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ON WHOM THE END OF THE AGES HAS COME: BIBLICAL
THEOLOGY, PREACHING, AND CHRISTOCENTRIC
IDENTITY IN 1 CORINTHIANS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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December 2020

APPROVAL SHEET

ON WHOM THE END OF THE AGES HAS COME: BIBLICAL
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For Heather, Chloe, Malachi, and Abigail. As a husband and father, I hope and pray to live up to the Christ-centered identity that 1 Corinthians promotes.

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PREFACE

My goal in pursuing this degree was to better learn the Bible to strengthen me as a pastor and to grow in godliness. I always try to approach theological studies simply as a guy who is really glad to know Jesus, and just wants to know him better. From the beginning of this program, I quickly learned that it was a perfect fit. The greatest way this program has benefitted me is what others never see—my personal devotions. When I go to God’s Word, having a better understanding of how to read it has clarified God’s voice like never before as I have grown in my ability to think through the Scriptures.

I am awestruck as I reflect on how his sovereign hand has guided me to this point. I stand amazed at the gracious support and encouragement I have received from my wife, Heather. Without her support, I never would have accomplished this task. I may be the one earning a doctorate, but she has long ago earned a far nobler title, “excellent wife” (Prov 31:10).

I am also grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Samuel Emadi, whose teaching and advice throughout this project has transformed my writing abilities. He has challenged me to write in a way that exceeds anything I thought I was capable of doing.

Christopher James Kuenzle

Lakeland, Georgia

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Biblical theology, rightly understood, is an essential aspect of faithful biblical interpretation. Preachers in particular need to employ biblical theology in their ministries in order to faithfully lead, equip, and shepherd a congregation. In order to take the best evangelical practice and apply it to 1 Corinthians, this project explores Paul's biblical theology as presented in 1 Corinthians. My thesis is 1 Corinthians employs the themes of new creation, new temple, new exodus, new covenant, and new Israel from the Old Testament and applies them to the church, exhorting the saints to adopt a Christocentric identity. Paul then urges the Corinthians in light of this Christocentric identity to unite under the lordship of Christ to more accurately represent the gospel.

Christian preaching emerges from the truth of God's absolute and unchanging word. At the same time, while God's word is absolute and unchanging, preachers must also contextualize their messages so that they faithfully communicate the message of Scripture in a way that is accessible to a modern audience. As Kelly Kapic notes, "Attempting to separate life and theology is to lose the beauty and truthfulness of both."¹ Ministers of the Word of God, therefore, must demonstrate how God's unchanging word applies in the ever-changing modern world. Failing to do so leaves the church vulnerable to unbiblical ideas and susceptible to false teaching.

¹ Kelly M. Kapic, *A Little Book for New Theologians: Why and How to Study Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 42.

At the heart of the preacher's task of communicating the message of Scripture is the discipline of biblical theology. Biblical theology ensures that preachers both understand a passage of Scripture on its own terms and according to its canonical context and demonstrates how that passage can be rightly applied to the modern church.

The following project explores how understanding 1 Corinthians biblically-theologically ought to shape our understanding of the text and how we ought to preach it to the church.

Understanding Biblical Theology

Every passage of Scripture must be understood not only according to its immediate context but also in canonical context. Without endeavoring to understand how each part fits within the whole, we run the risk of both wrongly interpreting the Scripture and failing to see how Scripture climaxes in the person and work of Christ.

In fact, Jesus himself argued that failing to see how Scripture culminates with the fulfillment of God's promises in him is a dangerously aberrant interpretation of the text. In John 5:38–39, Jesus indicts his Jewish opponents for failing to see that Scripture testifies about him and as a result, they failed to find life. Christ declared that he came not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). After his resurrection, Christ appeared to the two men on the road to Emmaus, saying, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

Paul also argues that Christ is fulfillment of Scripture. He sought to persuade people in the synagogues from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ referencing the Law, Prophets, and Writings (Acts 13). In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Paul argues that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ happened in accordance with the Scriptures. By understanding the perspective that Jesus and the New

Testament authors had toward the Old Testament, we can begin to understand and imitate their hermeneutical practices and thus preach the whole of Scripture as a testimony to Christ.²

Accompanied with sound exegesis, biblical theology helps us to better understand how an individual passage or an individual book fits into the whole of Scripture. As Hamilton illustrates, “knowing what the forest looks like enables understanding of the individual trees.”³ To keep in line with the biblical authors intent, preachers must proclaim Scripture in such a way that the congregation sees how each particular Scripture fits within Scriptures own metanarrative and how it contributes to the Bible’s big picture.⁴

Defining Biblical Theology

Scholars employ the term biblical theology in a variety of ways to describe a range of theological and hermeneutical systems, many of which are contradictory to one another. For instance, in their survey of biblical theology, Klink and Lockett discuss five competing approaches to biblical theology: historical description, history of redemption, worldview-story, canonical approach, and theological construction.⁵

Scholars often trace the first modern exploration of biblical theology to Johann Philip Gabler’s seminal lecture on the topic in 1787. Gabler argued for a form

² See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 189. Here, Goldsworthy compares typological methods and argues that for a typology that sees all stages of progressive revelation to help find connections within themes that otherwise might be restricted.

³ James M. Hamilton, Jr., “Biblical Theology and Preaching,” in *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at The Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 197.

⁴ See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 25–26.

⁵ See Edward W. Klink and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012). Klink and Lockett provide a detailed description of these methods.

of biblical theology which endeavored to employ historical critical tools to rescue the dogmatic principles of the Old Testament from its historical claims. In the intervening centuries, numerous scholars of both liberal and conservative convictions have since responded with alternative proposals for doing biblical theology—creating several schools of thought with regard to the discipline.⁶

Ultimately, defining biblical theology largely depends on theological presuppositions. This project operates from a presupposition that Scripture, in all of its diversity, is unified, true in all it affirms, and climaxes in God’s revelation in Christ. Scripture is both Christocentric and theological as Christ both fulfills Israel’s history and reveals the Father and the nature of the Trinity itself.⁷ As Graeme Goldsworthy writes, biblical theology is “the study of how every text in the Bible relates to Jesus and his gospel.”⁸

Biblical theology also recognizes that Scripture reveals God’s plan of salvation through progressive revelation. Geerhardus Vos picks up on this aspect of biblical theology when he defines it as “that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.”⁹ To understand Scripture in its context, the reader must seek to understand what had been revealed at the time of its writing and the theology of the author who wrote it. Similarly, we must see how later biblical authors develop that passage of Scripture in

⁶ See Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 865–88. Schreiner traces this history highlighting key theologians and methods they used.

⁷ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles*, 40. Goldsworthy argues that Scripture is Christocentric and theological rather than merely Christological on the grounds that Christ reveals the Father. While this is correct and I am indebted to him for this knowledge, I prefer to include all three persons of the Trinity here by keeping in mind the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing Christ and thus also the Father (John 16:12–15).

⁸ Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 40.

⁹ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 5.

subsequent biblical epochs.

Along these lines, James Hamilton proscribes that biblical theologians must embrace the “interpretive perspective” of the biblical authors.¹⁰ The ultimate context for interpreting any passage of Scripture is the entire canon of Scripture. Hamilton describes the purpose of biblical theology as “to sharpen our understanding of the theology contained in the Bible itself through an inductive, salvation-historical examination of the Bible’s themes and the relationships between those themes in their canonical context and literary form.”¹¹

With these elements of biblical theology in place, Rosner’s definition is particularly helpful and the one I will embrace in this project:

Biblical theology is “theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyze and synthesize the Bible’s teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible’s overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.”¹²

Biblical theology, therefore, plunges us deeper into the brilliance of God’s Word and ensures that we read Scripture according to God’s own intent.

In keeping with Hamilton’s emphasis on embracing the biblical author’s interpretive perspective and Rosner’s focus on exegesis with literary and theological sensitivity, this project will seek to understand Paul’s view of certain Old Testament themes and how he applies those to the church at Corinth, “on whom the end of the ages has come.”

¹⁰ James M. Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

¹¹ James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 47.

¹² Brian Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 10.

Biblical Theological Systems

The precise relationship between biblical covenants is a matter of much debate. Dispensationalists view the church as distinctively new and thus different from Israel. Covenant theology focuses on a continuity between the two so that by nature, they are one and the same. This project assumes the posture of progressive covenantalism, which views that all the covenants find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ alone. Gentry and Wellum best describe this view by stating,

The genealogical principle rooted in the Abrahamic covenant (covenant theology) and the promise of land to Abraham and the nation of Israel (dispensational theology), even Israel herself as a people, all function typologically to point us forward to Christ. In this way, as we move across the Canon, the genealogical principle does not remain unchanged; rather it must be viewed in relation to the head of the new covenant our Lord Jesus Christ, and those he represents, namely, people of faith who have been born of the Spirit and united to Christ their covenant head. Furthermore, as we think of Israel, we must also view Israel typologically as not only looking back to Adam and picking up his role but also pointing forward to the coming of the ‘true Israel,’ our Lord Jesus Christ who by his obedient life and death achieves, secures, and inaugurates a new covenant in his blood.¹³

The covenants serve as a backbone to the Scripture’s storyline and are fulfilled in Christ, thus Scripture’s metanarrative is centered on Jesus Christ.

Understanding Scripture’s Metanarrative

In order to synchronize individual texts with Scripture’s metanarrative, we must first understand the metanarrative itself. Scholars have often summarized the storyline of Scripture in four words: creation, fall, redemption, restoration. God created all things including man in his image. Man rebelled against God, God provides redemption, and God ultimately brings restoration.

The Bible communicates this story through various themes and biblical-theological patterns across the canon. For instance, Biblical authors often employ Edenic imagery to show how paradise was lost at the fall of man but will ultimately

¹³ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 120.

be regained in the eschaton. In Genesis 1–2, God places man in a garden, enjoying the restful presence of their Creator. The garden had a flowing river that provided life and nourishment with fruitful trees (Gen 2:10). Man, however, rebelled and was exiled from the garden (Gen 3:24).

Later biblical authors use Edenic imagery to punctuate significant advances in redemptive history and show how God’s grace restores the goodness of the created order. Some Old Testament authors, for instance, describe Israel in Edenic terms—a land where man can dwell with God and enjoy Sabbath rest (Josh 21:44; 1 Kgs 5:4). The Temple was outfitted with Edenic symbols, arboreal décor, and images of fruitful trees.¹⁴

Furthermore, just as Adam rebelled in the garden and was exiled, so too Israel rebelled in the land and was exiled. In the midst of both instances, however, God gave hope in a pronouncement of salvation through judgment. To Adam and Eve, he promised that a seed of the woman would crush the head of the seed of the serpent.¹⁵ As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that this seed of the woman was going to come from the lineage of Abraham (Gen 12) and David (2 Sam 7) and that he would be a priest-king who would rule the earth (Ps 110), being everything that Adam and Israel failed to be.

When Christ returns to consummate his kingdom, he will establish the New Jerusalem where God’s people will enjoy the presence of God—once again in a land of fruitful trees, nourished by a river flowing from the center (Rev 21–22).¹⁶

¹⁴ For a more thorough description, see T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 20–31.

¹⁵ Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*, 84–89. Here, Hamilton traces this theme through Genesis, but alludes to it at several points in the book as it pertains to the narrative of the Bible.

¹⁶ Hamilton, *What is Biblical Theology?*, 67–69. Here Hamilton expounds on tree and water imagery in the Bible.

Additionally, we see the dimensions of this New Jerusalem corresponding with the dimensions of the Holy of Holies in the Temple, both gold-laden cubes where man can enjoy sabbath rest with God.¹⁷ Adam had the task of managing and subduing the earth, expanding the boundaries of the garden to spread his reign under God (Gen 1:28). Israel was to do the same, being a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:3). Jesus gave that same commission to the church under a new covenant administration, commanding them to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18–20).

This use of Edenic imagery throughout Scripture is just one example of how Scripture employs symbols, patterns, and images to unfold its metanarrative.

Biblical Theology Applied to Preaching

In Christian preaching, preachers must connect the context of their congregations to the world of the biblical author. When the preacher employs biblical theology, it focuses the message on the redemptive history of Christ while simultaneously proclaiming the experience of God's people in relation to our own.¹⁸ Biblical theology informs the sermon as it places the text within its place in redemptive history, thus centering the message on Christ and drawing its application from considering the relationship between God and people within that stage of redemptive history.

Additionally, preachers must not merely state their biblical-theological conclusions. They must shepherd the congregation to do biblical theology for themselves, modeling for them sound hermeneutics in every sermon. If the preacher sets a desired program or church-specific accomplishment as the agenda for a text,

¹⁷ Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 19–20. Here Alexander picks up on the Temple motif and highlights the correspondence between the Holy of Holies and the New Jerusalem.

¹⁸ See Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 78–82. Here, Clowney argues that as people relate to God in different epoch's of salvation history, they serve not as mere examples, but as people who occupy a particular place in the history of salvation.

the congregation will be trained to do eisegesis rather than exegesis in their personal study—something which will ultimately undermine the work of the ministry.

As Bryan Chapell argues, “The meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon.”¹⁹ The agenda for a sermon must always be set by the text as it is positioned within the storyline of Scripture.²⁰ When the preacher takes this approach, he shapes the minds of his sheep around Scripture itself and teaches them to read Scripture on its own terms and according to God’s intent. Furthermore, when Jesus said, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24) he revealed a direct correlation between the Holy Spirit and God’s truth. The preacher can expect the Holy Spirit to work through his preaching only when he presents God’s intended meaning through the author of that text.²¹

Biblical theology is a channel that the Holy Spirit utilizes to create worship. Acts 2 provides a direct correlation between being “filled with the Holy Spirit” and preaching the Scripture according to its metanarrative. In his preaching, Peter stood within a long line of those who spoke for God according to a word-fulfillment pattern that spans across both testaments. When God speaks in Scripture, his words are always fulfilled. When Christ speaks and acts, he does so in fulfillment of Scripture. Christian preaching thus utilizes exegesis working alongside biblical theology to proclaim God’s intentions for the text in its content, application, and mission. It is with these convictions that I will seek to exemplify this in a sermon series that highlights seven passages and biblical-theological themes in 1

¹⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 32.

²⁰ James Hamilton presents a strong argument for this stating that Nehemiah is not about a church’s building program and Psalms are not about psychotherapy. Rather, we need biblical theology to understand God’s purposes. James Hamilton, “Biblical Theology and Preaching,” 197.

²¹ See Jonathan Leeman, *Word-Centered Church: How Scripture Brings Life and Growth to God’s People* (Chicago: Moody, 2017), 18. Here, Leeman states his primary argument that “God’s Word, working through God’s Spirit, is God’s primary instrument for growing God’s church.”

Corinthians.

Survey of the Literature

The literature on 1 Corinthians is abundant and this survey mentions those on which this project most heavily relies. This literature is analyzed within three categories: commentaries, theological analysis, and contextual background. I have chosen only to engage with those commentaries that interact with the Greek text while keeping in mind the theology and context of the passage. The theological sources primarily examine the use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians, revealing how the book fits within the grander narrative of Scripture and examines how Paul wrote this letter on a foundation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Background sources focus on the Corinthian's cultural context, the life of Paul, and first-century Christianity.

Commentaries

To summarize the use of commentaries for this project, I will first examine those which primarily focus on grammatical-historical exegesis.²² Next I will employ those that focus on unraveling theological themes.²³ Finally, I will consider

²² Paul Barnett, *1 Corinthians: Holiness and Hope of a Rescued People*, Focus on the Bible Commentary Series (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2011); C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996); David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000); Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985); Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H, 2014); Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

²³ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); Charles Hodge, *1&2 Corinthians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000); Peter Naylor, *A Study Commentary on 1 Corinthians* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2004); Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018).

commentaries written from a historical-critical method.²⁴

Theological Analysis

To utilize sources that offer theological analysis, I will first employ theological works that examine the use of the Old Testament in both 1 Corinthians and Paul's letters in general.²⁵ In addition are those works which examine the themes

²⁴ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1975); Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

²⁵ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *1 Corinthians* in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. D.A. Carson and G.K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith, *Studies in the Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1989); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001); Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 74 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); T. Desmond Alexander et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000).

of new creation,²⁶ new temple,²⁷ new exodus,²⁸ new Israel,²⁹ and New Covenant.³⁰ Finally, I will utilize works that examine Pauline theology more generally.³¹

Contextual Background

To engage with the contextual background of 1 Corinthians, this project will consult literature pertaining to Paul's perspective and intentions,³² cultural

²⁶ T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010); G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd, eds. *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013).

²⁷ G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004); T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008); Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008).

²⁸ Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018); James Logan Johns, "The Function of the Exodus Events in the Argument of 1 Corinthians 10:1-13" (ThM thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 1998); Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); Carla Swafford Works, *The Church in the Wilderness: Paul's Use of Exodus Traditions in 1 Corinthians*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

²⁹ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); Brent Evan Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Typological Pattern: A Theological Critique of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017); Philip Chase Sears, "The Church as New Israel in Romans" (ThM thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

³⁰ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Bradley G. Green, *Covenant and Commandment: Works, Obedience and Faithfulness in the Christian Life*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 33 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014); Brian Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 31 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013); Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 23 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007); N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

³¹ F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

³² David W.J. Gill, *1 Corinthians*, in vol. 3 of *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

context,³³ and first-century Christianity.³⁴

Local Context

I currently serve as the senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Lakeland, Georgia. Lakeland is a small rural town in south central Georgia and is known for its murals and all-American southern charm. What is often overlooked is the desperate need of the gospel in Lakeland. Lining the street corners are empty church buildings that symbolically tell the story of a town that once personified the “Bible-belt” but is now devoid of the gospel. First Baptist is a church steeped with rich history and is full of loving people. Yet there is so little knowledge of the Scriptures that many struggle to articulate the gospel. Personal evangelism is lacking as some expressed they were not even aware that laypeople were supposed to engage in personal evangelism. Since arriving at the church in August, 2017, I have been approached by many members who claim to have never heard preaching where somebody “pulls everything he says from the Bible.” The lack of biblical knowledge has led to several issues tied to knowing and identifying with Christ. These issues include lack of lay leadership, lack of fellowship, and little awareness of how God has gifted them to serve. I decided to use 1 Corinthians as the basis for my ministry project because it deals directly with these issues.

Overcoming these issues will begin by developing in the church an understanding of Scripture that is built on sound biblical theology. The overall purpose of this project is to begin forming in the church a more intimate identity in

³³ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014); Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. John H. Schutz (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Bruce W. Winter, *Paul and Philo Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

³⁴ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

Christ by preaching a sermon series on 1 Corinthians. To cultivate this identity in Christ through preaching in 1 Corinthians within the parameters of this project, I will select seven passages of Scripture and write text-driven sermons on these passages using a biblical-theological and interpretive perspective. One of the aims of this project will be to write sermons that set each of these passages within the context of the grand narrative of Scripture. I will also examine Paul's use of the Old Testament in these passages, recognizing allusions, patterns, and symbols. This project will communicate Paul's intended meaning through the use of sound exegesis while attempting to reveal how these passages shape the way we live and act today.

1 Corinthians in Canonical Context

Paul wrote that the Corinthians were a “new creation” and that the old has passed away (2 Cor 5:17). Yet, in many ways, the Corinthian church was still living as if they were still part of the old creation. Paul writes against this backdrop to teach the church of Corinth to identify with Christ, the final Adam, who took the curse of the fall on himself, redeemed his people, and thus paved the way for restoration. Paul brings together a number of biblical theological themes to reveal Christ as the one on whom the end of ages has come and that the church is identified in him.

New Creation

At creation, God placed man in a garden where in fulfilling his purpose, he was to both work/serve (עבד) the garden and to keep/protect (שמר) it. In the center of this garden, God placed two trees: the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. With these trees placed in the center of man's abode, he is reminded

by the tree of life that while he is to cultivate life, God alone creates it.³⁵ The tree of the knowledge of good and evil taught man the necessity of obedience. Man was to dwell in the presence of God by bearing his image as he cultivated the life created by God and obeyed his commands. The New Testament teaches that this old creation now overlaps with the new creation which arrived in Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection brings life to Israel (Dan 12:1–2) and cleanses sin, inaugurates the reign of a new David and the emergence of a new temple with a new covenant (Ezek 37:23–28).³⁶ In 1 Corinthians 15:1–28, Paul reveals that this age has arrived, yet there is still more to come as the kingdom looks forward to its consummation.

