is the power and wisdom of God (1:23-24) and the foundation of the church (3:11). The church must be cleansed of the incestuous man because of Christ's sacrifice (5:7). To have relations with a prostitute is to violate Christ (6:15). Eating food sacrificed to idols must be avoided for the sake of one for whom Christ died (8:11) and in imitation of Christ (11:1). With respect to head coverings, he notes that Christ is the head of every man (11:3). The Lord's Supper must be celebrated by discerning "the body" of Christ (11:29). Spiritual gifts are to be exercised in order to build up the body of Christ (12:27). The resurrection of believers is grounded in the resurrection of Christ (15:3-23). Finally, all of history is about the subjection of all things under Christ's feet and his presentation of the fully redeemed kingdom/creation to God the Father (15:24-28). Throughout the letter "Christ" appears 64 times, "Lord" 66 times, and "Jesus" 26 times." Ibid., p. 33.

II. Overview of the book

A. *Introduction to the Letter's Main Themes (1:1–9)*

The first nine verses of the book set up the letter's main themes.

Verse 1 gives a heads up that this epistle is an inspired epistle - an apostolic epistle. The Hebrew concept of an apostle meant that he was a mouthpiece of Christ every bit as much as the Old Testament prophets spoke the very word of God in the name of God.

Verse 2 uses several expressions to indicate that the church was to be God's holy temple separated from the world. For example, the word "church" means the called out ones. They are called out of the world. He will later make the point that if this is the case, why are they acting like the world?

The word "sanctified" or "holy" was used to describe Israel as a holy people. The closer to God's temple something was in the Old Testament, the more holy it was. But he will point out that an outwardly holy people can be inwardly defiled just as Israel was.

To "call on the name" is an Old Testament expression connected with the temple, but when he says that they together with the broader church are gathered to do so, he implies that Corinth must have a unity with all the churches if they are to meet God's purpose as a temple. It's not the local church that is God's temple, but the entire church meeting before God's throne. It gives you a different perspective than basing everything on the local church.

But the most pointed reference in verse 2 is the quote from Malachi 1:11. Malachi dealt with the division, immorality, and dishonor that was happening at the postexilic temple - the same kind of issues that Corinth was going through. And Malachi prophesied that in the New Covenant that would eventually change: "from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations." The offering up of incense in every place was a reference to the universal church offering up prayers in every place of the world. So Paul is already setting up a Messianic temple context and hinting that Corinth is not living in light of this paradigm. Otherwise, why appeal to Malachi?

Paul pronounces grace and peace upon them in verse 3, and shows that those two can only come from heaven. Corinth desperately needs peace, but before

they can have peace, they must receive grace. There is an order to those terms that cannot be reversed. And Jesus as both Lord and Messiah also sets this in the context of Malachi's New Covenant temple.

But look at the praise in verses 4-9. I find it remarkable that this epistle is so filled with praise. They were a messed up church and he had to correct a lot of things, but he still managed to see the good and to maintain a positive attitude. To me this is remarkable. Though they had slandered him and put him down, he does not respond in kind. We would do well to do the same. When you are offended, take the high road. I was going to preach on these verses,⁶ but for sake of time will just read them:

1Cor. 1:4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And there are other themes. But let's move on.

B. Divisions over Christian Preachers (1:10–4:21)

In chapter 1:10 all the way through to chapter 4:21 he drops the hammer over divisions in the church. American churches are so used to divisions that we might not realize how out of touch such divisions are with our calling, but Paul lays it on thick.

