

# PAUL'S LOGIC FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CORINTH



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## The Transformative Power of the Resurrection

Paul can be identified in various situations as Jewish, Pharisee, Roman, and Christian. We know Paul's identity before the "Damascus road experience" but what about later? Did Paul continue to identify himself as being religiously a Jewish Pharisee? After his third missionary journey, before the chief priests and all the council, Paul was still identifying himself as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). But, did he express it this way for the sake of the hearers or is this how Paul saw himself? It is possible that Paul never supposed himself to be changing religions but instead thought of himself as religiously Jewish but reaching the conclusion of his faith by embracing the true Messiah. Hyam Maccoby believes that Paul's transformation was more of a terminal achievement than a transition. "Paul wishes to say that whereas, when he was a Pharisee, he mistakenly regarded the early Christians as heretics who had departed from true Judaism, after his conversion he took the opposite view, that Christianity was the true Judaism."<sup>1</sup> This seems to be Paul's understanding when he wrote to the Galatians, "*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*" (Gal. 3:29)

Paul was ethically and religiously a Jew of the diaspora, and as such he was familiar with the Midrash. Therefore, his theological perspective and worldview would have been decidedly apocalyptic. His loyalty was to the Torah as understood and practiced by the sect of Pharisees. He regarded the Torah as the absolute norm for measuring human and divine righteousness. Deuteronomy 21:23 states that if someone is executed by being hung on a tree, they are cursed of God. These disciples declared Jesus, a criminal executed on a cross, to be both resurrected by God and holy. To any devout Pharisee, this would have been utter blasphemy. We can safely

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<sup>6</sup>Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1986), 11.

assume it was righteous indignation, fueled by Paul's loyalty to the Torah, which initiated his campaign against the followers of Jesus. Was this passage from Deuteronomy in the forefront of Paul's earlier reasoning? Most assuredly since he quotes this very passage in Galatians 3:13 stating, 'Yes, Jesus was cursed of God, for us.'

Having been trained by the great Gamaliel, it seemed that Paul's destiny was to follow the path of the devout Pharisee. However, Paul's life was unexpectedly transformed by the visible appearance of the resurrected Christ. According to Zechariah 14:14, the resurrection was an event that would signal the end of time and the coming of final judgment. This event in Acts 9 is what prompted Paul's radical change. For him, the resurrection is "seen to constitute the eschatological event."<sup>2</sup> "To be sure, the apostle's transformative experience of Jesus radically changed his priorities. The difference, however, is not that Jesus signaled to Paul a kind of religious universalism that he had never known as a Pharisee. The difference is that Paul's vision of the risen Jesus meant the end of the world was near"<sup>3</sup> which then dictated, for this apocalyptic Jew, that he must reach out to the Gentiles—i.e., the whole world. Was this not what the OT prophets of God had foretold (Isa. 45:22-23)?

This event was not a religious conversion in the way 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians think. Paul never used the term conversion. "The one expression that Paul used most comprehensively in his writing to describe this experience is transformation. ... Arthur Darby Nock defined the study of conversion in the ancient world by showing that conversion was a distinctly specialized and rare religious experience."<sup>4</sup> In the thinking of modern Christianity, conversion implies an

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<sup>2</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 169.

<sup>3</sup> Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum, *Paul was not a Christian: the real message of a misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 197.

<sup>4</sup> Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 72.

improvement in moral behavior. Nowhere does Paul claim a moral conversion and to do so would have been contradictory to his former life. Paul's obedience to the law of God did not begin after the Act 9 event. In fact, Paul testifies to the Philippian church that in his former life he was blameless in keeping the law (Phil. 3:15).

Paul was devoted to Torah, a Pharisee of the Pharisees who knew of the crucifixion. The combination of these two things prompted his persecution of the Church. However, the sight of the resurrected Lord totally re-ordered his life. In a moment Paul was convinced that Christ was truly the promised Messiah.

According to Luke's record, Paul's direction and mission in life was radically transformed through this supernatural encounter. From then on, Paul's mission in life was to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and establish faith communities throughout the Mediterranean world. Paul's missionary call prevented him from remaining at any location very long, and as a result, he was forced to guide these individual communities through written correspondence. In the process, Paul "shaped his own theology within the context of those particular challenges that confronted him as a missionary and founder of congregations."<sup>5</sup>

The cross represented all the power earth could muster, and contrariwise, the resurrection represented that God's power alone infinitely exceeds humanity's collective. Without the cross the resurrection is unnecessary, and yet without the resurrection, the cross is meaningless. "*If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.*" (1 Cor. 15:14) I propose that for Paul the resurrection is fundamental for ministry, communal life, and theological logic.

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<sup>5</sup> Rainer Riesner, *Paul's early period: chronology, mission strategy, theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

## **Assumptions**

Seeing the resurrected Christ was transformative for Paul and therefore this became his overarching paradigmatic truth. The cross alone meant the law was limited in its influence; the resurrection meant ultimate fulfillment and victory. The cross, coupled with the resurrection, indicated that the lineage of the children of Abraham was no longer defined by one man's DNA but was now defined by one man's redemptive sacrifice. The kingdom of heaven was no longer an ethnic category but now a spiritual one. Behaviors, relationships, and social power structures which were previously prejudiced by familial and national loyalties were now the under the directives of divine precepts.