An aspect of the new creation theme that should be noted is that of Christ being the final Adam. The first Adam had failed to obediently reign over the earth. God recommissioned Noah to fulfill the adamic task but he also failed (Gen 9:21). As the Old Testament develops, we find Israel and David, as well as records of their failure. Christ, however, is the final and true Adam and the reign that had belonged to Adam was given to Jesus and sealed by his resurrection.³⁷

Paul pulls this together to speak of eschatological hope in 1 Corinthians 15 by speaking of the death that entered the world through the first Adam, but life through the final Adam, which is Christ (1 Cor 15:22). He speaks of heavenly bodies that will differ from earthly bodies because as the earthly body finds its origins in Adam, formed from the dust of the earth, while the heavenly body finds its origins in Christ, the final Adam from heaven. Paul not only speaks of the body of Christ in an eschatological future, but in 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 he describes the church as a

³⁵ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1a (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 202.

³⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 548.

³⁷ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 546.

body in the Holy Spirit, thus finding its origins in heaven (1 Cor 15:42–49). He established this truth by first calling the gospel to mind as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy (1 Cor 15:1–11) and thus speaking of the resurrection of Christ to establish his teaching on eschatological hope.

New Temple

Paul teaches the Corinthians that the church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16–17). Leading up to this description, he uses garden imagery to speak of Apollos planting and himself watering, thus cultivating life that was created by God (1 Cor 3:6–9). This fruitfulness in the garden in connection with intimacy with God is an Old Testament theme carried out in the Temple, which was a place where man would dwell with God.

Both the Temple and the garden of Eden are intricately linked throughout Scripture. T. Desmond Alexander summarizes: Eden and sanctuaries were entered from the east and guarded by cherubim, the lampstand recalls the tree of life, arboreal-themed decorations, the Levitical priests were charged to *עָבַד* and *שָׁמַר* the Temple as man was to the garden, and gold and onyx were used to decorate sanctuaries and priestly garments.³⁸ Solomon, the builder of the Temple, seems to understand this imagery in describing the ideal marriage in Song of Songs as he references the Shulammite bride with imagery that recalls both Temple and the garden of Eden.³⁹

Israel failed to obey and was exiled to the east into Babylon just as Adam and Eve were exiled into the east. Christ then came and rebuilt the Temple in three days. This biblical theology of the Temple undergirds Paul's words as he describes

³⁸ Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 22–23.

³⁹ See James M. Hamilton Jr., *Song of Songs: A Biblical-Theological, Allegorical, Christological Interpretation* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2015), 84–87.

the church like a garden and calls them a temple.

With this perspective established, Paul addresses the issues of disunity, sexual immorality, unstable marriages, idolatry, and disorderly worship to show that to practice sin is to act just as the serpent and bring sin into the garden. It is to act as rebellious Israel and defile the Temple. The person who makes a practice of this evil is a person living in exile from the kingdom with 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 describing the ungodly as unable to inherit the kingdom of God. The people of God, however, are a new creation and the new temple of the Holy Spirit.

New Exodus

The exodus theme emerges throughout 1 Corinthians. Paul associates the church with Israel by describing them as having been baptized under the same cloud, passed through the sea, having eaten the same spiritual food and having drank from the same spiritual rock (1 Cor 10:1–5). Paul describes these things as *τύποι* for the church, events which prophetically anticipate the work of Christ and new covenant blessings.

Paul understands the servant narratives in Isaiah as a key to understanding the church under a new exodus. Schreiner rightly argues that this involved a “liberation from Babylon which is followed by the realization of Gods promises to Abraham.”⁴⁰ Isaiah 11:15–16 draws from Exodus imagery to speak of a time when there would be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of Israel—recalling Israel’s trek out of Egypt. In Isaiah, this exodus would occur as a result of the righteous “Branch” (Isa 11:1). In Isaiah 42, the prophet continues to employ Exodus imagery. Isaiah 48 describes God delivering his people as they drank water from the rock (Isa 48:21). Paul picks up on this imagery to show the Corinthian church that they all

⁴⁰ Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 48. Schreiner draws specifically from the servant narratives in Is 11:15–16; 40:3–11; 42:16; 43:2, 5–7, 16–19; 48:20–21; 49:6–11; 51:10.

drank from the same rock as God's people under a new exodus (1 Cor 10:4). Paul viewed this new exodus as an already-not yet reality.

New Israel

In the introduction to the book, Paul establishes that the Corinthian church belongs to a new Israel. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, he references the church as those called to be "saints," echoing Daniel 7:21–22. He draws from Daniel 7 again in 1 Corinthians 6:2 to describe the saints as those who would judge the earth. The saints that would judge are the new people of God.

New Covenant

Hamilton describes the Bible's central theme as "the glory of God in salvation through judgment."⁴¹ Just as the people of Israel were saved through the judgment that fell on the Passover lamb, so Paul picks this theme up in 1 Corinthians 5:7 to highlight Jesus as the fulfillment of the Passover as the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:14). As Israel was freed from bondage to Egypt through judgment, so the church is freed from the bondage of sin through the judgment that fell on Christ. As Israel headed for the new land after this deliverance, so the church is headed for the New Jerusalem after the salvation that came through judgment on Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1–3, Paul explains that the events of the gospel transpired "in accordance with the Scriptures," thus bringing a new law and covenant into the world with the old one having been fulfilled in Christ. The Law is kept through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16). This outpouring was promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34, where under this New Covenant, God's law would be placed within the hearts of his people. Ezekiel 36:26–27 promises that God would

⁴¹ Hamilton, *What is Biblical Theology?*, 41.

cleanse and put his Spirit within his people causing them to be obedient.

Paul continuously reminds the Corinthian church that they are a spiritual people who are to exemplify spiritual wisdom (1 Cor 2:6–16), spiritual exodus (1 Cor 10:1–13), and spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1–13). In 1 Corinthians 15:1–5, Paul writes about how this New Covenant came into being. He indicates that under this covenant, people are being saved and that if they hold fast, their belief will not be in vain. This new covenant serves as the fulfillment of the previous covenants in the Old Testament.

The New Covenant fulfills the broken covenant between God and Adam as Christ serves as the final Adam. It fulfills the promises to Abraham as God's people are brought in from the nations and are no longer ἐθνῶν (1 Cor 12:2). This New Covenant brings the forgiveness of sins and restores the broken relationship with Israel, administered through the new Davidic king, as promised by God.⁴²

Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul picks up on Old Testament types, themes, and metaphors to teach the gospel from the Scriptures and points to an eschatological future that is picked up in other places in the New Testament such as Revelation 22:1–3, where the New Jerusalem corresponds to the Temple.⁴³

Biblical Texts

The following seven passages of Scripture taken from 1 Corinthians represent Paul's confrontation with spiritual issues that stem from the church at Corinth failing to find their identity in Christ. Paul's main task in 1 Corinthians is to

⁴² For a description of how the covenants relate, particularly to the New Covenant, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 511–12.

⁴³ Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 22–23.

bring unity to the church under the lordship of Christ.⁴⁴

1 Corinthians 1:1–9

In his introduction, Paul addresses the church with the title that encompasses what he desires the church to know about themselves. They are saints in Christ. By addressing them this way, he recalls Daniel 7, when the Son of Man came to the Ancient of Days and the kingdom was given to the saints to possess. These saints were represented by the Son of Man as their corporate head. Christ is the fulfillment of these things and Paul wants the church at Corinth to know that they are the saints who live under the corporate headship of Christ, the Son of Man who is the true Israel.⁴⁵ After the coming of Christ, they are the saints to whom the kingdom has been given. They are also the *ἐκκλησία*, ordinarily translated in the LXX from קְהָלָא (Judg 20:2; 1 Kgs 8:14, 22, 55; 12:3; et. al). In so doing, Paul describes the church as a new Israel.

In verses 4–7, he expresses his thankfulness for them. He gives the encouragement that as the people of Christ, just as Israel was the possessor of the knowledge of God, they are enriched in the knowledge of him.

In verses 8 and 9, he then addresses them as anticipating the day of the Lord in Jesus Christ. Just as Israel had anticipated the coming day of the Lord when God would bring about his judgment (Zech 14, Isa 2, 13, Jer 46:10, Ezek 13, 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2), so the people of God in Corinth can anticipate the coming day of the Lord when his judgment will be executed. As Paul highlights throughout the epistle,

⁴⁴ While a central theme for 1 Corinthians is a topic of debate, I am taking the approach of a broader central theme that encompasses all of Paul's arguments while giving attention to critical issues and themes that encompass large sections of this letter. Ciampa and Rosner suggest four key themes of the letter: the lordship of Christ, worldwide worship, the eschatological temple, and the glory of God. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 33.

⁴⁵ For a further description of this prophecy being fulfilled in Christ, see P. Chase Sears, *Heirs of Promise: The Church as the New Israel in Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 19–20.

their obedience falls short of their status in Christ. Yet Paul sets before them a vision of who they are in Christ so that they might live into that identity. Christ is the fulfillment of what they lack, and it is in him where they find holiness as a new people.⁴⁶

1 Corinthians 3:5–23

Once Paul establishes a right concept of spiritual wisdom, he rebukes the church for her inability to be given solid food. In verses 5–8, Paul employs Edenic imagery when he speaks of himself planting and Apollos watering with God giving the growth. This illustration depicts Eden, when Adam was given the task of cultivating life and vitality that was given by God.

In verses 9–10, Paul begins speaking of the responsibility of working together to build up the church using a building metaphor. By doing this, Paul draws the connection between the garden and Temple in the Old Testament. He describes himself and Apollos as workers building the Temple of God, which is the church.⁴⁷ He transitions to Temple imagery from the Old Testament and provides an exemplary model of thinking spiritually in expositing the Scriptures as they apply to the Corinthians' lives.

In verse 11, he shows that the only true foundation was already laid in Christ. In verse 12, Paul references the building of Solomon's Temple (1 Chron 29:1–2) by revealing the materials that David provided for it as a symbol of work according to God's wisdom that will last. By contrast wood, hay, and straw represent work of humanly wisdom that will be burned. Those who build with the materials that Christ (the Son of David) provided will see it stand in the end on Christ's

⁴⁶ For further description, see Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 32.

⁴⁷ Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 19.

foundation, while those who labor their own way, though they are saved, will suffer the shame of losing all of their work.

In verse 16, Paul considers how the temple of God—the people of the church—is to be holy. A temple is identified by its god, so the church is to find its identity in Christ. Thiselton argues that those who would destroy the temple are those who feed division; they are bringing destruction on themselves as they are “pitting themselves against the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁸

This passage is a call for church unity. This unity is to be found in working together to build up the church in such a way that everybody’s work is complementary. Paul is here employing biblical theology as a way of promoting true Christian fellowship.

1 Corinthians 9:1–23

After speaking about surrendering rights out of concern for weaker brethren, Paul shifts the focus to the rights of those who preach the gospel. In verses 1–7, Paul defends his ministry by comparing himself with the other apostles. In verse 8, he transitions his defense to reveal how he came to his conclusion by doing biblical theology on the Old Testament Law. This defense reveals how Paul’s view of the Old Testament was influenced by the New Covenant in Christ.⁴⁹

In verses 9–12, Paul concludes that he and Barnabas have the rightful claim to reap material provision from those amongst whom he is cultivating life. This law in Deuteronomy, then, has broader meaning than perhaps even intended by Moses.

In verses 13–14, Paul once again alludes to the Temple. Just as God gave

⁴⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 68.

⁴⁹ See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 408.

man food from the garden that he was to cultivate, and provided food for the oxen who cultivated the land, he also ensured that the priests in the temple were provided for in service to the place that reflected life in the garden by the food from the temple. These principles applied to Israel as the Law was given during their exodus. Paul is indicating that a new exodus has emerged as Christ has delivered his people from the bondage of sin and they are to live like people who are freed. A greater exodus has come as the Law has been fulfilled in Christ. Now those who sow a spiritual seed through the preaching of the gospel are given the right to be provided for materially.⁵⁰ This example gives the church insight into how they are to treat others according to God's design, while also teaching the principle of laying down certain rights for the cause of the gospel.

After expressing his rights, in verses 14–23 Paul acknowledges his waiver of those rights so that he can preach the gospel free of charge, which he considers his reward. Refusing his rights permits him to move freely amongst various groups of people to advance the gospel.

1 Corinthians 10:1–13

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be identified in Christ, rather than the idolatry of the world. In verses 1–2, he refers to the Israelites being baptized under the pillar of cloud in the wilderness years (Exod 13:17–22) and led them through the waters where their contemporaries were killed (Exod 14). Paul once again does biblical theology on these passages by revealing how they fit in the history of redemption and reveals that these events point to baptism in Christ (Rom 6:13; Gal 3:27).

⁵⁰ See Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 392. Here, Schreiner shows that Paul is using a lesser to greater argument. Oxen get provision for work, so preachers of the gospel should as well. Sowers in the spiritual realm should be provided for in the physical realm. Workers in the Temple rightfully receive provision, so workers of the gospel should as well.

In so doing, Paul picks up on the theme of God's deliverance of his people through the waters of destruction. When God destroyed the world through the flood, Noah and his family passed through the water that destroyed their contemporaries, signaling a new birth for the world through Noah, thus bringing about the Noahic covenant. After the failure of Noah, God raised up Moses, who also passed through the waters that destroyed his contemporaries in the Nile as he lay in a basket, then God brought about the Sinai covenant.⁵¹ Israel then passed through the Red Sea, where the Egyptians were killed. God then delivered Israel into a new land where they could serve him and identify with him. Identifying with Israel, Christ was baptized in the Jordan, signaling a new age to come, that he would provide through his death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism, therefore, proclaims this New Covenant reality.

In verses 3–4, Paul alludes to the manna that God provided in the wilderness as the spiritual food and the water that came from the rock as spiritual drink. He then argues that this was a type of Christ, who came and employed this same narrative in John's gospel to indicate that he is the "bread of life" (John 6:33, 35, 51) and the "living water" (John 7:37–38). Both Paul's and Jesus' imagery is Edenic. God provided the life-giving fruit of the Tree of Life and living waters flowing through the garden. Just as God had shown this kind of provision in life-giving food and water to a starving and parched Israel, so he provides spiritual food and drink to the spiritually starving and parched. Thus, he brings life to those who are perishing.

In verses 5–13, Paul draws his conclusion on these types to speak of the disobedience of the people, citing specific examples that serve as a warning to the church. While baptism and the Lord's Supper are offered, destruction will come to

⁵¹ For relation between Noah and Moses, see Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 77.

those who reject the one who has provided life-giving food and water.⁵²

1 Corinthians 12:1–13

After writing about proper order in worship, Paul continues to discuss proper order in the church pertaining to spiritual gifts. Paul explains that gifts are to be used under the lordship of Christ and that the church needs to be informed of spiritual matters (v. 1).⁵³ In verse 2, by stating that they are no longer ἔθνη, Paul indicates that these Gentile Corinthians stand in continuity with Israel as the people of God. In verse 3, he explains that all of God's people come from the same Spirit. Verses 4–6 build off this explanation, teaching that all gifts come from the Holy Spirit and they are to be used in unity. In these verses, Paul references all three members of the Trinity to exemplify the way the church is to represent God in the way it employs spiritual gifts.⁵⁴ Paul is confident in this outpouring of spiritual gifts from the same Spirit in many forms because this is fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.⁵⁵

In verses 7–10, Paul lists gifts of the Spirit, then emphasizes once again in verse 11 that all these gifts come from the same Spirit. This passage encourages the church to be informed about spiritual matters and to use their gifts in unity while laboring for the gospel according to their giftedness. This passage also encourages the church to lead in areas that the Spirit dictates by their gifts.

⁵² See Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 376.

⁵³ Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 353.

⁵⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 567.

⁵⁵ Joel 2:28–32. Here Joel prophesies gifts of prophesy, dreams, and visions. It seems as though this list (like Paul's) is not intended to be exhaustive, but reveals God pouring out the Spirit on people to provide a variety of different gifts.

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

After speaking of the church as a body, being built up in love, and functioning in an orderly manner, Paul brings attention to the gospel in verses 1–2. He then expounds on the gospel in verses 3–4, indicating that the gospel events happened in accordance with the Scriptures.⁵⁶ Paul interprets the gospel in light of the Old Testament.⁵⁷ He describes the sacrificial death of Christ and subsequent glorification as a fulfillment of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53.

In verse 4, Paul indicates that Christ's resurrection on the third day was a fulfillment of Scripture, which is found in Jonah 1:17, where Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days. Christ described this event as a type pointing to his death, burial, and resurrection (Matt 12:39–40). The resurrection is also in accordance with Hosea 6:2–3, where he would raise up his people on the third day and his love would come on them like water, thus alluding once again to Edenic imagery. In verses 5–11, Paul then speaks of the grace of God in salvation as a result of this resurrection that happened in accordance with the Scriptures. The resurrection inaugurated the New Covenant and Paul then sets the table to speak of the eschatological hope of its consummation.

1 Corinthians 15:35–58

In in verses 35–41 Paul describes God's grace in giving an appropriate body and thus, in the new creation, God will give a new body.⁵⁸ This explanation sets up verses 42–43 for Paul to explain that what was made perishable,

⁵⁶ Ciampa and Rosner argue that Paul's use of the plural "Scriptures" indicates a generalization of the Old Testament message. This argument seems most likely, but as will be seen, a few specific Scriptures still rise to the forefront. They continue to highlight Ezek 37 and Hos 6:1–2 in their commentary—describing exile and restoration in terms of death and resurrection. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 746–47.

⁵⁷ See Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 190.

⁵⁸ See Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 804.

dishonorable, and weak will be made imperishable, honorable, and raised in power. God's people are a new creation. In verses 44–49, he describes the resurrected body as heavenly and spiritual rather than earthly because they are given to people made new in this final Adam who came from heaven.⁵⁹ With the glorified bodily resurrection of Christ comes the necessity of a glorified bodily resurrection of his people.⁶⁰

Paul then continues in verses 50–57 that in the coming day of the Lord, through his victory, Christ will give his resurrected people a new body that is imperishable and fitting for the immortality that has been provided by him. He then concludes that this hope is encouragement for God's people to know that their labor is not in vain.

⁵⁹ See Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 458. Here, Schreiner highlights that just as the first Adam precedes the last, the natural body precedes the spiritual.

⁶⁰ See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 777.

CHAPTER 2

CALLED AS SAINTS (1 CORINTHIANS 1:1–9)

Paul introduces his first letter to the Corinthians by acknowledging their status as sanctified saints who are equipped with spiritual gifts, sealed and secure for the coming day of the Lord Jesus Christ. The thesis of this chapter is that Paul exhorts the Corinthians to embrace a Christocentric identity by highlighting Christ's activity in their lives: giving them high standing as saints, giving them gifts, and preserving them to the end. I will support this thesis by examining several lines of arguments. First, I will examine Paul's use of the title "saints" to describe the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:1–3). Second, I will consider Paul's Christocentric focus as he describes God's distribution of gifts in Corinth (1 Cor 1:4–6). Finally, I will explore Paul's mention of the faithfulness of God in sustaining the saints (1 Cor 1:7–9). Considering that their calling to a new identity as saints, the distribution of gifts in Christ, and their preservation are all rooted in the work of Christ, the Corinthian's identity is shaped by and formed around the person and work of Jesus.

For many in our postmodern age, the quest for identity is a project that receives constant attention. Whereas personal significance and flourishing were once located outside subjective experiences and in objective realities, the postmodern era has witnessed a wholesale reversal of that worldview.¹ Increasing secularization and the relocation of traditional institutions such as church and family from places of

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 15. Taylor traces the plausibility structures of the pre-modern age, describing it as a time when it was impossible not to believe. Taylor continues that these plausibility structures transformed in modernity—creating a time where it was now possible not to believe. Finally, postmodernity has so altered our culture's philosophical structures that it is now impossible to believe.

cultural influence to the periphery has had a devastating effect on how postmodern people understand themselves. Decoupled from these institutions, many men and women no longer have a clear sense of their obligations, responsibilities, or even their identity. As Taylor writes, “once society no longer has a sacred structure, once social arrangements and mode of action are no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God, they are in a sense up for grabs.”²

In light of these cultural factors, pastors should help their congregations identify how the Bible establishes our identity in Christ. This identity provides a proper understanding of our obligations, responsibilities, and personal significance that is grounded in the will of God.