In verses 11-17 we discover that the church people were focused on leaders rather than Christ; on personalities rather than doctrine; on gifts and abilities and oratory rather than on relationship. Some were groupies of Paul, something he didn't take kindly to. Others were groupies of Peter, and others were groupies of Appolos, while many just stood by frustrated. When you enter the church, what should you see being exalted? Not rock-star personalities. Those preachers were simply tools of Christ. When you enter the church, the first thing you should see is Christ, just like when you

6 He praises them for some of the same things that he will later rebuke them for. In verse 4 he thanks God that they have grace. He doesn't forget that. But he will later point out that they have taken that grace for granted. In verse 5 he says they were enriched in everything. Sure, they may have misused what they were enriched in, but they were enriched in everything. He mentions two categories of spiritual gifts in which they were enriched - utterance and knowledge. Verse 5 - they understood the Gospel. Again, he will later say that they misused it, but he gives credit where credit is due. Verse 7 - there was no spiritual gift that this church did not have. They were as a result, eagerly waiting for the AD 70 coming in which the Old Covenant temple would end and the New Covenant temple would be the only thing remaining. And the grammar of those two verses coordinate this imminent coming with the spiritual gifts. The gifts were preparatory to and provisional during the period leading up to AD 70. The faithfulness of God and the fellowship of His Son are also themes that will keep coming up.

entered the temple in the Old Testament, the first thing that you saw was this gigantic pulsating pillar of fire that went up into the sky. In front of the glory cloud, there were no rock stars, celebrity preachers, or “Calvin is my homeboy” t-shirts. The church was not purchased by Paul or by Calvin. It was purchased by Christ’s blood and Christ alone is your Lord, Savior, and Messiah.

So where on earth did they get this groupie mentality? In verses 17-25 he says that they got it from the wisdom of the world. That’s what the world does. These Corinthians were fairly new converts, and somehow they had allowed the wisdom of the Greek philosophies to follow them into the church. In verse 23 Paul says that God’s ways look foolish to the world, but the world’s ways of leadership, growth, affirmation, advancement, etc are foolishness with God. And even if they don’t totally get it, he tells them to trust God’s ways to work in verse 25: “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

When we are governed by the world’s wisdom, we tend to get excited about the wrong things. And I think verses 26-31 are so self-explanatory, I will just read them:

1Cor. 1:26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 31 that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”

When you walk into God’s glorious New Covenant temple - God’s glory should be the only thing that consumes your vision. Yes leaders can be a help, but they can also let you down. Yes we are supposed to submit to leaders, but only as they lead us to Christ.

In chapter 2 Paul models for them how he didn’t use the speaking techniques of the world to wow his listeners. His goal was not to wow them anyway. His goal was to be used by the Spirit to bring the word to bear powerfully into their lives for transformation. Why would we look to heathen experts on counseling, leadership, administration, or anything else? Verse 14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” I would urge those tempted to use Classical education to meditate deeply on this chapter. Don’t take my word for it. Meditate on this

chapter. Paul over and over minimizes the wisdom of the world and glories in the incredible wisdom revealed in the Bible - some of which things are deep things that can only be pulled out by Spiritual illumination. In my spare time I am working to write down all the axioms for every discipline of life from the Bible and put it on the web. I'm doing this because (other than a few axioms in math and logic) this has never been done before to my knowledge. And I'm hoping to get other Biblical experts to dig deeper and add their contributions to the new website. My hope is to help people realize that the wisdom of the Spirit in Scripture is infinitely better than the best wisdom of the world. Verses 12-13 say,

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

I don't have the time to adequately deal with that chapter, but it makes us long to know more of the glories of the Scripture and makes us pray for the Spirit's insights into the Bible's wisdom. When you have marinated in the juices of this chapter, you have very little appetite for the books of the heathen and the wisdom of the world.

But in chapter 3:1-4 he has to sadly observe that the Corinthians are acting like the world. That's what the word "carnal" means - worldly; unbelieving. He isn't setting up a theory of carnal Christians as being a legitimate but optional category within the church. That's the way some people take it. He is saying that Christians who think, feel, relate, and act like the world should be an oxymoron. It is utterly inconsistent with what God has called a Christian to be.

And he goes on to use Christ's planting of a farm and building of a temple as two metaphors to communicate this idea. In verse 9 he says, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." In verse 10 he says that he helped to lay the revelational foundation of the Scriptures through the inspired revelation he had been given. But even there, the foundation is not Paul since the Scriptures he wrote were the Word of Christ. So verse 11 says, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

But then comes the same kind of frightening warnings that Malachi brought when people were failing to avail themselves of God's grace and His Word. Beginning at verse 12:

12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will

be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

And then in the remainder of the chapter he returns to telling them to avoid worldly wisdom. The worldly wisdom is the hay, wood, and stubble that will be burned up as being absolutely useless to God's glorious temple.