### **The Hermeneutical Importance of the Resurrection**

The literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the essential cornerstone of our faith. According to Richard Hays, those who deny the resurrection of Christ are first "unwitting partisans of the Sadducees" and guilty of leaving the "church in a state of uncertainty, lacking confidence in its mission, knowing neither the scriptures nor the power of God."<sup>6</sup> Not only is the resurrection of Jesus the cornerstone, it is also the lens through which we read all scripture. Hayes goes on to say, "confusion about the resurrection has hindered the church's ability to interpret Scripture ... [and we] interpret Scripture rightly only when we read it in light of the resurrection..." Finally, not only is the resurrection the cornerstone of our faith and our hermeneutical lens, it is the standard and model of obedience for all believers. In his *Moral Vision of the New Testament* Hays writes, "everything that Jesus taught and exemplified is vindicated by a God more powerful than death. He must, therefore, be seen as the bearer of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 216.

truth and the definitive paradigm for obedience to God.”<sup>7</sup> If there is no resurrection our faith is vain and worthless, our preaching is vain and pointless and “we are of all men most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:19).

In First Corinthians 15 Paul records what is believed to be the earliest Christian tradition relating to the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus (vv.1-8). Here, while resolving the Corinthian’s confusion about resurrection Paul illustrates his comprehensive understanding. Here we see both Paul’s apologetic for and theological application of the resurrection as the guiding principle for faith communities.

Resurrection is in opposition to the commonly held, historically long belief, that dead people stay dead. However, not everyone in the first century Judaism believed the dead stayed dead, particularly the Pharisees. They believed dead people were dead for an indeterminate period after which the “good ones” would receive new life. God, the good creator, would eventually make all things right and that meant that God’s people, would ultimately be raised to a new life. This was Paul’s earlier view. We find in 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul’s encounter with the resurrected Christ opened his eyes to see Jesus as the source of this eventual resurrection. Riesner writes the “resurrection of the dead ... follows from the resurrection of Jesus. It is thanks to the Corinthian errors that we possess at least 1 Corinthians 15.”<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not the Corinthian believers had faith in the resurrection of Christ wasn’t the issue. The problem they were struggling with was believing in the resurrection of others. They were confident of Jesus’ resurrection but uncertain of their own in the future. Paul saw this as problematic. Without faith in their own resurrection, these believers would fail to grasp the full

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<sup>7</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 166.

<sup>8</sup> Riesner, 392-393.

implications inherit in Christ's resurrection, the penultimate resurrection, as the first fruits of their hope and the keystone of God's redemptive plan. Christ's resurrection coupled with their own promised resurrection brings in a new dynamic (15:51). As in Christ's, being raised is not an escape from this body, it is a resurrection to a better one, and yet, it is still we who are being raised. This is the mystery Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians 15, and he begins his explanation in the Old Testament, exactly where Jesus began with the disciples on the Emmaus way,

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Cor. 15:3-4)*

Paul uses this same phrase (κατὰ τὰς γραφάς) in both verses. First, in reference to Christ's crucifixion and second to Christ's resurrection. Paul's use of the plural γραφάς implies that the Old Testament scriptures (either all of them generally, or some specifically) teach of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Relating to Christ's crucifixion some of the obvious passages would be Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 and for the resurrection Ezekiel 12:2-3; Isaiah 25:8; and Hosea 13:14.

Two things seem to be in play here. First, Paul's insistence on the resurrection κατὰ τὰς γραφάς suggests that the Messianic teachings of the Old Testament demanded a resurrection of the Messiah in order to meet the demands of the Old Testament prophets. Second, Paul's referral to the Old Testament illustrates that this "mystery" regarding the resurrection is not Paul's creation, but in fact, an unveiling of what was already revealed.

<sup>21</sup> *For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.* <sup>22</sup>  
*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:21-22)*



Following the method of Christ's teaching, Paul goes back to Genesis linking Adam to Christ to explain the redemptive narrative. In so doing, Paul assumes the Corinthian's knowledge of the Old Testament as well as their understanding of the implications of all dying from Adam's sin. When comparing Paul's parallel statements in verses 21 and 22, a question presents itself. Are all dying in Adam but only believers resurrected in Christ? This certainly seems to be the assumption within popular evangelical theology. However, could it be that Paul is saying that all are dying in Adam and to the same degree all are resurrected in Christ? What is really at question is the latter part—are all resurrected in Christ? Genesis 3:19 and Psalm 90:3 make it obvious that in Adam all (πάντες) die. However, regarding Christ Paul makes the same comprehensive claim—καὶ ἐν τῷ χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται. If we maintain a consistent hermeneutic, then the text says, "In Adam, all died, and in Christ, all will be resurrected"—all is all. Paul is not asserting universalism; this would be inconsistent with many of his other teachings. What Paul is stating is that Christ, as the recapitulation of Adam, is the new head of all humanity. Not everyone is a follower of Christ, but everyone is accountable to Christ, humanity's new head. But, how is it that everyone is raised? How can the unreconciled, unredeemed be resurrected? Would not this imply a heavenly home and reward for everyone regardless of faith and faithfulness? Paul's reliance upon the Old Testament validates it as a reliable source to inform his teaching and our understanding of resurrection. What, if anything, does it say? In Daniel 12:2 the prophet speaks of a resurrection of all where some awaken to everlasting life and others awaken to disgrace and everlasting contempt. Here is the obvious conclusion. Christ, as the new head will raise everyone from the dead but some, because of their rejection of the new life found in Christ's resurrection, will not be allowed into the kingdom, therefore, they will be raised to disgrace.