Scripture suggests that both identity and worship are interrelated concepts. We define our identity according to what we worship. Looking at this pattern in Scripture, Beale suggests, “What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration.”³ The person who identifies with an idol will resemble that idol in speech, conduct, values, and often in physical appearance. Idolatrous Israel was described in Isaiah 6:9–10 as unable to see, hear, or understand. Israel’s idols are described in a similar manner (Ps 115:4–6). The further a person pursues their idol, the more they will resemble it. Similarly, the person who finds their identity in Christ and worships him will begin to resemble him (Isa 32:3–4). With Christ as the highest value, those who identify with him find restoration as they resemble his speech, conduct, and biblical values with increasing measure.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul confronted a church that in many ways failed to

² Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto, Canada: House of Anansi Press, 2003), 5.

³ G.K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 16. Beale offers this thesis statement as he compares the similarities between the way idols and those who worship them are described in Scripture. He traces a pattern of idol worshippers being as spiritually empty and shameful as the idols they worship.

rightly understand worship and their identity in light of the gospel. For many in the Corinthian congregation, their identity and self-understanding emerged from lesser things such as loyalty to a dynamic leader, social advancement, worldly wisdom, sex, drunkenness, and spiritual gifts. As a result, Paul begins his letter by reminding the Corinthians of their identity in Christ as the most foundational solution to the problems plaguing the Corinthian congregation.

Need

Since worship shapes our identity, Christians need to revere and value Christ above all else if they are going to resemble his character. It may be easy to confess Christ as central to our identity, but far more difficult to truly worship him with a clear understanding of his person and work from Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 1:1–9, Paul establishes Christocentric identity as he addresses the church as the recipients of Old Testament messianic hope. He addresses them as the church of God—saints called to sanctity and unity as promised heirs to God’s kingdom. Knowing their status in Christ establishes the value of that identity as supreme over any identity that is not rooted in him. When the church knows and commits to its true identity, idolatrous influence and disunity wanes as they are conformed to the image of Christ. The true identity of the saints in Corinth makes Paul grateful.

Main Point

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to embrace a Christocentric identity by highlighting Christ’s activity in their lives: giving them high standing as saints, giving them gifts, and preserving them to the end.

Preview

This passage can be arranged as follows:⁴

1. Saints in Christ (1:1–3).
2. The Grace of God Received (1:4–6).
3. God’s Sustaining Gifts (1:7–9).

Context

First Corinthians is, at least in part, Paul’s response to a report on the state of the church provided by “Chloe’s people” (ὕπὸ τῶν Χλόης, 11:1). Additionally, 7:1 reveals that the Corinthians had written a letter of inquiry to Paul (Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε) regarding issues pertaining to marriage, divorce, pagan religion, order in worship, and the bodily resurrection. In response to these controversies, Paul writes 1 Corinthians to exhort the church to embrace a Christocentric identity.⁵

The letter begins with Paul using language from the Old Testament to address the Corinthian church as saints identified with the promised Son of Man who would receive the kingdom from the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:13–14). With this identity established, Paul offers his gratitude for them as these saints. This introduction serves to establish the church’s identity with Christ, which he would exhort them to embrace throughout the rest of the letter.

Exposition

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to identify with Christ by referencing their calling as saints, reception of gifts, and preservation on the Day of the Lord.

⁴ See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 53–68. While Ciampa and Rosner divide the text into more parts, their division of the text serves as the basis for the arrangement in this chapter.

⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 33. Thiselton expounds on both historical and theological terms and highlights that Paul corrects a value system beyond polity to place the “community as a whole under the criterion and identity of the cross of Christ.”

Saints in Christ (1:1–3)

As Paul identifies his audience, he uses titles that emphasize the work of Christ for the Corinthians and their union with him. In verse 1, Paul establishes who he is in Christ and what he is called to do. Tent making may be how he makes his living, but ultimately he is an apostle of the Lord.⁶ We tend to identify a person with their occupation, but Paul reveals that our true identity is who we are in Christ. Verse 2 describes the identity of God's people. In a few words, Paul establishes a biblical foundation for the Corinthian church's identity—their identity as an assembly of the Lord, their calling as saints, and their calling upon the name of the Lord.

Church of God. Paul makes a number of affirmations about the Corinthian congregation in verse 2. First, he calls them “the church of God.” Scholars have debated the primary background for Paul's use of ἐκκλησία as his descriptor for the church. Certainly, Paul's language here reflects Jesus' own use of ἐκκλησία in Matthew 16:18, but the question still remains: Why did Paul and his earliest followers choose ἐκκλησία, among other options, to describe believing communities?

While some see Jesus and Paul primarily drawing from the use of ἐκκλησία in the Septuagint to refer to the people of God, others have argued that Paul instead has in mind the Greco-Roman assemblies that gathered for political activity. In recent years, George H. van Kooten is among the most notable advocates for reading ἐκκλησία along Greco-Roman lines. He notes similarities between Roman and Christian assemblies—arguing that Paul sought to distinguish the church from civic

⁶ See C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968), 30–31. Here, Barrett examines Paul's assertion of apostleship with attention to its “delicately balanced authority,” which the Corinthians called into question.

assemblies.⁷

In response, Greg Beale argues that van Kooten's thematic parallels are not as strong as the literary allusions to the Septuagint, which also draw strong thematic parallels from the Old Testament.⁸ While acknowledging Greco-Roman background of ἐκκλησία in Paul's writings is plausible, Beale suggests that ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ is likely a direct quote from Nehemiah 13:1.⁹ He grounds this argument by noting that Nehemiah 13:1 is the only place in the Old Testament where ἐκκλησία and θεοῦ occur together and also suggests strong thematic similarities in the way the phrase is used.¹⁰

While some scholars suggest that ἐκκλησία is a collective term for the people of God, it must be noted that it is exclusively used in the LXX as a translation from the Hebrew לְהִקָּרָא.¹¹ When לְהִקָּרָא occurs in the Old Testament, it is characterized by an assembly, thus it seems best to interpret ἐκκλησία in the New Testament as a group that assembles together.¹²

Beale argues that θεοῦ is either a genitive of possession or origin—

⁷ George H. van Kooten, "Ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ: The 'Church of God' and the Civic Assemblies (ἐκκλησίαι) of the Greek Cities in the Roman Empire: A Response to Paul Trebilco and Richard A. Horsley," *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 4 (October 2012): 527.

⁸ G.K. Beale, "The Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 2 (December 2015): 163.

⁹ Beale, "The Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited," 164.

¹⁰ Beale, "The Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited," 152–58. Beale suggests that Nehemiah 13:1 is a quotation of Deuteronomy 23:4, thus highlighting the gathering of the people accompanied with the teaching of the Word. While acknowledging Deuteronomy 23:4 uses Κυρίου instead of θεοῦ, Beale suggests that the two words are interchangeable, highlighting that "LXX mss S and L read Κυρίου" in Nehemiah 13:1, indicating a scribal edit to link Neh 13:1 with Deut 23:2. He continues to show that this interchangeability was common in Jewish literature, highlighting both Philo's writings and the Qumran community.

¹¹ Darrell Grant Gaines, "One Church in One Location: Questioning the Biblical, Theological, and Historical Claims of the Multi-Site Church Movement" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 50.

¹² Gaines, "One Church in One Location," 52–53. Gaines acknowledges some New Testament passages where ἐκκλησία is used in reference to dispersed Christians (Acts 8:3; 9:31; 20:17) but argues that these passages still hold the expectation that at some point, these people do assemble together.

suggesting that perhaps both are intended.¹³ Either way, it seems to be a call to humility as the church does not belong to, or originate in any human group or leader, but God alone.¹⁴ The title by which Paul addresses them establishes the Christocentric unity that he will exhort them to uphold.

Sanctified saints. Second, Paul refers to the Corinthians as “sanctified in Christ Jesus” and “saints.” The words “sanctified” and “saints” are juxtaposed as a wordplay: (1) They are sanctified—*ἡγιασμένοις*. (2) They are called as saints—*ἁγίοις*. The repetitive nature of these words leads Conzelmann to question if the second clause should be deleted as a gloss—arguing that otherwise Paul’s language would seem “overloaded.”¹⁵ Barrett likewise argues that it may not be part of the original text.¹⁶ However, Paul is declaring Christ’s calling on these saints and the sanctification that takes place as a result of that calling. Paul’s use of these two words build his argument. Their sanctification is the result of their being called as saints—a work of God that leads to calling upon the name of the Lord.¹⁷ Therefore, the phrase “In Christ Jesus” is instrumental to show the means by which the saints are called and sanctified.¹⁸

Thiselton rightly suggests that—just like the repetition of “Christ Jesus” six times in such a short segment—this repetition is a deliberate means to “draw the

¹³ Beale, “The Background of *ἐκκλησία* Revisited,” 155.

¹⁴ For a more thorough analysis of the significance of this genitive, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 73.

¹⁵ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975), 21.

¹⁶ Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 32.

¹⁷ Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 76–77.

¹⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 32. Fee notes that the salutation as a whole stresses that Paul’s apostleship, the Corinthians conversion, and their grace and peace are effected through Christ.

reader's attention away from themselves and even away from the writer to Christ."¹⁹ Additionally, the manner by which Paul identifies the church mirrors the way he identifies himself. Ciampa and Rosner highlight this similarity: "He is an *apostle* by *calling*; they are a *holy people* by *calling*. He is an apostle *of Christ Jesus*; they are sanctified *in Christ Jesus*. He is an apostle *by the will of God*; they are *the church of God*."²⁰ By identifying the Corinthians according to these theological categories, Paul draws attention away from themselves to the work of Christ and their union with him.

While saints is a fairly common title for God's people in the Old Testament, Paul's use of the term in 1 Corinthians most likely echoes Daniel 7:13–14, 18, 22, 27.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed...But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever (Dan 7:13–14, 18).

Both Daniel 7 and 1 Corinthians 1 focus on the eschatological fulfillment of a global messianic kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul describes the saints as calling upon the name of the Lord in every place, thus indicating a worldwide reign in fulfillment of eschatological hope—following the pattern of Jesus' self-description in the Olivet discourse (Matt 24).

In Daniel 7, Daniel describes the same phenomena. The saints receive the kingdom of the Son of Man, one which includes "all peoples." Later in Daniel 7, as the war with the fourth beast is described, verse 22 states that "judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the

¹⁹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 73.

²⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 56.

kingdom.” The vision concludes in verse 27 that the kingdom and dominion will be given to the saints of the Most High. Comparing Daniel 7:17 (where the beasts are considered kings) with Daniel 7:23 (where the beasts are considered kingdoms), Beale suggests that these beasts are kingdoms represented by an individual king, and thus the divine Son of Man is the individual king who represents Israel.²¹ Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man in the gospels and Paul identifies the Corinthian church with Christ as the saints.²²

Paul is telling the church that they are the saints under the priestly kingship of Christ because they have been made holy. The inheritance and authority of the kingdom was given to the Son of Man who came to the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man extended this dominion to the saints. In this way, Paul defines the church’s identity as the new Israel to help them recognize their place in God’s unfolding plan of salvation and identify them with the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s Messianic promises.

As Paul addresses the Corinthian church in this manner, he exhorts them to identify as saints, just as Paul identifies himself as an apostle. Paul finds his identity in Christ, who called him as an apostle, so the church is to find its identity in Christ, who called them as the holy ones. By establishing a clear vision of this identity, Paul prepares them to see the scandal of bringing sin into the church fellowship. By labeling them “holy ones” Paul identifies them with God’s promise to Israel in Exodus 19:5–6 where Israel’s obedience would result in their becoming a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This obedience was ultimately accomplished by Christ and, as a result, the church in union with him is that holy people. Their

²¹ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 192–93.

²² See P. Chase Sears, “The Church as the New Israel in Romans” (ThM thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 56.

high standing is a work of Christ that forms their identity.

Calling on the Lord. Finally, in addition to being called as saints, Paul addresses the saints as “σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν.” The church is one; together with those who call upon the Lord in every place. Paul references that the saints have gone forth and call upon the Lord in every place—both Jew and Gentile—while the gospel spreads throughout the world.

Paul intends for the Corinthian church to see itself as the new Israel. Deuteronomy continuously speaks of the place which God will choose to have his name dwell (12:11, 21, 26; 14:23–24; 16:2, 6, 11; 17:8, 10; 26:2). Malachi 1:11, however, indicates that in the eschatological age, the people of God will worship him “in every place. Paul now addresses the Corinthians as united with those who call on the name of the Lord “in every place.”²³ They are a new Israel and the fulfillment of Malachi 1:11.²⁴

Paul’s allusions to these eschatological realities continue in verse 3 as he offers the greeting “χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.” The common Semitic greeting is shalom. Fee suggests that Paul adds “grace” to the normal Hebrew salutation “peace” to show peace flowing out of grace as both flow out of “God our Father.”²⁵ Paul’s greeting was distinctive and while considering Fee’s insights, Ciampa and Rosner describe the phrase as “Paul’s shorthand for the eschatological benefits that we have received in Christ.”²⁶ Just as God often described Israel as his son in the Old Testament (Deut 14:1; Ps 73:15; Jer

²³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 57.

²⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 58.

²⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 31.

²⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 59.

3:19; Hos 11:1), so now Paul places the church in that same position, identifying the church in Christ as fathered by God.

Not only does this grace and peace come from the Father, but from “κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.” Ciampa and Rosner argue that this title draws from Messianic expectation, which points the audience to the universal lordship of the Davidic king and Son of God.²⁷ This new Israel is centered around Christ, who is the true fulfillment of Israel and has come to the Ancient of Days and received eternal dominion—sharing his reign with the saints. After establishing awareness of this identity, bringing grace and peace, Paul then expresses gratitude for these saints because of what God has done for them.

The Grace of God Received (1:4–6)

Paul follows his greeting with a thanksgiving, which he does at the beginning of each of his letters with the exception of Galatians (where circumstances preclude him from doing so). Paul’s thanksgiving in 1 Corinthians continues to focus on the work of God in Christ on behalf of the Corinthians—giving a Christocentric focus to the grace they received. Paul highlights the source of these gifts of grace by expressing them in the passive voice. The grace of God *was given* them (τῇ δοθείσῃ) in Christ Jesus. They *were enriched* (ἐπλουτίσθητε) in him. The testimony *was confirmed* (ἐβεβαιώθη) among them. Paul’s use of the passive voice furthers his emphasis on the Corinthians’ Christocentric identity. The gifts they have received are acts of God’s grace to them in Christ Jesus, leaving no room for pride or self-exaltation because the work originates with God.²⁸

Ciampa and Rosner suggest that Paul’s thanksgiving in 1 Corinthians

²⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 59.

²⁸ Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 78.

serves four purposes: (1) to remind them of his teaching; (2) to exhort them to be fit for Christ's return; (3) to express his care and concern; and (4) to introduce the main themes of the letter.²⁹ They suggest that it supplies several definitions of what it means to be a Christian by citing: receiving God's grace (1:4), being enriched with spiritual gifts (1:5–7), eagerly awaiting the day of the Lord (1:7), standing shameless when the Lord is revealed (1:8), and being in fellowship with Christ (1:9).³⁰ This thanksgiving is a call to a Christocentric identity—acting like the people of God who have been made new in Christ, giving glory to him.

The verb εὐχαριστῶ is the primary verb for verses 4–9 as these verses (one sentence in Greek) describe the reasons for Paul giving thanks to his God (τῷ θεῷ). He tells them that he gives this thanks always. The word πάντοτε describes this thanksgiving as ongoing.³¹ The occasion (ἐπὶ) for this gratitude is the grace that was given in Christ. The aorist passive participle δοθείση shows the grace of God that they received at salvation is the means by which the rest of the gifts come.³² The entirety of Paul's gratitude and the fruit they bear is a result of their being made one with Christ—identified in him.

In verse 4, Paul expresses that he gives thanks to “my God” for them.³³ Ciampa and Rosner suggest that despite the issues he is responding to, he acknowledges that the God he serves (“my God”) is the same God who gave them

²⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 61.

³⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 62.

³¹ See Thistelton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 89.

³² Thistelton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 89–90.

³³ Some manuscripts omit μου leading some scholars to translate this phrase “to God” rather than “to my God.” See Thistelton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 89. Metzger, however, explains the omission as scribal errors and argues that θεῷ μου has strong support from a variety of witnesses. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 478.

grace.³⁴ Paul is possibly distinguishing God from the numerous gods of Corinth, which the church there once served.³⁵

Paul's gratitude is based on God's grace. While Paul offers gratitude for a variety of reasons in the beginning of his letters, nowhere else is grace so central. Paul's view of grace leaves no room for idolatry (Rom 5:21; 6:1–3, 14). Grace provides the means to overcome their issues, put away idolatry, and live as Christ's holy possession (Titus 2:11–14). Schreiner argues that grace here is not restricted to the free gift of salvation, but also speaks of Christ's transforming power.³⁶ This grace that transforms believers is shown in purity, worship,³⁷ and spiritual gifts³⁸—manifesting God's gracious activity among his people.³⁹ Paul reveals that the holiness he is exhorting them toward is fully attainable because of God's gift of grace in Christ Jesus—bringing a Christocentric focus to these matters. Paul is grateful for the Corinthians because of what God has accomplished in them.

In verse 5, Paul uses the passive verb to explain that in the grace of God, their enrichment indicates their faith. The Corinthians, however, seem to glorify themselves rather than humbly recognize the giver of grace. Specifically, Paul highlights their gifts of speech and knowledge, which scholars commonly believe to be those most prized in Corinth. It is important to note the connection with 1

³⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 63.

³⁵ See Paul Barnett, *1 Corinthians: Holiness and Hope of a Rescued People* (Fearn, Scotland: Christians Focus, 2011), 20.

³⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 54.

³⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 63.

³⁸ Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 36–37; See also Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 26–27.

³⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 35. Here, Fee compares this text with Romans 12:6, where Christians are given different gifts (χαρίσματα) according to God's grace (χάρις) given to them. He suggests that Paul associates the similar words grace (χάρις) and gifts (χαρίσματα) to express the gifts as "God's gracious activity in God's people."

Corinthians 12:8, where Paul uses the same root words (λόγος γνώσεως) as in 1 Corinthians 1:5 (λόγω καὶ...γνώσει) to describe these gifts. Schreiner notes that Paul is giving thanks for these gifts even though the Corinthians are abusing them—indicated in 1 Corinthians 12–14.⁴⁰ In 1 Corinthians 1:5, these gifts are highlighted with gratitude, signifying a reason to rejoice, but an incorrect use of them is cause for concern (1 Cor 4:8).

The conjunction καθὼς can function here either as a causative or comparative clause. Contextually, it seems best to translate it comparatively based on 1 Thessalonians 1:5, where Paul describes the gospel as coming to the Thessalonians not only in word, but also in the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ This conclusion seems most fitting considering that Paul wrote of his confidence in the Thessalonian reception of the gospel based on the Holy Spirit and he seems to be speaking in a similar way to Corinth. In so doing, Schreiner notes that Paul mentions these gifts of speech and knowledge as evidence to confirm their calling for God’s glory.⁴² Paul does not regard the testimony as his, but as “the testimony of Christ”, thus bringing a Christocentric focus to the testimony that was confirmed in them as they were given a new identity in Christ.

It should be noted that these gifts came in relation to the Corinthian reception of the gospel, not at some later time. Knowing that some of the

⁴⁰ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 55.

⁴¹ See Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 64; see also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 38. Fee suggests that the comparative translation becomes evident as it connects to verse 7, where Paul witnessed that spiritual gifts were confirmed among them. Conzelmann suggests a causative translation based on ἐβεβαιώθη as a Hellenistic expression that focuses on the development of a community. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 27. Schreiner, however, contends that it is a legal term, thus suggesting evidence. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 55.

⁴² See Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 55; see also Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 43. Schreiner follows suit with Morris’ view that the gifts serve as evidence, but builds the argument grammatically by noting ἐβεβαιώθη as a legal term (as previously noted), where the evidence validates their reception of the gospel.

Corinthians were unwilling to follow Paul in favor of others (1 Cor 1:12), this statement speaks not only to confirm the Corinthian salvation, but Paul's credibility.

We can see then that Paul highlights these points to remind the Corinthians of their Christocentric identity. Christ accomplished their salvation and gifted them. The work of Christ in them confirms their preservation in him. Christ's faithfulness confirms their fellowship with him.

God's Sustaining Gifts (1:7–9)

Paul brings a Christocentric focus to the Corinthian's future hope by emphasizing the faithfulness of God in sustaining them to the end as they await the Day of the Lord. Verse 7 indicates that the Corinthians are enriched, not lacking in spiritual gifts. While they became prideful in regard to their gifts, the fact that they are not lacking is evidence that God has given his grace in salvation to them. Though Paul seems to speak of the gifts broadly, this text links with 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul uses the same word to describe spiritual gifts throughout the chapter.⁴³ Just as they do not lack speech and knowledge, they do not lack any gift—confirming their calling and Christocentric identity.