Part of the divisiveness came from those who were critical of Paul. And chapter 4 deals with these critical people who treated Paul as being a dumb-bell. They thought he was dumb because he didn't have much use for the Greek philosophers. He tells them why. Verse 1 says, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." He's not a steward of Plato or Aristotle or Plotinus. He is a steward of the mysteries of God and he wants to be a faithful steward. And verse 2 says, "it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." If we Christians immerse ourselves in the wisdom of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans, we are not being faithful stewards of Christ's wisdom. Certainly pastors should be reading more commentaries than they do secular stuff.

People might respond, "Well, that's fine and dandy for Paul. But I have to teach my kids." But Paul applies the same standard to the Corinthians in verse 6. He says, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other." Going beyond the wisdom of God's word leads to pride and self-trust. Filling your mind and heart with the wisdom of the world leads to pride and self-trust. Underline that phrase in verse 6 that should be the theme of your life. "that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written." He's talking about the written word - "that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written." That is what Sola Scriptura means. This is why Gordon's Clark's philosophy of life is called Scripturalism. Jesus worded it this way: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." You can tell that the church is in the infancy of its existence because it has not even remotely applied every word of Scripture to all of life. It has started, but it has not gotten far.

Does that make us seem naive and foolish to the world? Of course it does. But in verses 6-13 he says that he is willing to be a fool for Christ. Are you? Verse 10 summarizes what they thought of Paul's naive Biblicism. Putting their thoughts on paper he says,

We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!

You see, that's what they thought of themselves, and that's what they thought of Paul. But if getting their approval meant embracing the tactics, methods, goals, strategies, and wisdom of the world, he would stay a fool for Christ. He'd be willing for them to think poorly of him.

In verses 14-21 he affirms his paternal love for them. But he does warn them that if they don't repent, the fur will fly when he arrives. He asks in verse 21, "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" So that ends this first major section.

C. A Report of Sexual Immorality and Lawsuits (5:1–6:20)

Next, in chapters 5-6 Paul deals with the report of sexual immorality and people taking fellow-Christians to secular courts. Paul is outraged, flabbergasted, and heartbroken all at once. He reminds me of Nehemiah when Nehemiah discovered that Tobiah the pagan had taken up residence in the temple and that various leaders had married pagan women. He becomes a man on fire. Jesus too was incensed when He saw the temple defiled by Caiaphas the high priest.

So in chapter 5 he deals with how to discipline a person who does not repent of immorality and in chapter 6 he deals with the person who took someone to a secular court on a financial dealing. And he attributes these things to following the wisdom of the world and having a gross misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of God's grace.

In chapter 5 we are faced with a man committing adultery with his father's wife - probably his stepmother. Paul commands them in verse 5 in no uncertain terms, "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." That's what excommunication is. It is kicking a person out of the protection of the church and placing them in the world. When you are in the church, you have the protection of the covenant. Demons have a much harder time touching you because God puts a hedge of protection around you. But when you are excommunicated, you lose that protection and you are totally at the mercy of demons. You are in their territory. Of course, if you are elect, God limits what demons can do. But God does allow demons to sometimes even take your life, if it means you will be saved.

And I'll illustrate that. In our former denomination there was a pastor who (unknown to us) had talked a woman in his church into divorcing her

husband and marrying him, and he was in the process of divorcing his wife. The presbytery instantly removed him from the ministry, but didn't immediately excommunicate him. They called him to repentance. He refused. I remember arguing with him for two hours from the Scriptures. And he admitted that he didn't have a Biblical case, but he claimed the Lord led him to do this and so it must be God's will. I argued that God never contradicts Himself and He has already stated his infallible will in the Word. You see, this man was not following Paul's mandate that you learn not to think beyond what is written in the Bible. His so-called guidance trumped the Scripture. The bottom line is that he was excommunicated, and immediately demons started beating up on him. Why could they do that? He was outside the covenant. He didn't repent, so demons afflicted him with a brain infection of which he was quickly dying. He called for the elders and repented and thanked them for the excommunication. He got right with the Lord, but because of the stain on God's name, God did not heal him. God took him. He died shortly after his repentance. That's what I mean by being handed over to Satan. It's a serious deal. And Paul took it seriously because the temple indwelt with God's glory must not be defiled. He is jealous over His temple. We are called to be a holy people.