In Romans 5:15 Paul is picturing a general resurrection of everyone. This is why in I Cor. 15:12 he phrases the question, “how do some among you say there is no resurrection for the dead” instead of writing “there is no resurrection of the righteous.” My proposition is further strengthened when you read verses 22 and 23 together.

*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, (1 Cor. 15:22-23)*

If we allow for a general resurrection, rather than only the resurrection of the righteous, then the idea of “order” and the phrase “Christ the first fruits after those who are Christ’s” not only carry greater theological weight, they make sense. Everyone dies because of Adam’s sin, and everyone will be resurrected because of Jesus’ resurrection. Paul continues to defend this premise in verse 29.

*<sup>29</sup> Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? (1 Cor. 15:29)*

I will not explain what Paul means by the phrase “baptized for the dead.” I could attempt it, but I am certain I would not succeed. What baptism for the dead was is not as important as what its existence implies. Dale Martin writes, “though it is not clear precisely what this practice was, how it was assumed to have efficacy ... the practice itself seems to suggest that the Corinthians believed in some sort of afterlife...”<sup>9</sup> Paul’s logic is that it is irrational to maintain the practice of baptizing for the dead while at the same time denying the resurrection.

Paul continues his method of linking Adam to Christ as a technique for explaining the theological ingredients of the redemptive narrative.

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<sup>9</sup> Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 107.

*So also, it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (1 Cor. 15:45)*

*<sup>50</sup> Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will 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 will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Cor. 15:50-53)*

For Paul, there is never a resurrection without a physical body, but there is also no possible way for the current body to enter the kingdom of God. He makes it clear that σὰρξ καὶ αἶμα cannot κληρονομησαί the kingdom of God. The word κληρονομησαί (inherit) is telling. In the ancient world “to inherit is often used of coming into possession of eschatological existence, with all that this implies.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, inherit doesn’t just mean to receive something given, it also means to step into the reality of the one giving the inheritance—in this case, Christ’s reality. Therefore John will later write, “when He appears we will be like Him” (1 John 3:2)

Consider the inheritance of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. He wasn’t just getting the riches of his father; he was to take on the father’s life through the riches received from the father. The same is true for the believer. The resurrection involves the inheritance of an incorruptible body (which is received through the sowing of the corruptible one) which allows the believer to step into the reality of the kingdom of God. For Paul, the resurrection to everlasting life is a new and dynamic reality, and it is nothing less than a glorified life. The consequence of sin is totally removed through Christ’s resurrection.

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1291.

*"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" (1 Cor. 15:55)*

The Holy Spirit has taken up residence in our mortal bodies, and consequently, Paul calls us a temple. The problem we are faced with here is that the present temple is corruptible and temporary. Paul wants the Corinthian believers to live their present earthy lives in their present earthy bodies in light of the body, like Christ's body, that is to come. For Paul, Jesus is the model for the believer's future resurrection, and this has tremendous implications for how we live now.

### **Assumptions**

Resurrection is the ultimate miracle. All other miracles, although still miracles, are lesser. How can one doubt the possibility of the other (lesser) miracles recorded in the Bible if one believes in the ultimate miracle of resurrection? It is absurd to go through the scriptures denying miracle after miracle and then come to Christ's resurrection and suddenly blurt out, "but this one I believe!"

*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (1Thess. 4:14 NASB)*

Physical and spiritual death is defeated. The resurrection eliminates every basis for squinting suspiciously at the promises and commands of the Bible. There is no cause to retreat from Paul's powerful phrase in 6:11 "such were some of you" regarding the aforementioned behaviors and create some false category where certain behaviors remain after regeneration while others do not. If we believe Jesus rose again (the ultimate miracle) there is no valid reason for questioning God's ability to do the all rest His word promises.

## The Communal Power of the Resurrection

The wonder and power of community, in our western post-enlightenment world, has been tarnished and in some places discarded. We think of ourselves primarily in individualistic and autonomous terms. Being part of a group is secondary in our minds to individualism. Paul's world was much different. To be a Jew meant to be a member of the people of God. To be a follower of Christ meant to be a member of a community of faith. This is why temple and body imagery were so important for Paul.

Around five years after writing the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul writes to the Ephesian church:

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22)*

While on the earth Jesus referred to his physical body as the temple (John 2:21-22). Now Paul uses the same imagery to portray Christ's mystical body, the Church. As stated, the letter to the Ephesians was written about five years after 1 Corinthians, and we can't know how fully developed Paul's theology was at the time of the writing of 1 Corinthians, but we do see that this imagery was a constant element in his logic.