In the preceding verses, Paul identified the church with God by adding grace (χάρις) to a common phrase, saying “grace and peace to you” (1 Cor 1:3). He then expounded on that addition of grace in verse 4, explaining that the “grace of God” (χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ) was given to them in Christ Jesus. In verse 7, Paul further explains that this grace is accompanied with gifts of grace (χαρίσματι), which they do not lack. In so doing, Paul uses the term broadly to speak of both redemption in

⁴³ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 55. Schreiner stresses that in 1 Cor 12, the word is used five times in reference to spiritual gifts (12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31).

Christ and spiritual gifts that enrich the Corinthians.⁴⁴ These spiritual gifts provide for the church as they wait for the day of the Lord—manifesting Christ in them.

In his letters, Paul describes the day of the Lord as a coming⁴⁵ (1 Cor 15:23;16:17), an appearing⁴⁶ (Titus 2:13), and here in 1 Corinthians 1:7 Paul focuses on Christ’s revealing (ἀποκάλυψιν).⁴⁷ As Israel anticipated the revealing of the Lord (Isa 40:5), so the church—the new Israel—places its hope in the coming revelation of Christ, when full revelation of his glory is given.

Israel was informed in Deuteronomy 29:29 that “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” The righteous obedience according to this law has now been given to God’s people forever through the revelation of Christ Jesus who fulfilled the law. Israel awaited the revealing of a savior and now the church—knowing that savior—awaits the revealing of Christ in his second coming. The Corinthians were enriched with gifts that confirm their calling as these saints identified in Christ.

Paul views the gospel as a mystery that has now been revealed in Christ (Rom 16:25). Though Christ has been revealed, we do not yet see Christ as we will at the day of the Lord’s second coming. Seeing Christ in this way caused John to fall at

⁴⁴ See Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 43. Morris takes into account that the term could be used to speak of salvation, gifts in general, or gifts of the Spirit, preferring this verse to speak of God’s good gifts in general. Ciampa and Rosner view this term broadly as well, suggesting that it is not limited to the spiritual gifts of chapter 12, but also the gift of grace (Rom 5:15–16) and eternal life (Rom 6:23). Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 65; See also, Charles Hodge, *1&2 Corinthians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 8. Hodge draws a line of differentiation between ordinary gifts of salvation and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, suggesting that Paul intends to encompass both, but emphasizes the latter.

⁴⁵ παρουσία

⁴⁶ ἐπιφάνειαν

⁴⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 65.

Jesus' feet upon seeing him clearly (Rev 1:7).⁴⁸ The gifts, however, set the church in anticipation of his coming, appearing, and revealing when the full disclosure of Christ in his glory will belong to his bride. This anticipation reminds the church of their identity in Christ.

The anticipation of Christ's revealing seems to be a humbling reminder that all is not complete. The gifts are worth celebrating, but they are not the final glory. Paul expounds further in 1 Corinthians 13 where love is described as the greatest of them all because it endures eternity (1 Cor 13:8). The gifts assist the church in setting her hope on the future advent of Christ, offering a foretaste of the glory to be revealed.⁴⁹

In verse 8, Paul reasons that the church is to anticipate the glory to be revealed because they will be preserved and stand blameless in that day. Schreiner notes that blamelessness should not be confused with being sinless, but should be understood in terms of perseverance.⁵⁰ Ciampa and Rosner describe this blamelessness as a legal metaphor, where they will be confirmed as “not guilty” at the last judgment.⁵¹ The verb translated for “will sustain you” (βεβαιώσῃ) is the same verb translated “was confirmed” (ἐβεβαιώθη) in verse 6—communicating to the Corinthians that just as their salvation was confirmed, their preservation in the faith is also confirmed. Scholars commonly compare this statement with Philippians 1:6, where Paul states that God will bring his work to completion. The phrase “to the end,” ἕως τέλους can be translated with the idea of perseverance to the end or a

⁴⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 66.

⁴⁹ See Hodge, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 9.

⁵⁰ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 56.

⁵¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 66–67.

completion.⁵² Some scholars suggest that a twofold meaning is intended by Paul—completion to the end.⁵³

Paul's association of the day of the Lord with Jesus Christ fulfills an Old Covenant expectation with New Covenant reality.⁵⁴ This day carried dreadful expectation in the Old Testament (Isa 13:6, 9; Ezek 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 1:15; Zeph 1:7–8, 14; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:5). In contrast, the church can eagerly hope for the day of the Lord Jesus Christ under the New Covenant—anticipating redemption. Paul's confidence in the Corinthian's guiltless standing in that day speaks to his confidence that they will repent from the idolatry which he prepares to address in the letter. He saw confirmation of the gospel in them, knows they are sustained by Christ, and is grateful. Paul expresses confidence in terms of past, present, and future by mentioning what God has already done as “grace was given” (1:4), what is currently taking place “as you wait” (1:7), and what will take place when “you will be sustained” (1:8).⁵⁵ Their reception of grace—leading to confirmation of gifts and sustaining by Christ—ensures victory over these sins.

In verse 9, Paul reveals what makes him so confident in their election—God is faithful and they were called into fellowship with his Son. The faithful character of God sustains and holds them guiltless in the day of the Lord. The Old Testament describes his character as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and

⁵² Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 42.

⁵³ For a more detailed analysis of this interpretation, see Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 39.

⁵⁴ See Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 56–57. Schreiner notes Paul's mention of Christ here to highlight his divine status. We can also see that as revelation of God's plan of redemption has progressed, the New Covenant reveals the “Day of the Lord” as “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

⁵⁵ Peter T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1977), 126–27.

abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Num 34:6; Ps 86:15). Schreiner argues that Paul’s view of God’s faithfulness always ties to the promise of sustaining believers to the end.⁵⁶ Paul described the Corinthians as called in verse 2 and he expounds on that calling in verse 9. He announces that their calling brings enrichment in gifts of grace. This enrichment confirms that calling both at conversion and in the end, when they are presented guiltless before God as those who were called into fellowship with Christ. Reformed scholars commonly consider this calling effectual and irresistible. Paul speaks in similar fashion in Romans 8:30, “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Those effectually called by God have the promise and seal that God will sustain them to the end and conform them to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).⁵⁷

Paul’s emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God brings with it the reality of covenant fulfillment. Christ is the promised Son of David who reigns forever as a priest-king over God’s people under a new covenant (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 110:1–4).⁵⁸ Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to a Christocentric identity, referencing Christ ten times in these first nine verses as he describes the Corinthians identity. All that God has done and will do is done in Christ Jesus.⁵⁹ Paul’s mention of calling reminds them that they are “called as saints” (1 Cor 1:2), and therefore they are joined to him to reign in the kingdom forever (Dan 7:14, 18, 22, 27).

⁵⁶ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 57. Schreiner makes this argument based on the following texts: 1 Cor 10:13; 1 Thess 5:24; 2 Thess 3:3; 2 Tim 2:13.

⁵⁷ For further discussion, see Hodge, *1&2 Corinthians*, 10–11.

⁵⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 68.

⁵⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 44.

Application

Paul's introduction in 1 Corinthians serves in various capacities as an encouragement to believers by addressing who they are in Christ. Many people in Corinth sought to build wealth and attain status.⁶⁰ Many people seek the same aspirations today, but this introduction informs the saints that they hold a greater status in Christ than anything earthly kingdoms can give. They are saints who will reign with Christ in his kingdom forever. We are called to this identity in Christ and thus encouraged to lay down the cares of this world and embrace hope in Christ. Doing so leads to unity in the church because identity with Christ unifies the body together under his lordship.

This identity is given, not earned (1 Cor 1:4). Believers need not work to receive their status because it is a gift of grace given by God. Along with this gift of grace, verses 5–7 teach that believers are enriched with every resource needed to live out this status and Christocentric identity through spiritual gifts. Over the past century, the various charismatic movements in the church have created a focus, like the Corinthians, on the gifts of the spirit which lead to spiritual pride. These movements often motivate responses from detractors which influence others to reject any notion of the visible manifestation of spiritual gifts.⁶¹ These opening verses should create a Christocentric focus on the gifts that leads to gratitude and unity, rather than a man-centered approach that leads to pride and opposition.

1 Corinthians 1:8–9 encourages believers by giving the assurance that Christ will preserve his saints eternally. This assurance is built on God's faithfulness rather than our own. God calls the believer, equips the believer, and preserves the believer eternally. Therefore, no believer has the right to claim their identity by

⁶⁰ See Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 23–24.

⁶¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 45.

anything other than Christ.

Conclusion

Paul's formation of the church's identity emerges from his understanding of God's unfolding plan of salvation revealed in the Old Testament. The church is a new Israel—a unified assembly (*ἐκκλησία*) made up of the “saints” whom Christ has given dominion in the eternal kingdom of God. The church has been given grace from God—enriched with spiritual gifts—and is thus a new creation. The church is also under a New Covenant, where eschatological Day of the Lord is to be anticipated with joyous hope based on the perfect character of God because of the promise of Christ's preservation of the saints who will reign in the kingdom. Paul's explanation of these realities are intended to unite the church with a Christocentric identity under the lordship of Christ.

CHAPTER 3

A GARDEN TEMPLE (1 CORINTHIANS 3:5–23)

In 1 Corinthians 3:5–23, Paul unpacks how ministers should conceive of their work while reflecting on the church as God’s garden-temple.¹ The thesis of this chapter is that Paul exhorts the Corinthians to embrace a Christocentric identity by showing how the new covenant community fulfills the garden-temple theme developed in the Old Testament. This thesis is supported by examining Paul’s garden metaphor (1 Cor 3:5–9), his temple metaphor (1 Cor 3:10–17), and his description of the garden, temple, and laborers all belonging to God.

Paul describes the church as a vineyard and her ministers as the keepers who labor for God. He then builds off the vineyard metaphor to describe the church as a temple, recalling the Temple of Solomon, which serves as a microcosm of the garden of Eden.² By addressing the church as a new Temple, Paul uses biblical theology to exhort them to embrace a Christocentric identity.

Paul explains that the foundation of this new Temple (the church) is Jesus Christ and leaders must be careful how they build on that foundation. A day will come when the work will be tested for its value. Those who build with perishable material will see their work destroyed, while those who build with precious stones will see their work endure. Those who seek to destroy the church will find themselves destroyed.

¹ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 245–46.

² For detailed explanation of the Temple as a microcosm of Eden, see T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 21–23.

Paul concludes his exhortation by reminding the Corinthians that aligning themselves according to charismatic leaders proves their foolishness. He cites Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11 to show how God brings the wisdom of the world to nothing. The gospel of Jesus Christ—the very foundation of the church—is foolishness in the flesh. Therefore, the Corinthians are to think spiritually about the identity of the church and their leaders.

Need

Christians need to view the church as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 3:5–23 because factions like those in Corinth exist today. The church can find itself divided over politics, preaching styles, preference for different pastors on staff, worship style preferences, and countless other matters. At the heart of this problem is misidentifying to whom we belong. Christians do not belong to a group, leader, or set of preferences. Rather, we belong to the Lord as his garden-temple. As the church embraces this understanding of Christocentric identity, unity in Christ emerges.

Main Point

The church is God’s garden-temple and thus, the only proper allegiance for the church is to Christ.

Preview

The passage can be arranged as follows:

1. God’s Garden (3:5–9)
2. God’s New Temple (3:10–17)
3. Belonging to God (3:18–23)

Context

Since Paul’s introduction, he revealed that the Corinthian’s pride

misguided their values—elevating outward appearance over the work of God. He exhorted the church to remove division over certain leaders (1 Cor 1:10–17). Paul sets the wisdom of the world in contrast with the wisdom of God as a call for the Corinthians to boast in the Lord, rather than in certain human leaders (1 Cor 1:18–31).

The divisions in the church that ensued caused Paul to have to treat them as fleshly people, rather than spiritual—feeding them a diet of milk, rather than meat because of their divisions rooted in misplaced identity (1 Cor 3:1–3). Their fleshly perspective was manifest in the division centering around whether they followed Paul or Apollos—revealing mere human (rather than spiritual) thinking (1 Cor 3:4). Paul argues that ministers are a lowly people who belong to God and merely labor for what God produces. Paul then describes the church in terms of a garden and temple to exhort the Corinthians to embrace a Christocentric identity—understanding that their teachers belong to God.

Exposition

Having just rebuked the Corinthians for their factionalism over charismatic leaders, Paul speaks of the church metaphorically as a garden-temple to exhort them to unity under the lordship of Christ.

God's Garden (3:5–9)

After comparing worldly and spiritual thinking, Paul rebukes the church for thinking as the world. Their thinking has rendered him unable to effectively give them solid food because he has to speak as if to those who are still in the world due to their jealousy and strife. By considering themselves followers of specific ministers and desiring human eloquence and wisdom, they resemble the flesh rather than the Spirit—embracing a man-centered (rather than Christocentric) identity. In the academy, students were encouraged to promote the professional attributes of their

teacher as an orator and educator—often creating strife through criticism of perceived deficiencies in other teachers.³ It seems that this worldly influence carried over into the church as the Corinthians created factions over which teacher they followed, thus acting in a fleshly way.

In verse 5, Paul asks a rhetorical question and his use of the neuter pronoun “what” instead of “who” is often noted by commentators. Fee argues that it is about Paul and Apollos’ identity, to express disdain for the Corinthians human (rather than spiritual) perspective.⁴ Others claim that it draws the attention away from the person and places it on their function.⁵ It seems most fitting that Paul is speaking to their roles, but uses this pronoun “what” to correspond with verse 7, where he answers the question.⁶

Paul describes his and Apollos’ status as servants (διάκονοι). This word carries no status of prestige, but the idea of assistance. People do not typically submit themselves under the yoke of servants. Paul mocks the Corinthian factionalism over church leaders by insisting that they are considering themselves to be followers of mere servants.⁷ These servants were each given a task as assigned by Christ. This explanation leaves no room for boasting in the minister as they are

³ Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 39.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 139.

⁵ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 67; See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 299. Thiselton suggests that Paul is using Socratic language in response to his comments on their quarreling, asking what the ministers roles amount to.

⁶ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 102. Taylor highlights the similarity between the “what in verse 5 (τι) and the “anything” in verse 7 (τι), differentiated merely by an accent mark; see also Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 145.

⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

simply servants who have been assigned to a task by God. Thus, he continues to exhort the Corinthians to form an identity centered on Christ, not human leaders.

In response to the Corinthian factions around noted figures, Paul describes these figures as servants in a common agrarian setting. He even attributes these same metaphors to both himself and Apollos (v. 6). The men the Corinthians are dividing over are not charismatic, super-leaders, but mere farm servants. Paul is the garden-worker who planted, while Apollos tended the garden. The growth, however, was an act of God.

Scholars commonly highlight that the work of Paul's planting (ἐφύτευσα) and Apollos' watering (ἐπότισεν) occur in the aorist tense, while the work of God is described in the imperfect tense (ἡϋξανε), suggesting that God's work is ongoing. Paul and Apollos' labor is a mere contribution to the continuous work of God, with whom the Corinthians are called to primarily identify.⁸ Following Robertson and Plummer, Garland suggests that the imperfect implies God giving growth throughout the work of both ministers.⁹ While this suggestion is possible, forcing the imperfect verb to state how long ago the work began seems to imply too much. It seems best to simply read the imperfect verb as an ongoing process that outlasts the ministries of mere human laborers.¹⁰ Fee rightly suggests that by addressing the church as God's field and building in the second person plural (1 Cor 3:9), Paul is not speaking of individuals, but to the church as a whole—identifying Paul as the church planter and Apollos as the one who continued with a teaching ministry.¹¹ If

⁸ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 302. Thiselton states, "Ministers come and go, but God's own work continues."

⁹ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 112.

¹⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 146.

¹¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 141.

Paul and Apollos labored for the whole Corinthian church, then the conclusion is that the whole church should unite under both of their teachings as both served their assigned duty from God, the master of the garden.

Israel was often referred to as God's metaphoric garden in the Old Testament (Isa 5:1–7; Jer 12:10; 18:9; 24:6; Ezek 36:8–9). Perhaps the text to most prominently employ this metaphor is Isaiah 5:1–7. Ciampa and Rosner note the blending of garden and building metaphors in Isaiah 5:2 and 1 Corinthians 3:5–9.¹² Beale associates the cultivation metaphor in this passage with Ezekiel 17, where God planted and watered Israel—the metaphoric vine (Ezek 17:5; 7).¹³

In verse 7, Paul shifts the focus from the equal status of the servants to God whom they serve. In this verse, he answers his previous rhetorical question: “What then is Apollos? What is Paul?” He concludes (“so then” ὥστε) neither of them is anything. Paul's intention seems to be to break up the Corinthian factions.¹⁴ After addressing the folly of identifying with certain ministers, he exhorts the church to identify with God—the one who gave the growth. By acknowledging God as the only one able to sanctify them, the natural response is to unite under God's leadership, rather than the farmhands that he employs for labor. Ciampa and Rosner rightly note that Paul does see value in human leaders, but uses hyperbole to assess the value of human leaders in comparison to God.¹⁵ Compared to the God who sanctifies them, Paul and Apollos are nothing. Their identity is to be rooted in

¹² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 143. They also note Jer 18:9; 24:6; Ezek 36:8–9.

¹³ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 248.

¹⁴ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975), 73.

¹⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 147. Here, they highlight that Paul compliments the Galatians for their loyalty to him (Gal 4:15) and the Thessalonians for being “imitators of us.” (1 Thess 1:6). However, only God deserves undivided allegiance; see also Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 102. Taylor offers a similar assessment, highlighting 1 Corinthians 4:16, where Paul exhorts them to “be imitators of me.”

Christ, not the gardeners he employs.

In verse 8, Paul calls the church to unity in Christ by speaking of the unity of Apollos and himself. Some scholars suggest that this unity refers to their purpose, while others suggest a unity of status.¹⁶ Thiselton notes that the Greek (ἔν) leaves open the possibility to speak of their status or their purpose and suggests that it beautifully embraces both.¹⁷ Considering that co-laborers work toward the same end purpose as well as Paul's repetition of comments regarding status, it seems most fitting to acknowledge that both grammatically and contextually, Paul intends to embrace both purpose and status.

As the Corinthians sought to compare ministers, Paul took himself and Apollos out of the equation by acknowledging that God alone determines a minister's reward. Fee rightly suggests that this analogy "emphasizes the servant nature of the workers" while the one they labor for determines their pay.¹⁸ This statement introduces the discussion about rewards a few verses later (1 Cor 3:13–15), and anticipates the argument that one cannot judge the servant of somebody else (1 Cor 4:1–5).¹⁹ Ciampa and Rosner follow Fee's suggestions and highlight that Paul later states that even the ministers themselves cannot judge their own success

¹⁶ Fee suggests that this unity refers to their purpose, citing the statement that each be "rewarded according to their own labor. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 142. While acknowledging that the text could be speaking of purpose, Ciampa and Rosner suggest that the context speaks to oneness of status. They state, "...in v. 5 they are both servants; and in v. 7 neither is anything (to speak of, in comparison to God). In v. 9 both are fellow workers." Thus they argue that the oneness speaks of their rank. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 147–48. Taylor responds to this argument by acknowledging its possibility, but suggesting that 1 Corinthians 4:15 gives Paul a different status as the founder of the church. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 103–04. While he makes a strong case, Paul speaks of his status in chapter 4 in comparison to the Corinthians as a father, but in chapter 3, he speaks in the context of comparing ministers to God. Paul might have a unique relationship with Corinth, but both he and Apollos share the same lowly status in comparison to God.

¹⁷ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 303.

¹⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 142–43.

¹⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 143.

or failures (1 Cor 4:4).²⁰ The one who employs the laborers determines the reward for each.²¹ Ciampa and Rosner warn against taking these rewards to be material and suggest that Paul likely has in mind a reward of work that endures (1 Cor 3:13) and is recognized by God himself.²²

Paul concludes his argument for the illegitimacy of exclusive allegiance to certain human leaders by stating who they truly belong to with three genitives of possession (God's fellow workers; God's field; God's building).²³ To think of a planter and waterer as working to outdo one another is absurd. Both rely on each other as a team to see the field grow, thus each man's work is more productive as a result of the other man's labor. A Christocentric identity forms this perspective as all are laboring for Christ.