Chapter 7 deals with taking a Christian to court. Paul is outraged that Christians would do that. Fine, take an unbeliever to court if you have to, but an unexcommunicated Christian? Never. Use binding arbitration or a church court. And if those don't work, just be willing to be defrauded rather than to appeal to the wisdom of the world. That's what Paul says. Verse 5 says, "I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?" Christians must learn to study how the Bible applies to conflict resolution, arbitration, and court procedures. Even if you aren't a court officer, you should know what the procedures of a church court are. It's just another illustration of how Christians can easily value the wisdom of the world more than the wisdom of Scripture.

Then in verses 12-20 he returns to dealing with more immorality. By the way, don't think that we moderns are the only ones faced with sexual temptations everywhere you look. It is tough nowadays to not inadvertently see glances of alluring sexual images unless you know how to guard your eyes and put blocking software on your devices. And even then, you may unintentionally see something. It's everywhere - on cell phones, bill boards, malls with pictures of women in underwear, etc. So some people think that no one has been tempted as badly as they have been. But it's not true. The

Corinthian Christians would have faced sexual temptations everywhere too. The summit of the Acrocorinthus hill was 1800 feet high, and it could be seen from everywhere in the city. Why is that significant? Because that was where the temple of Aphrodite was situated. It had 1,000 consecrated prostitutes who constantly paraded their stuff trying to bring in customers. Unless you completely turned your head away from those lurid scenes, it was hard not to notice something out of the corner of your eye. And there were many other places around the city where you had easy access to every imaginable kind of immorality that was flaunted publicly. So famous was the immorality of Corinth that even amongst the pagans empire-wide, the word “to Corinthianize” meant to engage in sexual immorality.

And in chapter 6:12-20 Paul lays out principles to help these Corinthians to overcome these temptations and to devote their body parts to righteousness. He scares them with the costs of fornication and he motivates them with the glories of serving God. He calls upon them to make Christ the Lord of their sexuality. But once again he ties it in with the temple in verses 19-20.

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

D. Questions related to marriage (7:1–40)

In the rest of the book we have the issues raised in the letter. First, in chapter 7 we have Paul answering some questions related to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. I simply don't have time to give that chapter justice. But let me make a few pointers anyway.

1 Corinthians 7:1 says, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” The NIV has mistranslated that as, It is good for a man not to marry a woman. Let me give you two obvious reasons why that is such a bad translation.

First, it contradicts Paul's words in the very next verse where he gives a command to the Corinthians, “let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (v. 2). That is the norm, with the gift of celibacy being the rare exception. Why would Paul command (and the Greek is in the imperative - why would he command) something that he has just said is good not to do? That seems like an extremely awkward way to argue his point. So the context alone refutes that idea.

Second, such an interpretation also contradicts Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 4:1-3, where he said that anyone who permanently prohibits marriage is automatically engaged in a doctrine of demons. The Roman Catholic

interpretation of this whole chapter is a doctrine of demons. The mandated celibacy of the priesthood is a doctrine straight from hell, and it has had hellish results.

And in my book on Biblical Romance I give many other reasons why that is a lousy translation. Nor is the ESV's translation legitimate. It has, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." That is not what the text says. Twenty of my translations render it just the way the New King James does, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." But the word for touch has to do with any touch that arouses (or literally, "ignites") sexual desires. This is not finishing those desires; this is the igniting of those desires. He's not just prohibiting sex outside of marriage. He has already done that in chapter 5. He is prohibiting any kind of touch that constitutes foreplay. Instead, that kind of foreplay should be reserved for marriage, and it should be a regular part of marriage according to verses 2-9. God intended it for pleasure, but it is a pleasure reserved for marriage.