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Cor 6:19)*

John 2:19 Jesus prophesies that they will destroy this temple (his body) and he will raise it up in three days. It may be that the “raised up body” to which Jesus refers is in fact, both His physical body as well as His mystical body, the church. The Holy Spirit indwelt Christ personally, now the Holy Spirit indwells us and with this comes both moral and communal obligations.

*Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Cor. 3:16-17)*

Unlike the passage in chapter 6 which identifies each believer as the temple here in chapter 3 Paul, uses the plural ὑμῖν and ὑμεῖς (you), insisting that the entire local community is collectively the temple of the Holy Spirit. As the domicile of God’s Holy Spirit each of us is individually a temple but when we come together corporately we jointly constitute the temple, and every member is a portion of it.

*For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:12-13)*

The “temple” and the “body of Christ” are the same with each illustrating different characteristics. We have already shown that the “temple” metaphor designates the dwelling of the Spirit. We also see that the “body” metaphor demonstrates both unity of variety and hierarchy. “The macrocosm of the body was used to explain how unity can exist in diversity within the macrocosm of society.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the imagery of the body shows how

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<sup>11</sup> Martin, 92.

radically different members, with complexity, are joined together as one, proving not only that diverse members CAN function in harmony, but that in fact, diversity is NECESSARY for harmony to be realized. Martin suggests that “the body would perish—or at least would become a nonfunctioning monstrosity—were it not for the different functions of the different members.”<sup>12</sup>

One final consideration is hierarchy. Within a system of complex and diverse functions, there cannot be pure egalitarianism, some parts must acquiesce to other parts to accomplish one task, but for different tasks, those same roles may be reversed. We see this same gracious subordination functioning within the context of the Trinity. Furthermore, according to Paul our human assessments of the more honorable parts are most likely incorrect. Paul writes, “*But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked.*” (1 Cor. 12:24b) As within the Trinity, hierarchy exists within the body of Christ, but unlike the Trinity, it is both unanticipated and fluid to meet the needs of the moment. This is a very non-institutional element that unfortunately risks becoming a source of marginalization, division, and stagnation. Paul is aware of this danger stating that he is writing so “*that there may be no division in the body*” (1 Cor. 12:25b)

What is the source of we individual temples being joined together as a single temple or body? In 6:14-15 Paul writes, “*Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?*” He then adds, “*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?*” Jesus being raised from the dead occasions our immediate spiritual and eventual physical resurrection enabling His Holy Spirit to fill us now.

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<sup>12</sup> Martin, 94.

Somehow this indwelling brings with it a sacramental element that both unifies and identifies us with Christ and other believers. Paul is reminding this divided church that division is contrary to their new nature afforded by Christ's resurrection, but there is a "more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31b). This is what Paul is referring to in Philippians 3 when he speaks of the "*power of the resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings*" as a path to "*attaining the resurrection of the dead*" (Phil. 3:10-11).

For Paul, the imagery of the body was more than merely an image. It expresses a reality that the local community of faith is the principal means by which the risen Christ manifests Himself in space and time in the present world. This is how the power of the resurrection is communicated. The local church, as a community of faith, is responsible for making Jesus known through their communal witness. So, each member is given a manifestation, or gift(s), of the Spirit for the common good to first, build up the body of Christ itself and second, to make Christ incarnate in space and time so that more people will be attracted to the gospel.

### **Assumptions**

The Trinity, as we understand it, is a complementarian construct. The model prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, Christ's prayer in Gethsemane before His betrayal, as well as His mediatorial work clearly illustrate this. If there is functional subordination within the Trinity, then one should expect to see functional subordination within the Trinitarian community. It is not a great leap to expect that a faith community would reflect the nature of its God each member functioning within the body, in tandem, submitting to one another and leading each other as the need arises. All parts are equal even though all parts do not receive the same public attention or functional honor. This seems to be Paul's understanding. Being unaware of this dynamic is one pressure that spawned division within the Corinthian church. Becoming a healthy faith



community requires acceptance of equality in value and importance as well as subordination in role and function.

### **The Moral Implications of the Resurrection**

Corinth was culturally, economically, religiously, and ethnically divided, or as we say in the modern world, diverse. In 146 BC the Roman military had destroyed Corinth, and it was refounded by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. “This recent new beginning meant that there were no old, landed families residing there ... This, in turn, made this city ... more open to new ideas”<sup>13</sup> and attributed to its broad diversity. The city was located on an isthmus that joined the Peloponnese to mainland Greece on a busy ancient roadway used for transporting cargo, light ships and travelers going from the Aegean to the Adriatic. Corinth became a center of trade, travel, and economic expansion notorious for its cutthroat character illustrated by the ancient proverb, “Not for everyone is the voyage to Corinth.” Even Paul admitted that he traveled to Corinth with “*much fear and trembling*” (1 Cor. 2:3).