God's New Temple (3:10–17)

The illustration of the field sets the stage for a transition to illustrate the church as God's building—they are God's garden and God's temple. The shift from garden to temple is theologically significant considering the correlation between the Temple and the garden in the Old Testament. This correlation in the Old Testament and Judaism likely influenced Paul and offers explanation for his combining of these

²⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 148.

²¹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 112–13. Garland acknowledges that the idea of rewarding each according to his work runs throughout the New Testament (Matt 16:27; Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 11:15; 2 Tim 4:14; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 2:23; 20:12–13; 22:12). He also highlights the parable of the vineyard workers, where the master gave equal wages to each at his discretion.

²² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 148.

²³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 149. The TNIV translates “fellow worker” as co-workers with God, while others translate it as fellow workers who belong to God. Ciampa and Rosner follow Garland, who argues that servants are not co-workers with their master—thus the context demands that Paul references himself and Apollos as co-laborers who belong to God. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 113; See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 89; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 306.

images in this passage.²⁴

Paul expands the metaphor from the end of verse 9 to describe the church as a building, which seems to be God's temple, as verse 16 indicates. Beale argues this point on the basis of the materials Paul lists (gold, silver, and precious stones), stating that the only other building made of such materials in Scripture is Solomon's gardenlike Temple.

"They quarried great stones, costly stones, to lay the foundation of the house" (1 Kgs 5:17); "and the inner sanctuary . . . he overlaid . . . with pure gold . . . So Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold" (1 Kgs 6:20–21). He also covered with gold the altar (1 Kgs 6:20), the cherubim around the ark (1 Kgs 6:28), the floor of the temple (1 Kgs 6:30) and the engraved work on the temple doors (1 Kgs 6:35). Indeed, "100,000 talents of gold and 1,000,000 talents of silver" were "prepared" for the construction of the entire temple (1 Chr 22:14; likewise, 1 Chr 22:16; 29:2–7). First Chronicles 29:1–7 repeatedly refers to "gold . . . silver . . . [precious] stones" (v. 2, 7–8) to be used for all the various parts, pieces of furniture and utensils of the temple.²⁵

The Corinthians are to understand themselves as God's new temple. God dwelt in Solomon's Temple and now the Corinthians are to recognize the Holy Spirit's presence within them—the new temple.

Malachi 3–4 speaks of an end time temple and Ciampa and Rosner state that "the Corinthians are the anti-type of the imposing temple of Solomon and the fulfillment of Malachi's vision of an end time temple."²⁶ They follow the argument of Beale, who describes the faithful Corinthians as part of an eschatological temple that will withstand fiery judgment, thus fulfilling Malachi 3:1–3 and 4:1.²⁷ This temple is identified with Christ.

Paul's primary concern in this paragraph is for those who are in a leadership role to build up the church. He no longer mentions Apollos, and this

²⁴ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 246.

²⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 247.

²⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 150.

²⁷ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 251.

transition from Paul and Apollos to only Paul and those currently leading at Corinth attacks the division within the church and those responsible for it.²⁸ Likely avoiding an appearance of sounding critical of Apollos, Paul gives an admonition that applies to all ministers that they must be careful how they build on the foundation of the gospel.²⁹ This judgment is not for punishment, but purification and not of people, but of their work—a judgment of “wise and unwise builders of the church.”³⁰

Paul attributes his wisdom as a master builder to God’s grace and takes no credit for his work. This statement is similar to Exodus 35:30–35, where God gave to Bezalel wisdom in building and every skilled craft to build the tabernacle.³¹ Bezalel’s work was shown favorable to God (who gave him the grace to build) when God filled the tabernacle with His glory (Exod 40:34). Paul indicates in verse 13 that the favorability of the minister’s work will be revealed by God through fire.

Paul exhorts the leaders to take care how they build upon the foundation he laid, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. If a building is built in a way that does not match the foundation laid for it, that building will eventually collapse. With God as the architect, Paul exhorts the church leaders to follow God’s instruction to build on the gospel foundation already laid for them.³² As the materials match its foundation (the gospel of Jesus Christ) the building is formed around the person and work of Christ.

In verse 11, Paul argues that nobody can build another foundation. Some scholars suggest that against his will, Peter had been considered the foundation of

²⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 147.

²⁹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 91.

³⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 150.

³¹ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 247.

³² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 115.

the church based on tradition arising from Peter's renaming (Matt 26:18).³³ This suggestion is unlikely, however, considering that Paul has transitioned away from the Paul, Apollos, Cephas factions and is addressing the leaders currently present in Corinth.³⁴ The context then suggests that Paul speaks generally to those who build upon the one true foundation, not to those attempting to build on another.³⁵ Paul is stating that Christ is the only foundation that a church can be built on if indeed it is a true church.³⁶ If Christ is the foundation, then its identity centers on him.

As previously noted, the materials Paul lists allude to Solomon's temple. Conzelmann suggests that Paul alludes to some fabulous building in the future.³⁷ Ciampa and Rosner argue against this claim, stating that Conzelmann has missed the Old Testament background.³⁸ They rightly follow Beale in recognizing 1 Corinthians 3:12 as alluding to 1 Chronicles 29:2, "I have provided for the house of my God the gold . . . silver . . . wood . . . precious stones."³⁹ Garland disagrees, arguing that such reference would not be obvious to readers and "the inclusion of hay and straw would seem anomalous."⁴⁰ He suggests that the materials simply refer to the quality of material going into the building up of the church—contrasting building with God's wisdom against attempting to build with the flimsy straw of

³³ C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1968), 87–88.

³⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 149.

³⁵ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 116.

³⁶ Shreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 92.

³⁷ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 76.

³⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 153.

³⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*; see also Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 247.

⁴⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 116.

human wisdom.⁴¹ While Garland may be correct about Paul's comparison of materials, Paul explicitly refers to the Corinthians in verse 16 as God's temple, making Beale's suggested allusions a more likely reading of the text.

Beale argues that while "Malachi portrays the refining of priests in the temple, Paul transforms the imagery by seeing that believers who are part of the temple are refined like precious metal."⁴² Beale suggests that this eschatological temple fits with Revelation 21:1–22:5.⁴³ He continues by rightly suggesting that while Paul alludes to builders building this new temple, it grows, thus fitting with the growth of the Edenic and Solomonian temples, which were intended to expand their boundaries to encompass the entire cosmos—thus expanding beyond Israel to include the Gentiles as a temple built on the foundation of Christ, revealing the true Israel.⁴⁴

The true Israel will be revealed as those who endure the fiery testing. Any treatment of the gospel as only the entry into Christian life is seriously deficient because the temple will be tested for endurance.⁴⁵ The ministers work may not be apparent in the present, but the future tense "will become manifest (*φανερόν γενήσεται*)" suggests that in time it will be revealed. The verbs "to become manifest (*γενήσεται*)," "to bring it to light (*δηλώσει*)," "to reveal (*ἀποκαλύπτεται*)," and "to test (*δοκιμάσει*)" are all used regularly in eschatological settings.⁴⁶ All ambiguity

⁴¹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 116–17.

⁴² Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 251.

⁴³ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*; Ciampa and Rosner cite Beale and further explain, suggesting that the eschatological temple in Revelation 21:1–22:5 is made up of similar materials. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 153.

⁴⁴ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 252.

⁴⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 154.

⁴⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. They rightly argue that the future tense and reference to the Day of the Lord make this eschatological reference clear.

regarding a ministers work will be removed in a definitive and public manner—leaving nothing to question.⁴⁷

Given the definitive nature of this testing, the true value of a ministers work will only be known when that future testing occurs.⁴⁸ On that day, that which was truly built with the correct materials will endure, while that which is built with human wisdom will perish—setting up a contrast between that which is man-centered and that which is Christ-centered. Malachi 3:1–5 describes a day when God will come to his temple and refine those who belong to him.⁴⁹ Isaiah 43:2 also speaks of refining through fire: “when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” Zechariah 9 also speaks of the day when God will cut off the idolaters and refine those who belong to him. Paul picks up this pattern, applying this refining to the leadership of the Corinthian church.

Paul reveals in verse 14 that those whose work survives will receive a reward. The nature of the reward is left somewhat uncertain—leading to various suggestions by scholars. Fee proposes that it includes praise from God (1 Cor 4:5), but suggests that this text implies more.⁵⁰ Garland argues that Paul views the reward as his church being saved with him (2 Cor 1:12–14).⁵¹ Schreiner makes a similar

⁴⁷ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 312–13.

⁴⁸ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 75.

⁴⁹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 92.

⁵⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 155. 1 Corinthians 4:5, “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.”; See also Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 157.

⁵¹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 119. 2 Corinthians 1:12–14, “For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand— just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.”

suggestion that the reward is seeing the work endure on the day of testing.⁵²

Given Paul's comparisons to the Christocentric gospel work that he promotes (1 Cor 2:1–4) and his rebuke for exercising the wisdom of this age (1 Cor 1:17; 2:6–7), it seems most fitting to follow Ciampa and Rosner in suggesting that the work that will be burned up is that done by human elegance and wisdom rather than the wisdom of God.⁵³

This testing is not a test of the leader's salvation, but of the eternal quality of his work. Fire is a common theme in regard to the Day of the Lord (Isa 4:5; 10:17; 66:15–16; Dan 7:9–10; Mal 3:2; 4:1; Matt 3:10–12; 7:19; 13:40–42, 49–50; 25:41; Luke 3:9, 16–17; 12:49; 17:29–30; John 15:6; 2 Thess 1:7–8; 2 Peter 3:7,12; Rev 18:8). It seems that just as evildoers will experience fiery judgment, so also works of church leaders that do not consist of the proper materials will also be destroyed.

In verse 16, Paul begins with a rhetorical question that scholars commonly interpret as a rebuke toward Corinthian church leaders for their disregard of this identity. This question occurs ten times in this letter (1 Cor 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24). It highlights that what Paul is suggesting is something that they should already be aware of. Paul may even be mocking the wisdom that the Corinthians so highly value by rebuking their failure to acknowledge what should be obvious to them.

Paul switches from the third person to the second person plural and concludes the building metaphor by describing the Corinthians as God's temple where the Holy Spirit dwells. The temple metaphor does not refer to the believer

⁵² Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 93. Schreiner makes this suggestion based on Paul's comments elsewhere regarding his church's as his crown and joy (1 Thess 2:19–20; Phil 2:16; 2 Cor 2:14).

⁵³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 156.

individually, but the church corporately.⁵⁴ This conclusion explicitly identifies the metaphor that began in verse 5, describing the Corinthians as a garden-temple. The Old Testament describes the temple sanctuary in terms of God dwelling with Israel (Exod 25:8; 29:45; Lev 26:11–12; Ezek 11:16; 37:26–28; Ps 114:2).⁵⁵ Jesus linked the temple to his body (John 2:19–21) and Paul addresses the church as the body of Christ, baptized by the Holy Spirit into that body (1 Cor 12:12–13, 29).⁵⁶

Corinth was a city adorned with grand temples for the pagan gods and the house-dwelling Corinthian church would seem inferior according to the wisdom of the world. Paul, however, dignifies them by identifying them as the temple of God.⁵⁷ Fee argues that Paul's use of temple imagery reflects the Old Testament people of God, amongst whom God chose to dwell.⁵⁸ The temple of Solomon communicated the theocentric identity of Israel. By describing the church as the new Temple, Paul communicates that the church's identity is Christocentric.

This speech is similar to the way Paul addressed the church in the introduction to the letter when he identified them as “those sanctified” and “called as saints” (1 Cor 1:2). This dignifying address warns the church of the severity of destroying the church, because as God's temple the church is very sacred and the Holy Spirit dwells within the church—making its defilement all the more heinous an offense. Ciampa and Rosner argue that this temple metaphor sets the stage for the expulsion of the incestuous man in chapter 5—arguing that he is destroyed because

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 93.

⁵⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 158.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 108.

⁵⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 159.

⁵⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 159.

he destroyed God's temple.⁵⁹

In verse 17, Paul argues that those who destroy God's temple will be destroyed by God. This warning is similar to the judgment faced in the Old Testament for defiling what God has made holy. Achan was destroyed for defiling what was set apart for God (Josh 7). Babylon faced God's judgment after plundering God's people and destroying the temple (Jer 51:11). Ohalah and Oholibah were sentenced to death for desecrating the temple (Ezek 23). Paul understands the gravity of such an offense and warns the Corinthians that the sins being addressed in this letter that destroy the church will bring destruction on those who commit them. The temple metaphor instills a sense of reverence to their Christocentric identity.

Belonging to God (3:18–23)

The paragraph that makes up these verses can be divided into two parts (3:18–20 and 3:21–23), each marked by the same opening statement (“Let no one...”).⁶⁰ The first statement speaks to the argument that occurred in 1 Cor 1:18–2:16 regarding human wisdom and the wisdom of God. He exhorts them to become fools to the world so they can be wise to God. The second statement speaks to the factionalism over charismatic leaders—rooted in the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 3:4). He argues that the church does not belong to ministers, but the ministers belong to the church, which belongs to God. Once again, their identity is not in leaders or worldly wisdom—they are united together in Christ.

In verse 18, Paul exposes those who consider themselves to be wise as living in delusion by stating, “Let no one deceive himself.” Ciampa and Rosner consider this warning as Paul's “most confrontational words to this point in the

⁵⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 159.

⁶⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 163.

letter.”⁶¹ In the previous verse, he has warned the church of the destruction that occurs with pursuing human wisdom. He then provides the solution—becoming fools to the world. Paul calls them to repentance by seeking the wisdom of God, which contrasts with human wisdom. In human wisdom, they created factions in following different teachers and Paul calls them to forsake that wisdom for the wisdom of God—embracing the message of the cross. Thiselton argues that to the world, ministers seem inferior to rhetoricians, but in God’s eyes they are stewards of the mysteries of God (4:1)—creating a “temporal contrast between those who have passed through the cross and resurrection and live in anticipation of the last day, and those who still belong to the old, earlier world order.”⁶² Barrett notes, “The wisdom of this world cannot be improved or developed into the wisdom of God; it must be destroyed.”⁶³

In verse 19, Paul states God’s view of the wisdom of the world—folly. This statement calls the Corinthians to abandon their identity with the world, and take up a new identity that is Christocentric—embracing the reality of the cross, which reverses the wisdom that they once knew in the world. Earlier in the letter, Paul described the wisdom of God as foolishness to the world (1 Cor 1:18–25). Fee observes that Paul now states the divine perspective that the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God—a reversal of the world’s perspective.⁶⁴

Paul undergirds his exhortation to forsake human wisdom by quoting two Old Testament verses to show God’s opposition of human wisdom and its futility. He first quotes Job 5:13 to show that those who follow human wisdom are destroyed

⁶¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 162.

⁶² Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 319.

⁶³ Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 94.

⁶⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 164.

by the very wisdom they so highly value—like a hunter caught in his own snare. Such a spectacle is truly an example of foolishness—proving Paul’s point that human wisdom is foolishness to God. Fee interprets this text as hunting imagery, likening God to the hunter who uses the very cunning of the prey as the means of its capture.⁶⁵ Paul then cites Psalm 94:11, stressing once again that the thoughts of the wise are useless to them. The best thoughts human wisdom can produce are futile because humans are fallible.⁶⁶ Paul cites the “wise” in Psalm 94 as those who are described as fools earlier in the Psalm (Ps 94:8)⁶⁷ and Paul seems to have no problem labeling the Corinthians this way. This translation (“the wise” in place of “man”) does not damage the text, but simply fits Paul’s rhetoric.⁶⁸ What he is calling the wise are those who are wise in the worlds eyes—following the futile thoughts of man.

In verse 21, Paul transitions from speaking on the futility of human wisdom to conclude his exhortation regarding the factions over leaders, caused by human thinking—thus concluding the discussion he began in 1 Cor 1:10–12. By stating “so then” (ὥστε), Paul introduces his command not to boast in men. Paul has already exhorted the Corinthians that the one who boasts should boast in the Lord, drawing off of Jeremiah 9:24. This negative command then is likely rooted in Jeremiah 9:23, which states, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches.’” Such boasting is not consistent with one who has the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 165.

⁶⁶ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 323.

⁶⁷ Psalm 94:8, “Understand, O dullest of the people! Fools, when will you be wise?”

⁶⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 165.

⁶⁹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 96.

After commanding the Corinthians to cease boasting in humans, Paul gives the reason— “for” (γὰρ) all things are theirs. They do not belong to the leaders, but the leaders belong to the church, which belongs to God. Paul is turning their earlier statements from 1 Cor 1:12 on its head by stating that the Corinthians are of God, so that they are not of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. Thus these ministers are actually of the Corinthians because “all things are yours.”⁷⁰ This statement fits the building metaphor because “all the workers belong to the same project.”⁷¹ They are to identify with the one to whom they belong. Thus, their boasting is to be in Christ—a product of identifying with him.

Paul continues in verse 22 to expand what belongs to the Corinthians beyond the leaders to the world, life, death, and the present and future. Fee calls these possessions “the ultimate tyrannies of human existence, to which people are in lifelong bondage as slaves.”⁷² These binding “tyrannies” exist in subjection to Christ, who has been given the kingdom by the Ancient of Days and shares his reign with the saints (Dan 7). The world, death, and present circumstances have no grip on the church because Christ has overcome. This text suggests that creation and the church are restored to proper orders for the well-being of human-kind and the glory of God.⁷³

In verse 23, Paul reverses the slogans “I belong to Paul, Apollos, or Cephas” to belonging to Christ. Paul then states that Christ belongs to God because though he is equal in deity, Christ lived in perfect obedience to the Father and thus is risen to sit at the Father’s right hand as the Lord of all creation. To reverse the

⁷⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 166.

⁷¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 165.

⁷² Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 167.

⁷³ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 327.

slogans in this manner stresses the ultimate rule of God, taking the focus and identity of the church off of human leaders and placing it where it belongs—on God, his gospel, and the work of Christ.

Application

Christians often fall into the error of factionalism. We do not have to look far to see the church divided by differing identities. Some might create factions by pitting one denomination against another to form a wrongful sense of tribalism. This tribalism also occurs over secondary theological positions (soteriology, eschatology, or theology of Spiritual gifts, etc.), or ideologies and politics.⁷⁴ Christians must be careful not to discredit church leaders simply because they do not belong to the same group, because as Paul teaches, “all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor 3:22b–23). While Christians are to be discerning of wrong teaching, we should be quick to unite with those with whom we share an inheritance in Christ. If believers belong to one building, we weaken the church by refusing to bond together with those who might differ in their particular expressions of the faith.⁷⁵

Christians can easily fall into the sin of hoping in the here and now—causing an unhealthy allegiance to the leaders whom they see here and now. Church leaders have a responsibility to discourage these unhealthy allegiances—protecting themselves from pride and vanity while protecting the church from sinful division. Fee states, “God’s people must abandon confidence in the securities of the present age; they must trust in God’s folly—such a person should become a fool—and

⁷⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 168.

⁷⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 166. They list examples as leadership styles, worship, preaching, evangelism, or music.

thereby become truly wise.”⁷⁶ Embracing a Christocentric identity bonds the church together under the lordship of Christ as the wisdom of God (which is folly to the world) provides growth and stability to God’s garden temple.

Conclusion

Paul confronts the factionalism in the Corinthian church by explaining the identity of the leaders and the church. When he described the leaders as agrarian servants, he exposes the folly of boasting and identifying with these leaders. The leaders are servants of the field, which is the church—God’s garden. The church is also God’s temple, which fulfills Old Testament expectations. To divide the church by creating factions over leaders is to destroy the temple of God, which in turn brings destruction on the guilty individual.

Paul exhorts the church to forsake the wisdom of this world in favor of the wisdom of God, understanding that they belong to God. The church must regularly guard itself against creating factions based on the world’s wisdom and embrace one another as one building united in Christ, in whom their new identity is formed.

⁷⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 164.

CHAPTER 4

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM (1 CORINTHIANS 9:1–23)

In 1 Corinthians 9:1–23, Paul establishes his apostolic credentials and his waiver of financial support to exhort the church to embrace a Christ-centered perspective regarding Christian freedom. The thesis for this chapter is that as a new creation, our identity in Christ gives us freedom to lay down our rights for gospel purposes. This thesis will be supported by first assessing Paul’s apostolic credentials and right to financial support. Second, I will examine Paul’s refusal of that right—described within the larger scope of chapters 8–10.

Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions pertaining to his apostolic status and rights. He expresses his freedom in Christ and his rights as an apostle. Christian freedom as described by Paul is not freedom to do as one pleases, but freedom to serve the Lord and his church in the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:13–26).¹ He continues to ask rhetorical questions in a manner that causes readers to carefully consider what he is saying—putting them on the stand by offering a defense that undermines the defense of any who would oppose him.²

After addressing his apostolic status and freedom, Paul speaks of his right to financial support—using the illustrations of a soldier, a farmer, and a shepherd. Each of these professions receive provision through their physical labor. Paul proceeds that if basic civil principles were not enough, the Law speaks in the same

¹Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 398.

² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 400.

manner—quoting Deuteronomy 25:4. He argues that if those who sow material things receive material benefits, certainly those who sow greater spiritual things can expect material provision. He furthers this argument by reminding them that temple workers are also given material provision.

After establishing his rights as an apostle, Paul expresses his refusal of those rights so as not to lose his grounds for boasting because his reward is to preach the gospel free of charge. Embracing this freedom, he uses it to move amongst various groups and become like them to advance the gospel among them.

Need

Christians need 1 Corinthians 9 because we must always consider how our freedoms effect the work of the gospel. A Christocentric identity causes us to consider, like Christ, what rights are best to give up for the sake of others. Paul's perspective and example impacts the way Christians today practice faithful stewardship of various freedoms we have in Christ.

Main Point

As a new creation in Christ, Paul uses his freedom to surrender his rights for the advancement of the gospel.

Preview

1. Status and Freedom (9:1–2)
2. Right to Financial Support (9:3–14)
3. Refusal of Rights (9:15–23)

Context

The rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 9 is a matter of considerable debate. Many scholars believe that Paul is defending his apostleship against some in Corinth who bring it into question. Others view this chapter in an A-B-A structure within

chapters 8–10. Given the context of the chapter within the larger scope of the letter, the latter seems most convincing. In chapter 8, Paul addressed an apparent issue regarding food sacrificed to idols and taught that while Christians possess freedom in Christ, it is often best to deny oneself those freedoms for greater gospel purposes. Following this exhortation, Paul provides an example of his own denial of rights for a greater gospel purpose as he refuses material support for his ministry. He then connects chapter 10 with this discussion and concludes that while all things are lawful, not all things are helpful or build up (1 Cor 10:23) and that we are to seek not the advantage of ourselves, but the advantage of the many (1 Cor 10:33).

Exposition

Paul affirms his apostolic status and right to receive financial support from the church. He then explains how he waives that right for the sake of the gospel.

Status and Freedom (9:1–2)

Chapter 9 begins with Paul asking four rhetorical questions regarding his rights. Many scholars believe that he is establishing his credentials as an apostle. Barrett argues that Paul would not have spent so long speaking of his apostolic rights if they were not being questioned.³ Fee follows similarly, arguing that his refusal to receive material support and eat food sacrificed to idols (despite eating with Gentiles) caused the Corinthians to question his apostleship.⁴ Arguing against Fee's assessment, Garland notes that this text is the only place where the notion of Paul's apostleship appears and simply speaks of his right to earn material support just like soldiers, farmers, shepherds, plowmen, threshers, and priests (1 Cor 9:7,

³ C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 200.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 434–35.

10,13).⁵ Paul is making a larger argument about surrendering his rights and to do so, his rhetorical questions must assume a positive answer.⁶ He denies himself the freedoms that some likely regarded as part of the status and signs of apostleship and offers an argument about rights that builds off his previous statements regarding meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:1–13).⁷ Ciampa and Rosner describe this chapter as a “sandwich structure” between chapters eight and ten—where an issue is raised then another issue comes up but turns out to be a contribution to the issue already raised.⁸ Lockwood describes the issue as Paul acknowledging to the Corinthians that he is not inferior, and like them, he too has a conscience that allows him to eat food sacrificed to idols, yet he gives up those privileges for the sake of the gospel.⁹ It seems most fitting to the context that Paul is not defending his apostleship so much as emphasizing Christian freedom as a new creation and the value of giving up rights for the sake of the gospel—expressing his own experience with the tension between his freedom in the gospel and responsibilities as one living out the gospel. It is fair to acknowledge that his description of the Corinthians as a seal to his apostolic authenticity (1 Cor 9:2), coupled with his argument as a defense to those who would examine him (1 Cor 9:3), does seem to indicate a defense of his apostleship. This defense, however, is not the main point of the argument and does not necessarily give evidence that it was questioned in Corinth. His first rhetorical question

⁵ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 397.

⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 398–99. Garland suggests that if a negative answer were expected, the whole argument of surrendering his rights would be pointless. Ciampa and Rosner follow Garland, suggesting that the affirmative is expected as he establishes his Christian freedom as an apostle. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to The Corinthians*, 397–98.

⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 666–67.

⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 396.

⁹ Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 291–92.

regarding freedom sets the tone for the main argument—indicating that his identity in Christ gives freedom regarding his rights.

In verse 2, Paul emphasizes the certainty of his apostleship as one sent to them. Scholars commonly note that the very existence of the Corinthian church is evidence of Paul's apostleship. They are a "seal" (σφραγίς), which means they authenticate him as an apostle. Though some apostles such as Cephas, James, and John preached primarily to the Jews, Paul was an apostle to those such as the Corinthians.¹⁰ As such, he deserves a hearing from those who question him regarding his use of Christian freedom.¹¹ If their primary identity is in Christ, then the one who brought the gospel of Christ to them must certainly be credible to them.

Right to Financial Support (9:3–14)

In verse three, Paul speaks of his defense in legal terms. Whether this defense is hypothetical or an actual defense against critics is debated. Garland argues that Paul is not speaking in response to actual critics but using a rhetorical figure of style by raising a fictitious defense—suggesting that Paul's fictitious defense is due to the "delicacy required when discussing oneself."¹² Those who believe Paul's apostolic authority to be in question in Corinth commonly suggest that the questioning likely stems from his refusal of apostolic rights.¹³ As noted previously, it seems unlikely that Paul's apostleship was in question by the Corinthians or else the

¹⁰ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 293.

¹¹ Peter Naylor, *A Study Commentary on 1 Corinthians* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2004), 222. Contra Fee, who approaches this verse as Paul defending his apostleship against those who doubt his authenticity in Corinth. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 438; Garland, however, argues that the situation is hypothetical. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 405.

¹² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 407.

¹³ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 442; see also Naylor, *1 Corinthians*, 222–23.

rhetoical questions would likely undermine his overall argument. While his apostleship is unlikely to be questioned by the Corinthians, he does have critics in Corinth (1 Cor 4:3–4). It seems that these critics are examining him with regard to his use of Christian freedom.¹⁴ Lockwood argues that those who examine him (ἀνακρίνουσιν) is a present dative participle that indicates criticism currently taking place.¹⁵ His use of rhetorical questions in the following verses turn the defense from himself to the readers—attacking the validity of his opposition.¹⁶

Paul begins this rhetorical defense to express his rights (ἐξουσίαν) as an apostle—utilizing the same word for the Corinthian’s right (ἐξουσία) to eat in the pagan temples (1 Corinthians 8:9). The first question pertains to eating and drinking and relates directly to the subject previously addressed in chapter 8—to which he will return in chapter 10. Paul recalls his teaching from chapter 8 regarding his waiver of food rights by setting his waiver of provisional rights parallel to his earlier exhortation.¹⁷ This first question seems to set a tone for understanding the rest of the rights Paul waives as he contrasts himself with the Corinthian’s exploitation of their right to eat as they desire.

Second, Paul acknowledges his waiver of the right to take a believing wife (ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα). It seems that the custom for church leaders was to marry and take a wife along with them on their journeys—leaving Paul and Barnabas outside of the norm. Regardless, they had the right and opted not to exploit it, which (as verse 6

¹⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 182.

¹⁵ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 294.

¹⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 400.

¹⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 400–01; see also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 444. Fee argues that the food primarily references provision, rather than idol food because the primary issue was eating in temples more so than the food and that Paul did not always abstain from food that had been sacrificed to idols.

seems to indicate) possibly would have enabled them to garner support from that wife so they would not need to work for a living.¹⁸

Paul asks three more rhetorical questions that anticipate a negative answer. A person is expected to be sustained by their labor. Paul is probably referring to the sustenance of basic needs rather than the provision of a salary.¹⁹ The soldier receives his provisions as he serves. Paul then quotes Deuteronomy 20:6, saying “Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit?” Paul then notes that the keeper of the flock receives a share in the milk. The Old Testament prophets commonly describe God’s people as an army, a vineyard, and a flock and Paul’s examples of a soldier, farmer, and shepherd build off those Old Testament descriptions.²⁰ While other apostles received provision for their work, Paul—as the planter of the Corinthian church—certainly had the right to provision from the Corinthians for his labors.

While reasoning by means of what is typical in the workforce, Paul employs more rhetorical questions to argue on biblical grounds—particularly quoting Deuteronomy 25:4. The Greek *κατὰ ἄνθρωπον* generally emphasizes human inferiority to God²¹—indicating that even if his previous argument were not enough, here’s what the Scriptures say. At first glance, Paul seems to use a verse of Scripture that is removed from its original context. In response to this *crux interpretum* some scholars have suggested that Deuteronomy 25:4 speaks of people, not oxen.²² It is best, however, to understand this quotation as a lesser to greater argument—

¹⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 402.

¹⁹ Chrys C. Caragounis, “Οὐένιον: A Reconsideration of Its Meaning,” *Novum Testamentum* 16, no. 1 (January 1974). Other works that follow this view include: Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 408–9; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 447; Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 402.

²⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 409.

²¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 403.

²² Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 206.

showing that God is more concerned with people than animals.²³

Paul's use of the Old Testament Law concerning oxen presupposes the notion established by Christ that missionaries are laborers working a harvest (Matt 9:37–38; 10:10; Luke 10:2, 7; John 4:37–38). By using the Old Testament text in this manner, Paul exemplifies hermeneutical mastery by drawing application from a seemingly obscure text, thus speaking both to the issue of support and to his credentials as an apostle—divinely authorized to interpret the Scriptures.²⁴ Paul's hermeneutic can be articulated in the phrase δι' ἡμᾶς πάντως λέγει; (Does he not entirely speak for our sake?). While the text was originally written for Israel, the ancient community for whom it was intended have become types—emerging with greater clarity in the church.²⁵ Paul's use of this text not only affirms his apostleship and right to provision, but is also instructive regarding Paul's interpretive method of Scripture.

In verse 11, Paul continues his agricultural metaphor to argue that if a laborer has rights to the valuable crop he is working, then he certainly has rights to material provision—considering the greater value of his spiritual labor. To answer this question negatively would be to the Corinthians shame—suggesting that a spiritual laborer could not even expect lesser material provisions for his labor. Paul contrasts spiritual (πνευματικὰ) and material (σαρκικὰ) things in reference to the work of preaching the gospel compared with material benefits in return. Fee

²³ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *1 Corinthians in Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 718–22.

²⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 407.

²⁵ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 167. Hays notes that this practice exists within the Old Testament, highlighting Deuteronomy 5:2–3, “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us alive today.” He suggests that while this text crossed genealogical boundaries, Paul stretched the text beyond time and ethnic boundaries—using the Scriptures as a means to build an eschatological community.

suggests that since Paul is referencing the preaching of the gospel with the word πνευματικά, the Holy Spirit is being emphasized.²⁶ Contextually, this argument is strong considering the Holy Spirit was clearly at work through Paul's preaching in Corinth—leading to the formation of the Corinthian church. The rhetorical question suggests that it is not too much (or a big deal) to reap material things because the bigger thing was the work of the Holy Spirit in Paul's preaching of the gospel that led to their salvation.²⁷ Paul then follows with another rhetorical question to show that if others reap material gain for spiritual work in Corinth, then Paul has even more right as the church planter.

Paul interrupts his line of rhetorical questions to briefly interject his willingness to forgo the right to material provision out of concern for the effectiveness of the gospel ministry. Paul gives up what was rightfully his for the work of the gospel—providing evidence of his authenticity and priority for the gospel. Paul is silent as to exactly why his reaping material benefit might hinder the gospel, however verses 15–19 do seem to provide some context as Paul declares himself free from all, yet willingly making himself a servant to all in order to win people. Garland suggests that Paul likely sought to avoid deterring potential converts from thinking that conversion came with financial strings attached.²⁸ Some commentators suggest Paul's refusal of material benefits could be a refusal to enter a friendship and patronage system where the giving and receiving of gifts entailed commitments, obligations, and privileged status amongst those who were part of the relationship.²⁹ Paul's silence regarding how reaping materials would have hindered

²⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 141.

²⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 408.

²⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 413.

²⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 410–11.

the gospel leaves much to speculate, but the main point is his Christ-like attitude as he denies himself of certain rights for the sake of others—using his Christian freedom as a new creation to advance the gospel.

In verse 13, Paul returns to his series of rhetorical questions and appeals to Corinthian pride regarding knowledge. The notion that temple employees partake of the sacrificial offerings is a principle established in the Law (Lev 6:16–18, 26; 7:6–8; Num 5:9–10; Deut 18:1–5). Paul reminds them that those whose work is dedicated to God’s service are supported through that work.³⁰

Paul proceeds in verse 14 to highlight the relationship between temple or altar service and preaching the gospel.³¹ He brings his argument to its climactic conclusion by referencing the command of the Lord himself (Luke 10:7).³² It is commonly noted that in 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul follows a citation of Deuteronomy 25:4 by quoting Luke 10:7. Fee rightly notes that the casual way in which Paul references Jesus’ teaching suggests that the Corinthians may have been familiar with it—though it cannot be known for certain.³³

Paul’s rhetorical questions build the argument in an increasing fashion as he expresses his right to provision based on his apostleship and the rights of other ministers. He then alludes to common labor principles, followed by the practice of temple and altar provisions—leading to the climactic conclusion that Jesus himself established that preachers of the gospel should receive provisions through the gospel. He makes clear in this argument, however, that as a new creation identified in Christ, he is free to prioritize the gospel above his own rights.

³⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 412–13.

³¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 413.

³² Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 187.

³³ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 456.

Refusal of Rights (9:15–23)

Paul returns to his renunciation of his rights as stated in verse 12b, but his shift from the first person plural pronoun “we” to the first person singular and the shift from the aorist verb (ἐχρησάμεθα) to the present (κέχρημαι) escalates the statement to add more personal resolve.³⁴ He also escalates the emotion of the statement from saying “but we endure everything” in (v. 12) to “I would rather die” (v. 15). This statement features a grammatical break, which literally states, “I would rather die—no one will deprive me of my grounds for boasting.”³⁵ This emotional statement suggests that nothing is more important to Paul than sharing the gospel free of charge—not even his life.³⁶

Paul continues by stating that he preaches out of necessity and thus, he has no reason to boast in preaching alone. As Fee points out, God ordained his destiny as a preacher and revealed it to him on the Damascus road (Gal 1:15–16) and it is therefore not something he chose to do, but something he must do.³⁷ If he has no choice but to preach or face certain calamity, then his preaching is no grounds for boasting. As commentators commonly point out, by speaking of his own constraint, Paul’s reference to his apostolic task is likened to that of the Old Testament prophets. While Paul’s phrase “woe to me” seems reminiscent of Isaiah’s confession of sinfulness (Isa 6:5), Jeremiah’s experience seems most similar to Paul’s. Paul’s words of necessity seem to reflect Jeremiah’s reflection of the call, which is described in terms of overpowering necessity (Jer 20:9). This comparison sets up a contrast

³⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 422.

³⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 492. Metzger provides further detail regarding this break and copyist’s attempts to carry on the syntax.

³⁶ Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of 2 Corinthians 2:4–3:3 Within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 138.

³⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 462.

between Jeremiah's experience and Paul's as Paul does not lament the suffering his preaching brings, but boasts of it.³⁸ While Jeremiah regrets his birth because of his suffering (Jer 15:10), Paul would rather die than give up his reason to boast.³⁹ While Jeremiah declared woe on himself for being constrained to preach (Jer 10:19; 15:10; 45:3), Paul declares woe on himself if he does not preach.⁴⁰ The difference for Paul was shaped by the suffering of Christ and identifying with Christ in his suffering.

Paul continues in verse 17 to show that had he preached by his own choice he would be entitled to pay, but he had no choice, so he can only do as he was commanded by God. Referencing his "stewardship" (*οἰκονομίαν*), Paul uses a word likening himself to a household slave who is expected to perform a task without necessarily expecting a reward. Paul then discusses what he can expect for reward in verse 18. If he is constrained to preach the gospel, he cannot expect reward for doing so because it is not voluntary, but what is voluntary is preaching the gospel free of charge. While some commentators argue that Paul is speaking of eschatological reward, Ciampa and Rosner helpfully point out that Paul's words focus on the basis of his boasting—preaching the gospel free of charge as a reward in and of itself.⁴¹

Paul's reward emphasizes his joy in the Lord because his reward is not in his freedom, but in giving up freedoms so as not to hinder the gospel. While the Corinthians are defending their right to eat temple food, Paul is providing an example for the Corinthians to follow—pursuing a reward not of freedom to eat food sacrificed to idols, but freely abstaining so the gospel might not be hindered.⁴²

³⁸ Harry P. Nasuti, "The Woes of the Prophets and the Rights of the Apostle: The Internal Dynamics of 1 Corinthians 9," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (April 1988): 258.

³⁹ Nasuti, "The Woes of the Prophets and the Rights of the Apostle."

⁴⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 417.

⁴¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

⁴² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 417.

In verse 19, Paul refers back to his first rhetorical question in verse 1 to state that though he is free, he willingly makes himself a slave in order to win people—exemplifying the attitude of Christ (Phil 2:5–8). Ciampa and Rosner note that this slave-free dualism was a basic thought to Roman society—much like the Jew-Gentile dualism in Jewish thought.⁴³ Even though Paul was free from any obligations to patrons, he decided to act as a slave who must conform to the cultural norms of the people he is assigned to serve. Paul’s goal was to gain more people (τοὺς πλείονας) by enslaving himself than he would have gained had he exercised his rights. Paul uses the word κερδήσω (gain) five times in this passage and only once elsewhere (Phil 3:8)—where he speaks of gaining Christ in a profit-loss manner. Taylor helpfully notes that this word carries a sense of financial profit (Matt 25:16–22; Jas 4:13)—raising the prospect of financial overtones where Paul considers gaining people as his reward.⁴⁴ While Paul considered that his reward is preaching free of charge, in financial terms that reward is an investment that multiplies as people are won for Christ.

Paul explains what he means by becoming a slave to all as he describes his service amongst various groups. The first two groups (Jews and those under the Law) could be one group where Paul defines Jews as those under the Law (whether by birth or as a proselyte).⁴⁵ This view finds support through a likely parallel with 1 Corinthians 10:31–33—understanding this context to be part of the larger discussion of food sacrificed to idols. Thiselton notes that these phrases ὡς Ἰουδαῖος and ὡς ὑπὸ are telling of Paul’s theology of new creation since he was already a Jew but now in

⁴³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 421.

⁴⁴ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 218.

⁴⁵ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 702.

Christ he transcends cultural allegiances.⁴⁶ He understands that his identity in Christ transcends all others and this identity also refuses to be dictated by his service as a slave to others.⁴⁷ This example is for the Corinthians in regard to the larger conversation of food sacrificed to idols and is a call to identify with Christ above all so as to use their freedom as a means for missionary accommodation to win more people. As a mission strategy, Paul willingly puts himself in a slave's role because his Christocentric identity transcends culture—participating in a greater reality as a new creation.⁴⁸

In verse 21, Paul transitions from those under the Law to his identification with those who were not—with the word *ἄνομος* serving as an antonym to his previous statements of identifying with those under the law. Paul asserts that *ἄνομος* does not indicate himself as outside of God's Law. Rather, under the law of Christ he is a new creation who has Spirit-empowered freedom that allows him to live out the Law of Christ in a way that supersedes Old Testament Law because Christ is the fulfillment of the Law. Under the lordship of Christ, Paul was free to accommodate himself to a Gentile context to win Gentiles to Christ.

Paul moves from Jew-Gentile dualism to address how the Corinthians are to relate to those who are weak. Paul seems to be bringing the argument back around to the previous chapter's discussion about idol food. Fee helpfully notes that since Paul is speaking of winning the weak, we must be careful not to be too specific in categorizing them—suggesting a more generalized and sociological category.⁴⁹ Paul's association with weakness in Corinth as he worked with his hands models

⁴⁶ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 702.

⁴⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 425.

⁴⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

⁴⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 475.

becoming weak, which he considered as a paradigm for the Christian life.⁵⁰ His motivation for becoming weak is to win the weak—most likely referencing unbelievers whom he is laboring to win for Christ.