Well, what about if you got an unlawful divorce and you don't want to go back? Paul says, tough - you've got two choices. "But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband." And then he gives a ditto for the husband. Interestingly, he doesn't force them to get back together. But he only gives them two options: remain single or go back to your previous partner and get remarried. If its an illegitimate divorce, then marriage to anyone else is unlawful.

Then he deals with divorce and remarriage of unbelievers. And I don't have time to overturn all the false interpretations of these verses that have been given or to give the true interpretation, but a true interpretation of those verses completely dovetails with the Law of God and even with Ezra and Nehemiah. Every New Testament passage related to divorce and remarriage has a hint in the context that it is upholding the Old Testament law, not replacing it.

He also deals with slavery in that chapter. Yes, there was slavery in New Testament times. But verse 23 gives the trajectory for Christians - "do not become slaves of men." It should be our desire to avoid slavery if at all possible. And by the way, when the Old Testament authorized slavery for a period of time to pay restitution for a crime, it did it in a way that moved those people to responsibility, maturity, future-orientedness, a love for liberty, and eventually, when they got out a sum of money to start a business. It was restorative. Our modern slavery of the prison system does none of that. In fact, it does the opposite. It makes people dependent, fearful of the

risks of liberty, disciplined by other criminals, and when they get out, no money in their pocket, difficulty of getting hired, which just sets them up for repeat crime and more slavery in the penitentiary. God's goals for his criminal penalties of the Old Testament always led people to eventual liberty. That was the trajectory in the Old Testament and that is the trajectory in these verses.

Then he gives guidelines for postponing marriage during persecution - as a wisdom issue, not a mandate. But it was only a temporary postponement because of the present distress - the great tribulation that was almost upon them.

E. Questions related to liberties (8-9)

Chapter 8 then moves on to some fabulous principles to govern our use of liberties and make sure that we exercise them consistently with the Gospel, and consistently with being God's glorious temple. I don't have the time to get into those principles, but the key thing is that Christ purchased and owns us, so our liberties are His and not absolute. And because we are called to live out the Gospel, the Gospel should influence how we exercise our liberties. It's a great chapter that keeps our focus on the glory of God and not on our own glory.

And in chapter 9 Paul illustrates what he had said about liberties with himself. Even though he was an apostle with certain rights (verses 1-14), he restricted those rights for the sake of others (verses 15-27). And he did so because of his love for others. And the irony of it all is that his willingness to devote His liberties to God produced even greater liberty since it enabled him to become all things to all people (verses 21-22). And I don't have time to show how all of this is woven into the central theme.

F. Divisions over Corporate Worship (10-14)

But the next section of corporate worship should be fairly obvious on how it relates. That's chapters 10-14. These are chapters most people think about when you bring up 1 Corinthians - either the beauty of Paul's love chapter (chapter 13) or the controversy of the gifts chapters (chapters 12 and 14). But what unifies all of these chapters is corporate worship before the glory of God's throne. All of chapters 10-14 is correcting weird problems that had arisen within the corporate worship service.

He begins with the Lord's Table. Most of the judgments mentioned in chapter 10 issued from the glory cloud of God's Old Testament tabernacle.

And Paul gives illustration after illustration of how eating the sacrament brought judgment upon those who partook unworthily. While the younger generation was blessed by God because of their faith, verses 1-13 shows how almost all of the older generation (the all our fathers mentioned in verse 1) ate to judgment. Why? The verses show because they faked their relationship with God even though they were baptized. They lacked faith. They lusted. They committed idolatry. They tempted Christ. They grumbled. They were carnal - in other words, they acted like unbelievers and eventually proved to be unbelievers. They were rebellious, divisive, and ate unto judgment. Our focus when we come to the Lord's Table should be God's glory. Verse 31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

And by the way, chapter 11 continues to discussion of communion. He has not changed the topic. He points out that even how we dress and conduct ourselves and respond to authority relates to whether we will be blessed or judged in the Lord's Table. That's verses 1-16. I already dealt with the headcoverings and long hair issue in that section. I know there is legitimate debate on that (and not even all the officers agree on this), and we give you liberty to be Bereans on that subject. But there is only one right interpretation, and it's worthwhile studying the issue. We don't give liberty because it is an unimportant doctrine. We give liberty because it is not a settled doctrine in the worldwide church. But it will eventually be. And as I mentioned, I believe only my view can root this teaching in Paul's theme of the glory of God in His temple and in Old Testament law.