The Church in Corinth was divided on multiple fronts. The people were at odds, and many questioned Paul’s leadership and authority. There were cases of elitism, doctrinal speculation, misunderstandings of what it meant to be spiritual, sexual immorality, disorder in the Lord’s supper, and a misunderstanding concerning the relationship of the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. Some members were suing other members, and it appears that the wealthier ones were using their influence in the courts and community to defraud the less influential ones (I Cor. 6:1-11). Corinth was, no doubt, a difficult city itself and as a result, tough challenges also existed within the faith community.

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<sup>13</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 329.

Sexual behavior was designed by God to reflect the relationship between Christ and His church but in Corinth, like in many places, became a source of division. One man was with his father's wife (5:1-2). Male members were patronizing prostitutes (6:12-20). Some married couples were living celibate rather than enjoying the benefits of marriage (7:1-5).

In chapter five Paul mentions that legal incest had been accepted in the Corinthian church—someone had his father's wife (5:1). Paul's use of the word *πορνεία* (immorality) is quite descriptive and broad. Although according to Thiselton this “word covers “every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse,”<sup>14</sup> here Paul uses it to indicate that this incestuous relationship was not just illicit, it was beyond what even the heathen communities would tolerate.

In chapter six Paul addresses those believers patronizing prostitutes, and here he communicates his best logic on the issue of sexual immorality. Although patronizing prostitutes was accepted and common throughout the pagan world, some Corinthians were justifying this practice in the Christian community by twisting Paul's teachings regarding Christian freedom and liberty. They misconstrued Paul's words on the indwelling Spirit (3:16) or living in the Spirit, to marginalize the importance of the fleshly body. Paul quotes their reasoning in 6:13 *“Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them.”* In other words, some believed what they did with their bodies didn't matter to God. The logic was this: We get hungry, so we eat. We have sexual desires, so we act to fulfill them. None of this is wrong because, in the end, it is only the soul that matters.

Paul responds to this misconception by appealing to a core tenant of Orthodox faith—the resurrection—both Jesus' and ours. The believer's body is not meant for immorality, it is intended for the Lord and the Lord for the body (6:13). *“God has not only raised the Lord but*

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<sup>14</sup> Thiselton, 387.

*will also raise us up through His power” (6:14)”* so, what we do with our bodies and the bodies of others matters in light of the reality that our final destiny is to share in Jesus’ bodily resurrection — Jesus is the first fruits (15:20). Now Paul states his logic and the moral implication of the resurrection.

*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! (1 Cor. 6:15)*

Why are our members the members of the body of Christ? To put it plainly, it is because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. How is it possible that God’s Spirit would reside within our physical bodies? Resurrection! Based upon this it is a mistake to diminish the importance of our physical bodies. Martin writes, “the pneumatic union between the body of the Christian man and the body of Christ (6:17) is what identifies the Christian man. The man’s body and Christ’s body share the same pneuma; the man’s body is, therefore, an appendage of Christ’s body, totally dependent on the pneumatic life-force of the larger body for its existence.”<sup>15</sup> The moral implication is this: Through the indwelling of the Spirit (which is a byproduct of the resurrection) Christ is real, present and profoundly with us in such a deep and intimate way that if a man joins his body to a prostitute, he is joining Christ to her. For Paul this is reprehensible this logic is consistent regarding every sexual moral issue. He is challenging the Corinthians to take seriously their present reality of being the temple of the Holy Spirit and in light of their future reality of being raised from the dead to everlasting life.

Continuing with this logic Paul makes one of his boldest statements in this letter. *“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”*<sup>16</sup> Because of the resurrection what we do with our bodies and the bodies

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<sup>15</sup> Martin, 176-177.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18.

of others matters. To engage in any form of sexual immorality is to sin against one's own body. This is so serious that it even impacts ecclesial communion. Earlier Paul had reminded them of his previous command to not even associate with "so-called brothers" who were openly and unrepentantly immoral. To avoid tendencies toward isolationism he added this clarification, "*I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world*" (1 Cor. 5:10).

Paul realized indifference toward sexual immorality, which is antithetical to the moral implications of the resurrection, would further divide the Corinthian church. Unity and reconciliation arise from caring and accepting communities sustained through obedience to God unbroken by calloused or rebel disobedience. Immorality is "a defiling contagion to the individual and thus the corporate body of believers."<sup>17</sup> Eisenbaum writes that "acts of sexual immorality pollute the community. Moral impurity bears properties of contagion ... Moral impurity affects or "infects" the sanctified community by the immoral actions of community members, especially when the community takes no action to constrain the guilty person or persons."<sup>18</sup> Martin, along these same lines, adds, "all these issues—the man sleeping with his stepmother, men visiting prostitutes, and ... for Paul then, marriage in the church serves as a mechanism for protecting the boundaries of the church's body from external contamination through sex with those outside."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Paul's reprimand regarding a variety of sexual immoralities and dysfunctions along with his encouraging "*such were some of you*" in 6:9 was simply an attempt to restore communal unity through reconciliation with God and consequently each other.

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<sup>17</sup> Eisenbaum, 164,166.

<sup>18</sup> Eisenbaum, 166.

<sup>19</sup> Martin, 212.

In chapter seven Paul sees the existence of sexually healthy marriages as a moral preventive. He recognizes the importance of physical love between husbands and wives who are made to become one flesh standing as a symbol of Christ's love for His church. However, in Corinth, some were promoting abstinence among spouses (1 Cor. 7:1-7) and their radical asceticism was demonstrated by their slogan "*It is good for a man to not touch a woman.*" Paul's response was to say that those who are called to marriage are to give to their spouse his and her conjugal rights. Paul's reasoning on this not only strengthens marriages it also corrects some of the patriarchal attitudes of that day and ours.

*Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise, also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1 Cor. 7:3-4)*

Paul clearly establishes the mutual privileges of both husband and wife. In these verses and the surrounding ones, Paul affirms the absolute equality of rights and needs inside the marital covenant. For a marriage to be good and right mutuality must exist between both spouses. According to 11:3 this gender equality extends from the home, through society, and into the church.

*However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. (1 Cor. 11:11-12)*

BAGD's translation of this text uses the phrase "apart from" rather than "independent of." This translation more adequately illustrates the mutual dependency that God intends in marriage. Certainly, two genders imply some degree of variation which, left to the schemes of society in a fallen world, has often resulted in the marginalization of the woman. Paul's reminder

that “*all things originate from God*” should help prevent this. “Whereas the creation order entails a differentiation ... Paul adds that in the gospel differentiation is determined more explicitly by a principle of mutuality and reciprocity.”<sup>20</sup> According to Paul, God planned for marriage and sex in marriage to be a unifying source. The smallest communal unit is marriage. Marriage creates the larger communal unit of the family. Believing families make up the even larger community of faith. Sadly, the thing which God intended to unite divided. Paul recognized this which may have been the reason for his writing, “*Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that*” (1 Cor. 7:7). If someone has the gift, celibacy would be the better path, however, as Bruce writes, monogamy “not celibacy is the norm for Christians even if there were no higher motive for it than the avoidance of fornication.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Assumptions**

One of the strongest human impulses is sex. It has been the force behind great romances and horrible atrocities. Humanity left to unrestrained desire can produce a spectrum of behavior that is both shockingly broad and destructive. If we are slaves to our instincts, and Christ is powerless to free us, then division and chaos are the expectation. However, Paul gives us hope that we can rise above our natural birth. In a longer list of transgressions Paul makes this glorious statement, “such WERE some of you.” These few words alone are enough to give us pause and rescue us from the brink of nihilism. As Hays writes in chapter 16 of his *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, “Redemption (a word that means “being emancipated from slavery”) is God’s act of liberation, setting us free from the power of sin and placing us within the sphere of God’s

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<sup>20</sup> Thiselton, 842.

<sup>21</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Paternoster Press, 2000), 267.

transforming power for righteousness.”<sup>22</sup> In truth, we are all without excuse but because of resurrection power behavior is not identity. Paul shows us that the challenges regarding this variety of illicit sexual attitudes are resolved through the logic and moral implications of the resurrection. Tragically we are all a broken people but happily, resurrection is the ultimate reversal of brokenness.

### **The Social Implications of the Resurrection**

Another division in the Corinthian church had to do with eating meat offered to idols. This was such an important issue that Paul takes three chapters (8-10) to address it. As we have already hinted, the city of Corinth was glutted with pagan religions and mythological gods. With each came worship rituals, festivals, and sacrifices and those animal sacrifices were a primary source of meat in the ancient world. Additionally, the temple facilities were built to accommodate large gatherings. Not only would groups gather there to feast on significant days (religious and otherwise) but also many merchants would go here to acquire this meat in order to it sell in their market booths. Most, if not all available meat was connected directly or indirectly to idol worship.

The Corinthian believers came from pagan backgrounds and had probably participated in the temple festivities at one time or another. Therefore, coming to Christ presented the moral and ethical dilemma of determining whether or not continuing in these social events and eating temple meat, was analogous to a betrayal of Christ. Obviously individual believers came to differing conclusions.

On the one hand, some understood Paul’s teaching that since there is only one true God idols have no actual reality. These people were the “strong,” and they were arrogant (8:1) in their

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<sup>22</sup> Hays, 390.

knowledge. These were most likely the wealthier ones who had position, status, and possibly more education. These were the ones who got invited to the public ceremonies where meat was freely served, and so they favored eating meat offered to idols.

On the other hand, there were those who questioned this practice based upon their understanding of Paul's teachings which called them to avoid idols and worship the one true God. They presumed some evil spiritual power intrinsic in the idols and therefore in the meat offered to them. These were the "weak." According to Dunn the "weak" probably belonged to the lower economic classes who lacked the finances to afford meat. "The opportunities to eat quality meat may have been largely limited to the public distributions of meat at public ceremonies, at which the meat would have been dedicated to the presiding god or gods. For the "weak" the choice between a poor man's diet and acting against conscience would have been quite stark."<sup>23</sup> They were probably called weak by the "stronger" who looked down on them for not having sufficient knowledge and for being overly sensitive.