In verses 17-34 he continues to give exhortations on how to eat for the better and not for the worse. When we lack those qualifications we end up like the unbelieving fathers in the wilderness.

And that brings us to the discussion of gifts in the worship service in chapters 12-14. And Wow! Those are controversial verses too. Again, we give you liberty to disagree with my views. You don't have to believe what Phil Kayser believes if you don't see in the text. In fact, for you to be a groupie of Phil Kayser would be a violation of the first chapters. But I don't have a choice - I have to preach it the way I see it in the Scripture. I've already preached on tongues and prophecy during the Acts series, showing numerous principles that show tongues was a true language that the speaker understood, so I don't feel the urgency to rehash those things today. But let me cover just four key principles that I believe can help you to interpret these chapters.

The first principle is that the Spirit of God moves us to understanding. Any view of the gifts that diminishes our understanding should be suspect. Chapter 12:1 - "I do not want you to be ignorant." Over and over Paul admonishes people that if others do not understand what we are saying, we shouldn't say it. That includes the gift of tongues. Chapter 14:14 is not an exception when it says, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." Charismatics claim that means that I don't understand what I am saying when I speak in tongues. But that verse actually says the exact opposite. It says, "if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays." Notice it doesn't say that the Holy Spirit bypasses our understanding and He prays. My spirit prays, I pray. The next phrase says, "my understanding." The Greek is in the genitive and means "the understanding I have; that I possess." It's mine; I hold it; I don't lack it. Continuing - "the understanding I possess does not bear fruit." In other words, I may understand what I am praying in a different language, but without a translator, it won't bear a lick of fruit in other people. Without understanding there is no fruit; no edification. Paul's constant refrain in these three chapters is that the Spirit increases our understanding; He doesn't bypass it or shortcircuit it. So the first principle is that the Holy Spirit always moves people to more understanding through His gifts. He never shuts the mind off. That principle alone will help you to sort through a lot of error.

Second principle, every gift was designed to build up and edify others when it is used in the church. In other words, the church is not the place for personal devotions. This is the place for corporate worship of the body, and all the exercises of all the spiritual gifts must have the purpose of building up or edifying others. And there are several verses that say this. Verse 7 says, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all." Charismatics will try to prove exceptions to this rule where we edify ourselves with tongues, but even those passages when rightly understood are seen as reasons not to exercise the gift. If they don't edify others, they belong in private, not in the assembly. Chapter 14:12 says, "Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." Verse 26 says, "Let all things be done for edification." So the second principle is that every gift (without exception) was designed to build up and edify others when it is used in the church. It's OK not to build up others in your private devotions, but not in the church, which is the temple of God.

The third principle is seen in chapter 13, which says that every gift should be exercised out of love.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

And what does love do? The opposite of what happens in many churches.

Quoting verses 4-7 from the ESV,

1Cor. 13:4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

That love principle would help to correct a lot of errors on the spiritual gifts.

The fourth principle is that prophecy and prophets were intended to be temporary and to pass away. Let me read verses 8-10 in Mounce's translation. (And there are many other translations that translate it this way, but I have picked him because everyone recognizes him as a Greek expert who has written Greek textbooks for both beginners and advanced.) His translation says,

8 Love never comes to an end. But if there are prophecies, they will be set aside; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be set aside. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when what is complete comes, the partial will be set aside.

Now, if his translation is correct, then what is complete is the canon. There are partial prophecies and partial revealed knowledge; this is the completed prophecies and the full body of revealed knowledge. That makes sense of the discussion of revelation of prophecy no longer being needed once the complete revelation has come. Gordon Fee's only objection to that is that he doesn't think that Paul would have thought of a completed canon. Actually, in light of several Old Testament prophecies of a completed canon, he is wrong.

Others object that it should be translated as "perfect," not complete. And that is a possible translation. So the ESV translates it this way:

1Cor. 13:8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

But that still doesn't settle as to what the perfect is. It could still be the perfect canon.

Some insist that the perfect is referring to Christ - to His second coming - when He comes. The problem with that interpretation is that the Greek for "perfect" is a neuter adjective that can only modify a neuter noun. Jesus is not neuter. His name Jesus is in the masculine as are the titles Christ, Lord, and Savior. Greek grammar makes it impossible for Christ to be what is

meant by the word “perfect.” It’s clearly not referring to Him coming back.

So others say that it is not Christ but it is the coming of Christ that is the “perfect.” Beyond not being what text says (the text says that the perfect is something that comes, not the coming itself - but beyond that), this still doesn’t work since none of the three words for coming is neuter. Parousia (παρουσία), Eleuseos (ἐλεύσεως), and Eisodou (εἰσόδου) are all feminine words, not neuter.

Some say that the perfect is heaven. When we get to heaven. And actually, a couple of preterists think this refers to when the demons were cast out of heaven just prior to AD 70, it was the first perfect place in the universe to be purged and purified from sin. Heaven was cleansed or made perfect at that time and the demons were restricted to earth. Prior to that, Job tells us that Satan had access to heaven. It was not perfect. But that too is unlikely since the Greek word for heaven is a masculine noun, and the word “perfect” requires a neuter noun. I’ve not completely ruled that interpretation out, but I don’t see how it works.

Some say that it is the resurrection. And since Paul would die before the first resurrection happened, he would see God face to face at the same time that revelation ended. But the word “resurrection” is a feminine noun.

Again, I think the best interpretation is to say that it is the Biblos - the canon. It fits the context of revelation. It fits the contrast between partial revelation (which is prophecy) and the complete. It fits the timing of AD 70. It fits the usage of a neuter adjective, perfect. It fits the prophecies of the ending of prophecy in Isaiah 8, Daniel 9, and other passages - all of which point to AD 70. And it fits verse 13, which has faith, hope, and love be more enduring than prophecy. If prophecy ended in AD 70, then those three things are indeed more enduring, but if prophecy lasts till the end of history, faith, hope, and love are not more enduring. Love is, but Paul says faith will give way to sight and hope will give way to fulfillment.

Again, in one sermon it would be hopeless to settle such a hugely debated passage. I know I have not done justice to these chapters. But I have read Wayne Grudem and at least forty other Charismatic scholars and I believe my interpretation is the most natural and the only one that fits the neuter gender of perfect. In any case, if those four principles are kept in mind, I believe these chapters will open up.

G. *The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised (15:1–58)*

Chapter 15 deals with the beautiful doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of believers. It also gives us a plan for what happens between now and the end of history. I'll just read verses 20-28 without comment:

1Cor. 15:20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

In verses 50-56 we discover that the last enemy, death, is conquered while Christ is coming back to earth, but just before He arrives. If that last enemy is conquered while He is coming back, that logically means that every other enemy must be conquered before He comes back. This is the Postmillennial vision. It's a glorious plan for the eventual Christianization of the entire earth. Thrones, dominions, and every other aspect of the world will be Christianized and put under Christ's feet in history.

But it also shows us the importance of the physical creation. It too was redeemed. Apparently there were some in the church who doubted the need of the resurrection. The reference to evil company corrupting their conduct in verse 33 is taken by some to refer to the influence of Greek philosophy on these Christians. The Greek philosophers taught that if the flesh is inherently evil, then resurrecting it would be foolish. In fact, they wanted to get rid of everything physical. So Paul shows how God's grace goes as far as the curse of the Fall reaches - yes, even to the physical universe. Let me read how central the resurrection is to the faith in verses 12-19:

1Cor. 15:12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

Again, I cannot even remotely do justice to this glorious chapter which is the

basis of the glorious and logical conclusion in verse 58:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

H. The Collection for the Saints and Travel Plans (16:1–12)

Then in chapter 16 he deals with the Christian Sabbath and that offerings should be collected on the first day Sabbath. That's the literal Greek of verse 2. Let me read verses 1-2.