Paul attempts to bring reconciliation in this division by appealing to Christ's submission, to the Father for us at Calvary, as the model to emulate. In this same vein Paul "appeals to those who do possess knowledge to act in loving acknowledgment of their familial interdependence with their brothers and sisters in the community ... Those who insist on their own spiritual prerogative and refuse to place concern for the community first are pursuing a disastrous course."<sup>24</sup> Paul affirms this to be his intended behavior. "Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble." (1 Cor. 8:13 NASB) Those who are "stronger," or more knowledgeable, must prove their "strength" by a willingness to sacrifice their liberty for the sake of community and the spiritual edification of the

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<sup>23</sup> Dunn, 702.

<sup>24</sup> Hays, 42.



“weak.” Paul’s genius for communal unity is seen in 1 Cor. 8:6. To divide the body of Christ is to wound the work of God, *from whom are all things and for whom we exist.*

### **Assumptions**

In the context of meat offered to idols; in the disconnect between the “stronger” and “weaker;” Paul shows us that, the most divisive factor is ego. There is, as Brian McLaren writes in his *The Great Spiritual Migration*, a little fundamentalist in every one of us and biblical love demands we resist him. The depth of Christ’s desire to reconcile us to the Father and one another is proven by His own submission. *“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.”* (Luke 22:42 NASB) The depth of the Father’s desire for our mutual reconciliation is proven by His putting us before the safety of His own son. *“But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering.”* (Isa 53:10 NASB) The behavior of our Triune God, the behavior that we must emulate is this: He held nothing back. Everything was given to bring us into right relationship. God “the strong” is known best by His self-giving love for “the weak.”

### **The Community of Communion**

As Paul is concluding his discussion on meat offered to idols, he tells them to *“flee from idolatry”* (10:14) and then he explains why in verse 21. *“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons...”* In verse 16 of this discussion, Paul’s writing reveals two things. First, he writes, *“Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?”* (10:16) This indicates that the Corinthians did share the bread and wine to commemorate Christ’s death. Second, he writes, *“Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.”* (10:17) Paul is teaching that our individual relationship with Christ necessarily creates

fellowship with each other. In other words, the context for communion is community. The Lord's Supper is one of two ordinances that define the church and affirm our mutual belonging to the gospel.

“Paul himself records the tradition authorizing the Lord's Supper as the account of the last supper of Jesus with his disciples, which Paul himself received and passed on to the Corinthians at the foundation of their church (11:23).”<sup>25</sup> This is not a private event between the individual and Jesus; it is a family meal around the family table. But, nothing can ruin a family meal quicker than a drunk uncle, or a bunch of drunk uncles.

In Corinth, the Lord's Supper happened within the context of a larger meal, and it was here the disparity between groups revealed itself. “Here not least it is evident that the tension was basically between ... those who had enough food and drink and their own houses (11:21-22) and “those who have nothing” (11:22). Presumably, it was the well-to-do who were going ahead with their meal before the poorer members arrived (11:33)”<sup>26</sup> and by the time of the actual event the well-to-do were already drunk.

The Lord's Supper was supposed to be that moment in weekly worship where the unity of the community was most obvious. It was to be a communal affirmation of dual belonging to God and each other, but instead, it was the opposite. Paul's anger is apparent in verse 22. <sup>22</sup>  
*“What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.”*

Hearing of this conflict Paul makes it a point to warn the Corinthians not to take the Lord's supper unworthily—with unconfessed sin in their lives. Why? Since this ordinance

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<sup>25</sup> Dunn, 606.

<sup>26</sup> Dunn, 609.

declares the gospel it logically also carries with it the demands of the gospel. According to Paul the one “*who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.*” (1 Cor. 11:29) What is the body to which he refers in verse 29? An initial and uninformed answer, since Paul is in the context of the crucifixion, would be “the body of Christ.” However, upon closer inspection, you can see in the following verse many in the church are weak, sick, and dead because some are partaking unworthily. The body to which Paul is referring is our body, individually as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and corporately as the body of Christ, all of which will be resurrected.

### **Assumptions**

The ordinances (Lord’s Supper and Baptism) are those things we have been given to mark off the church. These things do not save us, but they are signs of the gospel given to the church to affirm one another as belonging to Christ. Someone says, “Jesus is my Lord, and I believe that God raised him from the dead” and the church says, “we see evidence of that” so we (the community of faith) baptizes them, and with them, we come to the table and partake of the wine and bread together. These are the symbols of belonging to Christ and belonging to one another. The idolatry of one’s self hinders the unity of community. The worship of God in an environment of mutual submission strengthens it.