1Cor. 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

“On the first day of the week” is literally, “On the first day Sabbath.” There is your New Testament mandate for Sabbath keeping. And consistent with the New Covenant temple that was prophesied in the Old Testament, it must be on the first day of the week, not on Saturday. First Day Sabbath keeping is not an option. He said he had given orders for such Sabbath keeping. He uses the word “must.” And he puts it all in the imperative mood which is the command mood in the Greek. If you need a theological basis for New Covenant Sabbath keeping, here it is.

I. Closing Admonitions and Greetings (16:13–24)

Then in chapter 16 he gave final greetings, which also displayed the centrality of the Gospel and the way it brings unity to the body.

The bottom line is that Paul said that if they could begin to see that God had called them to be a holy temple with God's glorious Spirit in their midst, it would help them to properly adjust their attitudes, priorities, and actions. The church is not about us as much as it is about God - gathering before His throne and following His orders.

Of course, he will continue these themes into 2 Corinthians, giving us a much fuller picture of God's glory and the leadership of God's temple. But let's take heed to the Lord's corrections in this epistle and seek to be a congregation consumed by God's glory and committed to leaving His temple throne room to work for Him as faithful servants. Amen.

Skipped material Third, the Greek word for “touch” (7:1) has sexual connotations, and is not a synonym for “marry.” Its primary meaning is to cause burning to take place, to light a fire, or to kindle a fire. The derivative meanings are to have close physical contact, to cling to, to touch intimately,

or to have sexual contact.⁷ Though the word “touch” could have non-sexual connotations (and often does), it frequently referred to any kind of physical touch that would ignite the flames of passion. But in the ancient world the full phrase, “to touch a woman,” referred to some kind of sexually stimulating contact with a woman, whether within marriage or outside of marriage.⁸ The straightforward meaning of the term has caused some commentators to take it as an encouragement for married people to abstain from sexual relations. However, this too violates the context, which immediately calls for regular sexual relations within marriage (vv. 3-5). Why say that it is good to abstain from sexual relations within marriage and then immediately command every married couple to engage in regular sexual relations and to not deny one another (v. 7)? Though this interpretation takes the correct meaning of the term, it fails to apply it to the right people – singles.

Fourth, the context itself confirms that Paul was calling upon Christians to avoid any touch prior to marriage that would arouse sexual desires. The kind of touch he was talking about was always immoral outside of marriage (v. 2a) yet was commanded inside of marriage (vv. 2b-5). What kind of touch would be considered “sexual immorality” before marriage, but would be considered an obligation after marriage? It is a touch that renders the Biblically commanded “affection due” to a spouse (v. 3), any touch that demonstrates authority over the other person’s body (v. 4), and any touch that relates to sexual hungers (implied in “lack of self-control” – v. 9). The implication is that the fiancé in verses 25-40 does not yet have authority over the other person’s body (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2). The lady remains under her father’s protection until marriage (vv. 36-38). The further implication is that they should indeed deprive one another of their sexual desires prior to marriage (the opposite of v. 5), they should show self-control (vv. 5b, 9) and they should not “burn with passion” (v. 9). In context Paul is ruling out any kind of touch that arouses sexual desires.

7 BDAG dictionary lists six definitions: 1. to cause illumination or burning to take place, light, kindle, 2. to make close contact, 3. cling to, 4. to partake of someth., w. cultic implications, have contact with, touch, 5. to touch intimately, have sexual contact, 6. to make contact with a view to causing harm, touch. Any of definitions 1 (metaphorically), 2, 3 or 5 could be in view and would fit the context of not arousing and/or satisfying sexual desires.

8 The nine times it occurs in the ancient world is in Plato’s *Leges* 8:840a; Aristotle’s *Politica* 7.14.12; The LXX on Genesis 20:6, Ruth 2:9, Prov. 6:29; Plutarch’s *Life of Alexander the Great* 21.4; Josephus’ *Antiquities* 1.163; Marcus Aurelius Antoninus 1.17.6.