### **The Reconciliation of Resurrection**

More than a few scholars propose that factionalism is really at issue in every chapter of 1 Corinthians, and so the question presents itself: What was the primary cause for this division? Is there a primary cause? Was it theological belief, power struggles, personality cults, or something unique in that ancient culture? Thiselton believes Corinth’s internal fracturing was due to the community of faith becoming “embroiled in what we have termed a postmodern pragmatism of

the market with its related devaluation of truth, tradition, rationality, and universals.”<sup>27</sup> Perhaps Thiselton is correct in his assessment. His prescribed cure seems to be a clearer indicator of the problem. “The value system is corrected not by reformulating an ecclesial polity but by placing the community as a whole under the criterion and identity of the cross of Christ.”<sup>28</sup> The church in Corinth was not Christ-centric and, as I proposed in the assumptions section of the social implications of the resurrection, the primary driving force has become ego. Polity and organizational restructuring may extend community life and slow down the dying process, but it will never fix a divided community where members orbit around their cherished selves. The WHOLE COMMUNITY must come under the standard, principles, and identity of the Cross. Gustaf Aulén maintained that the crucifixion is best conceived as the triumphant outcome of confrontation and conflict, with Christ as the conquering hero.<sup>29</sup> That triumphant outcome is the resurrection of Christ.

In Corinth, there was even division over baptism which symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The arrogant even boasted over who performed their baptism. For this reason, Paul writes, “*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void*” (1 Cor. 1:17). The community became divided behind personalities, so Paul writes, “*Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? (1 Cor. 1:13)* The “strong” were wielding their liberty as a sword, swinging it this way and that without regard for others so Paul rebukes them. “*For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. (1 Cor. 8:11)*”

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<sup>27</sup> Thiselton, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Thiselton, 34.

<sup>29</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, SPCK Classics. (London: SPCK, 2010), 12.

If Christ is God's representative for reconciling the world to God, then *Christ in us* means we are God's representatives for reconciling ourselves to each other. Without the literal crucifixion of the literal body of Jesus Christ and the literal resurrection of the literal body of Christ, there can be no mystical body. Subsequently, if there is a mystical body of Jesus Christ, then there must be the spiritual crucifixion and resurrection of that mystical body. Richard Hays writes, "discipleship is necessarily cruciform."<sup>30</sup>

At Calvary, we find the example and source of humility and forgiveness. If the crucifixion is the locus for humility and forgiveness, then the resurrection is the locus for reconciliation. It was this element of the atonement process that convinced Paul of Christ's messiahship. If Christ has "*not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.*" (1 Cor. 15:14) Without the resurrection our hope is groundless, and we are still in our sins. Resurrection is the reversal of death, and it is the one thing that sets Christianity apart from all other religions. Because of the resurrection, we are made able to see past the sorrowful crucifixions of life to an ultimate rebirth and new life. *God has not only raised the Lord but will also raise us up through His power.*" (1 Cor. 6:14)

Although we live in a fallen world, the community of faith should not resign itself to the fate of being broken beyond repair. As believers, we should embody "the power of the resurrection in the midst of a not-yet-redeemed world ... [we remain] in suspense between Jesus' resurrection and parousia."<sup>31</sup> We embrace our groanings and travail. We acknowledge our brokenness while simultaneously waiting for the joy that comes from the healing of resurrection. Resurrection should serve, not only as a pattern for humility and mutual submission but as a revitalizing paradigm that brings together salvific significance and reconciliation. It is the

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<sup>30</sup> Hays, 365.

<sup>31</sup> Hays, 198.

cornerstone of our apocalyptic hope and the eternal confirmation of our imperishable inheritance. Resurrection is not a singular, isolated event. It is the disclosure of God's eternal purpose to destroy death and grant everlasting life. It is the light that illuminates all scripture! It is the power of transformation and life. It is the one non-negotiable that sets us apart. I love Paul's incredulity before Agrippa. *"Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?"* (Acts 26:8) As previously mentioned the resurrection is the ultimate miracle. It is incredible. Not only do I believe it, by faith I look forward to it when all my brokenness will be forever erased.

### **Assumptions**

The intrinsic nature of the resurrection is reconciliation for it reconciled unholy man to a holy God. As a further self-limiting of God Himself it is the opposite of personal pragmatism—we gained at Christ expense. He became poor that we might become rich. It is an unbelievably bold confrontation of nihilism uncovering the deepest meaning of life and existence. It was the key that unlocked the closed soul of fallen man and allowed the Holy Spirit to reside within the individual human. The ascension of Christ's physical body exploded his mystical presence in all the earth. Now our governing spirit is His spirit, and the local body of Christ is animated by the gifts—which mature, unify, and heal—of His spirit. And what is the apex of these gifts? Love.

No passage of scripture has suffered at the cruel hands of eisegesis more than 1 Corinthians thirteen. It is read at weddings and anniversaries as though it was some ode to romantic love. In light of Christ's resurrection and ours, in the hope of resolving conflict and dissolving division, to heal the hurt caused by multiple envies and the abuse of gifts Paul lists (13:4-8a) the characteristics of biblical love lest we confuse it with tolerance or apathy. Love is patient, kind, not jealous, not arrogant, doesn't act disgracefully, isn't selfish, isn't easily irritated, isn't vengeful, does not support or celebrate unrighteousness, celebrates the truth,

accepts the burdens that come from living out this kind of love and in the face of negative things has hope for better. There is no better description of the life of Christ and no better recipe for the Christ-life. This is the cure for every division. To the Philippian church, Paul writes that he wants to know the power of Christ's resurrection. Well, this list in 1 Corinthians 13 is exactly what the power of Christ's resurrection looks like.

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