Paul then summarizes verses 20–22 to indicate that he utilized the most effective approach for each group of people he served.⁵¹ In this summary statement, Paul switches from the aorist tense “I became” (v. 20, 22a) to the perfect tense “I have become” to indicate his ongoing missionary practice.⁵² He not only preached the gospel, but lived it within the context of his hearers so they could see what the Christian life looked like if they were to embrace it. Paul’s example is a reflection of Christ, who emptied himself and became like those he came to save (Phil 2:5–11). Ciampa and Rosner helpfully note that making a good impression for God toward pagan neighbors is an ethical motif found in the Old Testament (Exod 32:12, 25; Num 14:13–19; Deut 9:25–29; Isa 52:5 LXX; Ezek 20:9–22; 36:20–23).⁵³ As a new creation in Christ, Paul uses his freedom in Christ to personally exemplify the gospel to people in all contexts.

Paul continues his string of “all” statements to indicate that his efforts are all for the sake of the gospel and sharing its blessings with those he wins. This reference to the gospel invalidates any claim that Paul sought to accommodate people by changing the message or by changing moral standards. His reference to the gospel indicates he preached the same message and ethic as Christ. To use freedom in Christ for personal autonomy opposes the very notion of the new identity in Christ that provides freedom. Paul views his freedom in Christ as a means to live

⁵⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

⁵¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 429.

⁵² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 430.

⁵³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 431.

in ways that win others to Christ by exemplifying Christ (with whom he identifies) in various contexts. As Plummer states, “The apostle adjusts his behavior in inconsequential matters so as not to put an unnecessary barrier between a non-believer (or person of questionable faith) and the gospel.”⁵⁴

The last clause of verse 23 is of considerable debate. Many commentators believe that the clause carries an eschatological tone regarding salvation by linking this clause with the context of verses 25–27—seeking a prize (v. 24b) so as not to be disqualified (v. 27).⁵⁵ Paul’s partnership or participation (συγχοινωνός) in the gospel is best understood as in Philippians 1:5, 7, where he praised the church in Philippi for being his partners in the gospel.⁵⁶ Garland states, “He portrays himself as a partner with the gospel in the common enterprise of winning others.”⁵⁷ Considering Paul has stated his goal of winning converts, the following passage (v. 24–27) is best understood as an athletic metaphor regarding the self-discipline and hardship that Paul embraces for the greater goal of winning more people.⁵⁸ In his other letters, his converts are described as his crown (Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19) and thus it seems most convincing that Paul speaks similarly in verse 25 when he metaphorically speaks of competing for an imperishable crown. As a new creation with a new identity in Christ, Paul became all things to all people because his crown is those who receive the blessing of the gospel through his ministry.

⁵⁴ Robert L. Plummer, “Imitation of Paul and the Church’s Missionary Role in 1 Corinthians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 226.

⁵⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 477.

⁵⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 432.

⁵⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 437.

⁵⁸ Plummer, “Imitation of Paul and the Church’s Missionary Role in 1 Corinthians,” 227. Plummer associates the imperishable crown (v. 25) with winning souls based on Paul’s other letters where he describes his converts as his crown.

Application

While this text may be used to defend a minister's right to compensation for gospel work, the priority must be what it was for Paul—do not allow anything to hinder the gospel.⁵⁹ When ministers use this text to justify a luxurious salary or lifestyle, they lose the essence of this text. Paul exemplifies the need for Christian ministers to not only believe, but to live a manner of life that reflects gospel priorities—even if it costs what rightfully belongs to them. As new creations identified with Christ, Christians should make decisions based on what most glorifies God and best advances the work of the gospel.⁶⁰

A Pauline understanding of new creation frees the church to adapt to different cultural contexts and informs its mission strategy between the gospel and culture because its primary identity is Christocentric. This freedom to adapt to culture is essential for potential converts to have an example of what the Christian life looks like for them.

Conclusion

As a new creation in Christ, Paul embraces a Christocentric identity that recognizes his rights as an apostle, yet waive those rights for the advancement of the gospel. He describes his apostolic status and makes a thorough defense of his rights for material provision so that he can express his waiver of those rights. Within the larger context, Paul is offering an example of the Christocentric identity that the Corinthians are to embrace pertaining to their use of Christian freedom.

⁵⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 457.

⁶⁰ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 215.

CHAPTER 5

A NEW EXODUS (1 CORINTHIANS 10:1–13)

In 1 Corinthians 10:1–13, Paul employs the exodus narrative to warn the Corinthians against idolatry. The thesis for this chapter is that Paul identifies the church with Israel in the exodus to warn them of the danger of losing their identity in Christ if they participate in activities that associate them with idols. This thesis is supported by examining how Paul expresses Christ's participation in the exodus in comparison with the church. First, Paul speaks of Christ's provisions for both the wilderness generation and the church. Second, Paul warns that the same judgments the Israelites faced are examples for the church. Third, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to escape the temptations of idolatry.

Paul describes Israel's rites of passage typologically for the church. Israel's passing through the cloud and sea are types of Christian baptism, while God's provision of food and water are types of the Lord's Supper. Establishing these types warns the Corinthians that not all who were integrated into God's people were pleasing to God. He then describes five examples of failure that led some of Israel into judgment— forfeiting their entrance into the Promised Land. Within the context of idol food, Paul warns the Corinthians about their current danger of making the same mistakes and incurring the same judgment on themselves. Although these judgments occurred, not all fell into the temptation—undergirding the fact that because of his faithfulness, God always provides a way to escape temptation.

Need

The church needs Paul's warnings today as we are confronted with the

idols of this generation. The Corinthian church did not seem to recognize their current danger as they associated with the idols in Corinth. Many in the church today nonchalantly associate and participate in countless forms of idolatry that pull their hearts and affections away from Christ—setting themselves up for destruction even though they claim to be followers of Christ. Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:21–23 speak volumes to this need: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!’”

Perhaps the most daunting task for the contemporary church in certain regions is convincing “churched” people of their need to be saved. Dean Inserra states,

When we think of unreached people groups, we envision intrepid missionaries taking the gospel to a place where the name of Jesus has never been spoken. But many American pastors are faced with a similarly daunting task: to bring Jesus to a place where he is admired but not worshipped, where God is a grandpa in the sky, where many of their congregants are “good people” who don’t know they need to be saved.¹

The sad reality is many people associate with Christ, but are headed just as steadily toward destruction as those who openly oppose him. This passage teaches us to be true followers of Christ.

Main Point

Paul identifies the Corinthians with the Exodus to warn them against participating in activities that associate them with idols rather than Christ.

¹ Dean Inserra, *The Unsaved Christian: Reaching Cultural Christianity with the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 30.

Preview

The passage can be arranged as follows:

1. Exodus Provision (10:1–4)
2. Warning for the Church (10:5–11)
3. Escaping Idolatry (10:12–13)

Context

Paul concluded his apostolic defense in chapter 9 and ended with a warning—illustrating a race where all runners participate but only one receives the prize. He transitions from his athletic illustration to more direct warnings based on Israel’s wilderness experience. Paul concluded chapter 9 illustrating that while all runners run the race, not all receive the prize. Now he transitions to a more direct warning based on Israel’s wilderness experience—noting that though all Israel experienced the blessings and divine provision, not all made it to the Promised Land.² Paul uses the catchword “all” (πάντες) five times in 1 Corinthians 10:1–4—linking together “all” who run the race (1 Cor 9:24) and all who identify with Moses.³ Paul reminds the Corinthians that not all runners receive the prize and not all Israel entered the Promised Land.

With the help of this illustration, Paul rehearses Israel’s exodus experience (1 Cor 10:1–13)—identifying the church with the wilderness generation to warn the Corinthians of the grave danger of rejecting God’s mercy. Coupled with the prohibitions that follow, this passage undergirds Paul’s following argument when he more directly returns to the matter of temple food—warning them about the dangers of attending meals that express idolatry.

² Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 443.

³ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 225.

Exposition

Paul recalls the consequences of rejecting God’s mercy in an earlier generation to warn the Corinthians and exhort them to embrace God’s mercy—identifying with Christ rather than Israel’s wilderness generation.

Exodus Provision (10:1–4)

In 1 Corinthians 10:1, Paul explains his athletic illustration (1 Cor 9:24–27) with “for” (γὰρ), followed by the vocative “brothers” (ἀδελφοί)—indicating close ties with the preceding argument regarding Christian freedom while transitioning to comparable examples of God’s people in the Exodus.⁴ The word γὰρ marks a shift from Paul’s personal example to a theological reflection on the Scriptures, which the Corinthians are likely familiar but are failing to grasp its significance—that though Israel received God’s blessings and care, nearly all of them perished (1 Cor 10:5).⁵

By calling Israel “our ancestors,” Paul emphasizes Corinthian continuity with what God has done in the past—indicating that the church is the new Israel who fulfills God’s earlier promises.⁶ Hays notes, “Israel’s story, as told in Scripture, so comprehensively constitutes the symbolic universe of Paul’s discourse that he can recall the elements of that story for himself and his readers with the sorts of subtle gestures that pass between members of an interpretive family.”⁷ The word ἀδελφοί

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 489. Many earlier commentators minimized or ignored this γὰρ altogether. Fee notes this failure in Conzelmann and Barrett. Conzelmann describes this passage as “self-contained”—overlooking the γὰρ entirely. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1975), 165. Barrett acknowledges the γὰρ, but describes the connection as loose. C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 220. Many recent commentators have corrected this oversight.

⁵ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 448.

⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 490.

⁷ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1989), 92.

reminds the Corinthians that they have a new identity in Christ—adopted into the people of God.⁸ Ciampa and Rosner note that Paul’s suggestion that the Corinthians could be ignorant of the implications of Israel’s exodus experience could be aimed at the Corinthians pride in their knowledge.⁹

Paul follows with a series of analogies that highlight common experiences between all Israelites and all in the church. The reference to Israel being under the cloud and passing through the sea (v. 1) is explicitly paralleled with Christian baptism (v. 2). The Israelites passing through the Red Sea was a climactic act of redemption as the Israelites faced death at the hands of the Egyptian army, who had held them in bondage. The cloud served as a guide and indicated the presence of God amongst His people. Paul affirms the Israelites were “under the cloud” because Exodus 14:24 indicates that God “looked down” on the Egyptians trailing the Israelites from the pillar of fire and cloud (see also Exod 13:21–22; Num 9:15–23; 14:14; Deut 1:33; Ps 78:14).¹⁰ Paul parallels Israel’s passing through the Red Sea with Christian baptism. As Israel passed through the Sea with water on the sides and the cloud above (an event symbolizes God delivering them from bondage to Egypt), so Christian baptism symbolizes God’s deliverance from bondage to sin (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 1:14; 12:13; Acts 8:16; 19:5). The phrase “baptized into Moses” speaks to the people’s identity. Taylor notes, “Just as Israel identified with Moses in the events of the Exodus, so too believers identify with their deliverer, Christ, in the new and greater exodus.”¹¹ Thiselton notes, “Baptism signifies being bound up with the one in whose name, or in whose sphere of influence, a person is baptized, so that in Paul

⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 446.

⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 445.

¹⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 447.

¹¹ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 227.

Christian baptism signifies above all else identification with Christ, especially identification with Christ's saving death and resurrection."¹² Stressing this baptism analogy with the leader, Paul makes the point that Israel's identification with God's appointed deliverer during the exodus did not prevent the Israelites from perishing in the wilderness as God's blessings are for the faithful.¹³ This analogy serves as a warning to the Corinthians that just as the Israelite baptism did not give them immunity to the persuasion of idols, they must be on guard to remain faithful if they are going to run to win the prize. Being identified with Christ, Christians are expected to obey Christ's commands, just as Israel was expected to obey the Law's commands.

Paul transitions from his baptism analogy to that of the Lords Supper. Considering the larger discussion of idol food, these comments are linked with Israel's idolatry in Exodus 32:6 (as Paul cites in v. 7). Paul contrasts eating and drinking unto the Lord with eating and drinking unto idols—a matter more explicitly addressed in v. 14–22.¹⁴ Just as they had experienced a sort of baptism, they experienced an anticipation of the Lord's Supper by partaking of spiritual food and drink. By calling the food and drink "spiritual," Paul is referring to that which is received by the miraculous provision of God.¹⁵ While some commentators interpret this text as a response to hypersacramentalism, Fee rightly contends that to do so is to place emphasis where Paul does not.¹⁶ The context suggests that Paul's concern was idolatry. Paul's point is to warn the Corinthians that even after all the Israelites

¹² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 724.

¹³ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 227.

¹⁴ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 228.

¹⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 448.

¹⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 493; See also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 453–54.

received God's blessings and initiation into the redeemed community, many of them still fell under judgment for their participation in idolatry.¹⁷ Garland notes that Paul likely referenced the Lord's Supper to compare it with idol meals—contributing to the larger discussion at hand.¹⁸

The term “spiritual” to describe the food and drink is best understood as spiritual in origin. Garland helpfully notes that this understanding is supported by Exodus 16:4, 15, where the manna is described as originating from God.¹⁹ This food and drink originated with God and revealed his presence among them. This understanding provides the most fitting explanation for the nature of the “spiritual rock” that followed the Israelites—Christ being among them providing for them.

The identification of the rock is a matter of considerable attention. Some scholars believe this rock to be a reference to extrabiblical Jewish tradition describing a supernatural mobile source of water that followed the Israelites. Other scholars, such as Enns, believe that these Jewish traditions played a role in Paul's exegetical method.²⁰ Still others, such as Kaiser, argue that Paul's argument is similar to the extra biblical tradition, but independent of it in origin—suggesting a lack of evidence to draw such a parallelism.²¹ It is best to understand that Paul may have incorporated the tradition into his writing, but teaches that the “rock” that followed them was Christ, not a physical rock. As Garland states, “He is not thinking of a

¹⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 449.

¹⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 454.

¹⁹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*.

²⁰ Peter E. Enns, “The Moveable Well in 1 Cor 10:4: An Extrabiblical Tradition in an Apostolic Text,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6, no. 3 (January 1996). Enns bases this argument on other biblical texts such as Jude, where Jewish tradition seems to influence the authors writing; For a thorough list of writings pertaining to this tradition, see E. Earle Ellis, “A Note on First Corinthians 10:4,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76, no. 1 (March 1957): 53–56.

²¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 115–16.

material rock following them, or a moveable well, but of the divine source of water that journeyed with them. He understands the replenishing rock in a spiritual sense, not a physical sense.”²² This understanding fits the context where Paul is noting God’s presence among the Israelites in the wilderness.

Paul’s identification of Christ as a “rock” is consistent with number of Old Testament descriptions where “rock” is a title used for God (Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31; Ps 19:14; 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; Isa 30:29; 44:8; Hab 1:12). This identification of Christ associates God’s presence among Israel as Christ among them—emphasizing both the typological nature of the wilderness experience and the continuity between Israel and the Corinthian church, who is in danger of experiencing the same judgment for their idolatry.²³ The Corinthians are to be careful to identify with Christ, rather than the idols around them.

Warning for the Church (10:5–11)

In contrast to all Israel receiving the blessings of redemption, verse 5 indicates that most of them did not please God. In fact, the only two members of the wilderness generation to enter the Promised Land were Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:29–30, 38; 26:65; 32:11–12). The verse begins with ἀλλ’ (“but/nevertheless”) to contrast what one might expect given the divine blessings Israel received. God was not pleased (ηὐδόκησεν) with most of them. The verb εὐδοκέω is commonly used for the sovereignty and mystery of God’s election (Matt 17:5; Eph 1:4–9; 1 Cor 1:21; Gal 1:15; Col 1:19; 2 Pet 1:17).²⁴

The following clause, indicated by the word γὰρ, explains the result of

²² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 456–57.

²³ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 496.

²⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 458.

God's displeasure. Rather than entering the Promised Land, they were scattered (κατεστρώθησαν) across the desert. Paul uses the phrase κατεστρώθησαν γὰρ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ to paraphrase Numbers 14:16 (κατέστρωσεν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ), where Moses asks for God's mercy lest the nations say God "scattered their bodies in the wilderness."²⁵ This phrase provides a morbid description of death in the wilderness for their rebellion—the very thing Moses sought to avoid.

Israel's death in the wilderness was a result of their continuous rebellion against God. While this text serves as a grave warning for the Corinthian church, Paul's confidence in the Corinthians standing on the Day of the Lord (1 Cor 1:4–9) indicates that one should not assume that he is speaking of a loss of eternal salvation any more than one should believe that all Israelites were "saved" eternally. However, one should not hold a false sense of security while flirting with idols.²⁶ This grave warning speaks to the larger context of idol food.²⁷ The point Paul stresses to the Corinthians is that just as God did not tolerate Israel's idolatry, he will not tolerate theirs.²⁸ Identifying with Christ is incompatible with identifying with idols.

Ciampa and Rosner helpfully note that Paul applies the Exodus narrative to the Corinthians in verses 6–11 in a chiastic manner—where 7–10 tie together to unpack the point of verse 6 and prepare for the summary in verse 11.²⁹ They note a parallel between verses 6 and 11 beginning with "these things,"³⁰ which are understood as examples and verses 7 and 10 contain first person imperatives (do

²⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 452.

²⁶ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 230.

²⁷ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 230. Taylor insightfully notes a connection with 1 Corinthians 11:30, where "we read that many of the Corinthians are sick and some have died as a result of their behavior at the Lord's table."

²⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 497.

²⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 452.

³⁰ Verse 6 begins with Ταῦτα δὲ τύποι and verse 11 begins with ταῦτα δὲ τυπικῶς.

not), while verses 8 and 9 employ first person hortatory subjunctives (“let us not”).³¹ Within this structure, Paul provides five examples of sins that brought God’s judgment on Israel during the Exodus—all relating to the issue of idol food. The activities of the Exodus serve as examples (τύποι) for the church. Whether these events are to be classified as types or examples is debatable as v. 1–4 establish a clear typology between Israel and the Corinthians, but these events do not necessarily point to typological patterns so much as patterns to avoid so as not to fall into a similar fate as Israel by becoming an antitype of these Exodus judgments. Paul provides examples of five sins that the Corinthians are to avoid as they identify with Christ.

The first sin centers on evil desires and echoes Numbers 11, where Israel craved meat. Israel’s evil cravings provide a general description of the issue that led to all of the sins listed in these verses—leading them to grumble (the final example) when their cravings for food or sex were unmet.³² Schreiner notes that Paul’s use of “desires” (ἐπιθυμητάς) and “desired” (ἐπεθύμησαν) are similar to the Greek in Numbers 11:4, 34.³³ Scholars commonly note that Paul likely also has in mind Psalm 106, which draws attention to the sinful cravings of the wilderness generation. Paul seems to use this example of craving meat to relate specifically to the Corinthian issue of craving idol food.

The focus then shifts from evil cravings to idolatry. Paul then references Israel’s most blatant instance of idolatry in the Exodus, namely the worship of the golden calf. Fee points out that if Paul spoke merely of idolatry in general, he likely would have chosen other verses from the chapter that more directly cite idolatry, but

³¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 452.

³² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 455.

³³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 202.

his choice of Deuteronomy 32:6 (which indicates that the Israelites ate in the golden calf's presence) specifically identifies the idolatry as a matter of cultic meals in the idols presence.³⁴ Commentators differ regarding whether “rising up to play” carries sexual overtones, but they consistently understand that it refers to some form of inappropriate behavior that follows the acts of eating and drinking in the presence of an idol.³⁵ This quotation forms a biblical ethic for the Corinthians regarding the issue of idol food. Hays notes, “Paul’s quotation from Exodus, by coaxing the reader to recall the golden calf story, links the present Corinthian dilemma (whether to eat meat offered to idols) to the larger and older story of Israel in the wilderness.”³⁶ This text warns the Corinthians against becoming the typological fulfillment of God’s judgment on Israel in the wilderness. To eat and drink in an idols presence brings guilt that has dire consequences.

The third warning from the Exodus pertains to sexual immorality and recalls Deuteronomy 25, where Israelite men had sexual relations with Moabite women. Numbers 25:2 indicates that the Israelites attended the sacrifice and ate and bowed down to the Moabite gods. Thus, Paul draws a connection to the eating of idol food with the worship of idols—closely tying sexual immorality with these acts. Garland notes, “In the minds of most Jews, sexual immorality and idolatry were two sides of the same coin.”³⁷ Paul likely draws a correlation between the lack of self-restraint concerning idol food and the lack of self-restraint concerning sexual immorality—an issue related to the Corinthian church (1 Cor 5:1–5, 10–11; 6:9–10, 12–20). Paul may be relating Corinthian tolerance for sexual immorality with their

³⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 502.

³⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 458.

³⁶ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 92.

³⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 461–62.

tolerance for idol food—especially considering his listing of sexual immorality alongside idolatry (1 Cor 6:9) and his temple reference (1 Cor 6:18–19).

Paul reports that Israel's harlotry with Moab led to 23,000 deaths, while Numbers 25 reports 24,000. Scholars offer a number of solutions to this discrepancy such as rounding numbers in different directions or blending Numbers 25 with Exodus 32:8, where 3,000 were killed after the golden calf incident. Conzelmann suggests Paul could be making allusion to Numbers 26:62.³⁸ Most commentators conclude that there is no entirely satisfactory answer, but Thiselton points out that the early writers had no issue with this discrepancy.³⁹ Schreiner helpfully suggests, "Perhaps our perplexity and questions derive from the precision expected in our culture. Rounding off numbers and using approximations was quite common in the ancient world; hence the discrepancy between 23,000 and 24,000 may have seemed like a non-issue to the original readers."⁴⁰ While the reason for the discrepancy is unknown, there are several possible explanations, leading Hodge to conclude that it shows the wonder of the Bible for one to have to use this text to attempt to "impeach" its infallibility.⁴¹

The fourth warning regards putting Christ to the test—further implying that Christ was indeed present with the Israelites in the wilderness considering that he has already described Christ as the rock that followed them.⁴² Paul refers to Numbers 21:5–6, where the Israelites criticized God's provision of food and water—once again bringing to Corinthian attention the current issue of idol food. Ciampa

³⁸ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 168.

³⁹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 740.

⁴⁰ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 204.

⁴¹ Charles Hodge, *1&2 Corinthians*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 178.

⁴² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 463.

and Rosner note that Paul is probably referencing Numbers 21:5–6 in light of Psalm 78:18, where the incident is related to craving food—warning the Corinthians against testing Christ by insisting on eating the food they craved even if it entails provoking God.⁴³ The word “destroyed” (ἀπώλλυντο) is often used by Paul to describe eschatological destruction (Rom 2:12; 14:15; 1 Cor 1:18, 19; 8:11; 15:18; 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:10), leading Schreiner to suggest that Israel’s physical punishment points to and anticipates a greater final judgment, which is what Paul is warning the Corinthians about.⁴⁴

The fifth warning regards grumbling. While commentators differ regarding which instance to which Paul alludes, it is most fitting to follow Thiselton, who suggests that Paul is referring to grumbling in general.⁴⁵ Schreiner points out that Israel grumbled about lack of food (Exod 16:1–3, 7, 8) and water (Exod 15:24; 17:7), difficulty of travel (Num 11:1), Aaron’s leadership (Num 16:11), the death’s in Korah’s rebellion (Num 16:41), and the Lord’s promise to bring them into the Promised Land (Num 14:2, 27, 29, 36; Deut 1:27; Ps 106:24).⁴⁶ Israel complained against both God and Moses—leaving the impression that the Corinthians could be grumbling against Christ by grumbling against his appointed leader (Paul) for his stance against temple food.⁴⁷ Ciampa and Rosner suggest that since Paul’s other warnings are based on behaviors already manifest in Corinth, it is likely that grumbling has manifested itself as well.⁴⁸ Paul again used the word “destroyed”

⁴³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 462.

⁴⁴ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 204.

⁴⁵ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 743.

⁴⁶ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 205.

⁴⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 505.

⁴⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 464.

(ἀπώλλυντο) to describe the judgment—suggesting eschatological judgment on those who give in to grumbling.⁴⁹

Paul concludes this chiasm by returning to his warning in verse 6 to learn from the wilderness generation, rather than repeat their mistakes—explaining the significance of these incidents. The Corinthians need to identify with Christ, rather than those who rebelled against him in the wilderness. In verse 11, we see that the Old Testament is pointing to its eschatological fulfillment in God’s new Israel. Fee notes, “In this sentence one captures a sense of Paul’s view that both the historical events and the inscripturated narrative are not simply history or isolated texts in Scripture; rather, behind all these things lie the eternal purposes of the living God, who knows the end from the beginning, and who therefore had woven the prefigurement into these earlier texts for the sake of God’s final eschatological people.”⁵⁰ From its outset, the history of Israel was purposed to serve the church as type (τυπικῶς) to warn the church and provide what Schreiner suggests as “...one of the means by which the promises of divine protection are secured.”⁵¹

Escaping Idolatry (10:12–13)

After establishing the exodus as instructive for the church, Paul concludes this paragraph with both a warning and an encouragement. He warns them to take heed lest they fall. The Corinthians are encouraged to take their lesson from the history of Israel, lest their confidence in their spiritual experiences lead them to a self-confidence that causes their “fall” (πέσῃ)—carrying the notion of apostasy.⁵² Some of the Corinthians thought they were safe and had nothing to fear in

⁴⁹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 205.

⁵⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 506.

⁵¹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 206.

⁵² Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*.

practicing their freedoms to gratify their desires, but Paul's warnings urge them to reconsider those attitudes with great urgency.⁵³ By their participation with idolatry, these Corinthians were putting themselves and others in great danger—calling each reader to self-examination. Israel's history does not threaten the assurance of believers, but provides warning for the church that gives assurance for those who heed that warning.⁵⁴

Coupled with the warning, Paul encourages the Corinthians by indicating that their situation is not unique. Garland rightly points out that temptation should be understood in the immediate context of the warnings from the previous verses and the following exhortation to flee idolatry.⁵⁵ Schreiner specifies that Paul is referring to the temptation to apostatize in their idolatry and that God's grace gives believers the resolve to withstand the temptation.⁵⁶ Witherington suggests that putting God to the test in idolatry may even be the ultimate human temptation, but even so God provides a way of escape.⁵⁷

In all of the referenced events from this passage, the Israelites faced temptation, but some of them took God's way of escape and did not fall—indicating God's faithfulness to his people by not letting them face unbearable temptation.⁵⁸ The word ὑπενεγκέῖν or “endure” is also used in the context of persecution (2 Tim

⁵³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 466.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 207.

⁵⁵ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 467. Fee suggests that Paul is indicating that one can expect divine aid in ordinary human trials, but idolatry is another matter as it is so inconsistent with Christian life, so one must flee idolatry. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 509–10. Ciampa and Rosner contrast Fee by pointing out that Paul does not seem to change topics and digress from discussing idolatry as if idolatry were not a common temptation to man. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 467.

⁵⁶ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 207.

⁵⁷ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 224.

⁵⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 468.

3:11; 1 Pet 2:19) and likely speaks not only to a way of escape, but also to God's faithful provision for the believer to endure the difficulties often associated with resisting temptation.⁵⁹ The Israelites who resisted temptation in the wilderness often had to endure hardship for doing so—facing pressure, accusations and grave threats from the guilty (Exod 16:2; Num 14:10; 16:41). The Corinthian's refusal to participate in idol meals would likely incite social stigma and potential financial loss⁶⁰, but these are common temptations for those who follow Christ and God will provide the means to endure the hardships associated with obedience to him. He is faithful to deliver those who identify with him.

Application

Paul's emphasis on the presence and activity of Christ in the wilderness reminds us to look at the blessings of God through a spiritual lens. The Israelites could have merely looked at the manna and water materially and simply enjoyed it, or they could view it spiritually as bread of life sent down from heaven (John 6:26) and water given by the presence of Christ. It is easy to acknowledge and enjoy the blessings of God and even identify with his people, but have no spiritual lens through which to see the grace of God at work and truly identify with Christ.

Paul's point regarding God's intolerance for Israel's idolatry warns both the Corinthians and us that God will not tolerate our idolatry—a matter punishable by death. Many people today give no more conscious regard for idols than the Corinthians, though that does not exempt us from behaving in idolatrous ways—failing to recognize the things that compete for our priorities and loyalty as possible

⁵⁹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 467.

⁶⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 468.

idols.⁶¹

Christians need to recognize how the events of the earlier generations in the Old Testament apply to the present. The sins and consequential judgments serve as a warning to us. The fact that we as the church live during the “culmination of the ages” creates a sense of urgency that the eschatological judgment of the Lord is near—creating a need for urgency to learn from Israel’s example so we do not make the same mistakes.⁶² These events teach us the grave consequences of disbelieving and disobeying God.⁶³

There is great comfort to know that in all temptation, God is faithful to provide a means by which we can escape sin and endure the hardships that might accompany refusing to participate in sin. In every situation we face, because of God’s faithfulness we have the opportunity to glorify him rather than succumb to temptation. The story of Israel reminds us of the grave consequences of apostasy while emboldening us to glorify God—even if our decision to do so leads to resistance from others.

Conclusion

Paul warns the Corinthian church that though they may identify with Christ, they are in danger of surrendering that identity as his people due to their association with idols. He confronts them regarding idol food by warning them of the danger of being disqualified—employing typology to associate Israel with the church. He associated passing under the cloud and through the Red Sea with Christian baptism, then associates God’s provision of food and drink with the Lord’s

⁶¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 459.

⁶² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 465–66.

⁶³ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 206.

Supper. This typology provides the context to warn the Corinthians against following some of Israel in their judgment.

Paul incites five examples of Israel's unfaithfulness that led to judgment for those who were unfaithful—all of which were associated with food and drink. In each example, people who were identified with Christ (the spiritual rock) proved themselves to be displeasing to God and fell under judgment—failing to reach the Promised Land. Paul describes these events as written for the church's instruction. This instruction provides warning for the church that they cannot presume that associating with Christ makes them immune to his judgment if they give in to evil desire and associate with idolatry. Paul also teaches that because of God's faithfulness, no temptation is so strong that it cannot be overcome.

CHAPTER 6

A UNITED BODY (1 CORINTHIANS 12:1–13)

The thesis for this chapter is that Paul exhorts the Corinthians to identify with Christ in unity by embracing the church's diversity of spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit for their edification. This thesis is supported by examining Paul's Christocentric view of spiritual discernment (1 Cor 12:1–3), Trinitarian unity in the distribution of various gifts (1 Cor 12:4–7), and his example of gifts working together in unity (1 Cor 12:8–12). These gifts—given by the Holy Spirit—indicate that the church body is a new creation that finds its origins in heaven. They are no longer ἐθνῆ (1 Cor 12:2), but recipients of a New Covenant—a new Israel that is strengthened in unity.

Paul begins the topic on gifts by reminding the Corinthians of their former idolatry to warn against using the same standards to measure spirituality in the church. He establishes a basic Christocentric standard of confession as a means of spiritual discernment, rather than mere experiences that may or may not come from God's Spirit. As a new creation and new Israel, their former pagan methods of spiritual discernment are displaced by the confession "Jesus is Lord"—indicating that a life lived in submission to Jesus' lordship is the best indicator of the Spirit's presence.

Paul then places the spiritual gifts in proper theological perspective. He emphasizes the singular source of the various gifts in a Trinitarian formula that shows the church how they are to use them to reflect God. He teaches that each gift is a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good—emphasizing the need to use them properly.

After establishing proper discernment and theological perspective on the gifts, Paul provides examples of various gifts and how they work together—illustrating a body metaphor that corresponds to Christ. Paul’s examples and illustrations further the notion that the diversity of gifts unite and edify the church while identifying them with Christ.

Need

Naturalism and rationalistic presuppositions have often guided much of the church’s thoughts in the post-enlightenment era. As postmodernity ushers more openness to spiritual thought, we need to carefully think through spiritual matters—taking care to be guided by the Scriptures rather than unbiblical rationalism or superstition.¹

Main Point

Paul establishes a Christocentric method of spiritual discernment while teaching the Corinthians that their variety of gifts are to unite and edify the church.

Preview

The passage can be arranged as follows:

1. Spiritual Discernment (12:1–3)
2. One God with Various Spiritual Manifestations (12:4–7)
3. One Body with Many Parts (12:8–13)

Context

In chapters 8–10, Paul instructed the Corinthians to avoid pagan worship, then continues to develop the theme of worship in chapter 11—raising three issues

¹ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 562.

pertaining to their gatherings: 1) relational roles in worship (1 Cor 11:2–16); 2) abuse of the poor at the Lord’s Supper; 3) and overemphasis on tongues (1 Cor 12–14).² In chapter 12, Paul recalls Corinthian idolatry to teach them how the Spirit empowers them to reject idolatry and recognize the lordship of Christ—expressed through the various gifts manifested in the church. He instructs them to edify one another by embracing unity through the diversity the Holy Spirit creates within the church body—climaxing with love in chapter 13, which is the ultimate gift that transcends eternity and sets the stage to discuss matters pertaining to the resurrection in chapter 15.

Exposition

Paul addresses Corinthian fascination with certain gifts by recognizing the lordship of Christ and highlighting how the diversity of gifts unites the church.

Spiritual Discernment (1 Cor 12:1–3)

Paul begins his discussion by noting Christological criterion for recognizing spiritual gifts. Paul’s opening words (Περὶ δὲ) accompanied with the vocative ἀδελφοί introduce a new section in the letter—discussing spiritual gifts. Scholars disagree as to whether Paul is responding to a previous Corinthian letter or simply changing topics, but the interpretation remains the same regardless. Scholars also differ regarding whether the broad phrase τῶν πνευματικῶν refers to spiritual gifts or spiritual people, but considering Paul’s ensuing discussion and use of the phrase in 14:1 in reference to gifts, the former seems most likely. Even so, the broad use of the word could be intentional to cause the Corinthians to consider whether they are acting in response to the Holy Spirit or under the influence of other

² Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 542.

spiritual powers whom we wrestle with (Eph 6:12) since Paul so directly distinguishes between the two in verses 1–3.³

Paul once again speaks to supposed Corinthian “knowledge” by stating his desire that they not be “uninformed.” While the Corinthians may have experienced spiritual manifestations, Paul warns against taking a mere experience as a sign of God’s work, since they also encountered these types of things in pagan worship. By disassociating them from their pagan/gentile (ἔθνη) past, Paul shows the Corinthians that they are a new creation and new Israel who is called to think and act differently than before.⁴

In their past, they were led away by mute idols as different gods would have offered diverse experiences, but unlike the mute idols, God offers various experiences from one source. In the Old Testament, idols are commonly referred to as mute (Isa 46:7; Jer 10:5; Ps 115:5; 135:16)—leaving worshippers with no true revelation.⁵ Ciampa and Rosner note that Paul is reminding the Corinthians that regardless of their superior knowledge or status, they had been “duped” before knowing Christ and must continue to have their thinking “reprogrammed” to understand true knowledge as the Spirit manifests itself within the Corinthian church.⁶ Terance Paige suggests that by describing them as having been led astray by these idols, Paul is referring to a pompe, where a public procession would occur as an idol was carried along, followed by sacrificial animals and distinguished people

³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 562.

⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 563. They note that this distinction is similar to 10:1, where Paul refers to the Israelites as “our fathers”—incorporating the Corinthian church with Israel.

⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 565.

⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

who would then feast in celebration.⁷ This insight is convincing considering the Corinthian allure to idolatrous feasts and celebrations. Removed from their former ignorance, they are to follow the living God with a renewed mind and understanding of spirituality. Mere spiritual experiences are not self-validating or authenticating.⁸

As new creations following the living God rather than mute idols, Paul distinguishes for the Corinthians the most basic matter of discerning spirits in verse 3: confessing Jesus as Lord. Paul juxtaposes declaration of Jesus as Lord with declaration of cursing him to show that spiritual discernment begins with recognizing who Jesus is and what should be credited to him. Both declarations focus on Christ—presenting a Christocentric approach to spiritual discernment.⁹ To declare “Jesus is Lord” is a basic confession of faith. Attributing such a basic confession to the Holy Spirit, Paul seems to be undermining the Corinthian elitism regarding tongue-speaking.¹⁰ While the mere words could be uttered as nothing more than a theological conviction, to make that declaration in one’s life is to give allegiance to Jesus and identify with him. In Paul’s theology, the phrase “Jesus is Lord” speaks to his eschatological exaltation as the ultimate Davidic king.¹¹ Ciampa and Rosner helpfully note that Paul may be thinking of Joel 2:32, which following the promise that God would pour out his spirit on all people (2:28–29) says, “all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”¹²

⁷ Terance Paige, “1 Corinthians 12:2: A Pagan Pompe?,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 14, no. 44 (October 1991): 57–65.

⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 253.

⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 566.

¹⁰ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 567.

¹¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 566.

¹² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

To declare that Jesus is cursed would be a blatant rejection of him as Lord. Just as Paul referenced a very basic declaration of faith, he seems to employ a very basic example of denial to bring Corinthian “knowledge” and fascination with tongue-speaking to a most basic matter of spiritual discernment—establishing a foundation so he can speak to the issue of spiritual gifts. Commentators differ regarding whether this statement was actually made by people in the Corinthian church. While efforts to explain why Christians would say such a thing have been futile, Garland suggests the possibility of this declaration coming from the Jews, who would have regarded a crucified Jesus as cursed.¹³

Whether the background was from among the Corinthian fellowship, outside, or simply a contrasting example, Paul employs this contrast to show the Corinthians how to recognize spirituality and spiritual manifestations. The Corinthians sought to discern the Spirit by seemingly extravagant revelations such as tongue-speaking, but Paul teaches the most noticeable manifestation is a life submitted to the lordship of Jesus—an undeniable example of the Spirit’s power. Setting this discernment straight is a correction for those who might see themselves as spiritually elite and set apart from the rest of the church body.¹⁴

One God with Various Spiritual Manifestations (12:4–7)

The previous paragraph (v. 1–3) put spiritual gifts in a Christological perspective. In this section, Paul places them in theological perspective—indicating that all varieties of spiritual gifts, service, and work originate in the triune God. As Paul speaks to these varieties of gifts and their source, the Trinitarian reference is striking. Paul references the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus, and God the Father—

¹³ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 570–71.

¹⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 573.

crediting each person of the Trinity with the work amongst the Corinthians. This reference speaks to the shared divine status amongst the Trinity and implies that the Holy Spirit—like the Father and Son—is personal.¹⁵

The fact that all believers receive their gifting straight from God speaks to the priesthood of believers. Regardless of the individual's background or status, their gifting comes from the same divine source. Paul's words undermine Corinthian elitism because gifts are merely an act of God's grace, not an earned reward—eliminating all grounds for boasting. Regardless of status, each member receives a gift from God so that even the poor have something to offer as all depend on one another in the free sharing of God's gifts.¹⁶ Ciampa and Rosner suggest that this understanding of gifts may be significant considering the Roman patronage system, where a patron was expected to receive praise from clients in response to generosity—indicating that all members, regardless of social status, are among a privileged group enriched in Christ.¹⁷

Paul ascribes the various gifts to the Holy Spirit to emphasize unity through diversity. Though the gifts are diverse, the Spirit indwelling each member is the same.¹⁸ The word translated “varieties” (διαίρεσεις) can also translate “distributions” “or allotments”—which emphasizes God's sovereignty over the gifts.¹⁹ Paul employs this word to describe varieties (or allotments) of gifts, services, and activities that outflow from those gifts. Paul's fluid language of gifts/service/activities and Spirit/Lord/God theologically highlight the triune nature

¹⁵ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 264.

¹⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 567–68.

¹⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 568.

¹⁸ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 255.

¹⁹ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 286.

of God reflected in the church.²⁰ Attempting to separate these categories risks missing Paul's main emphasis in these verses—to exhibit the singular source of various expressions of the Spirit as the church reflects the nature of God himself. Recognizing this reality helps the Corinthians better understand their identity in Christ.

Highlighting various kinds of service and accrediting them to the same Lord indicates that each individual is appointed to a holy and significant ministry to use their gifts in service to Christ. Spiritual gifts are accompanied with a calling to serve Christ. Though different services exist, all are worthy of praise as all are allotments from the same Lord. As Schreiner notes, “All the gifts people exercise flow from Jesus’ lordship and sovereignty.”²¹ This outflow of Christ’s authority over the believer’s life results in using spiritual gifts for service, which anticipates chapter 14, where Paul describes the purpose of gifts: the edification of others.²²

The Christocentric nature of serving others reflects Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:40, “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” Paul is showing the Corinthians that when those identified with Christ perform service and ministry, they are (in a variety of ways) expressing submission and devotion to Christ, who generates these gifts.²³ Exhibiting Christ through service leaves no room for elitist self-expression. Christian service is a result of God’s gifts of grace—accenting his generosity in accomplishing his divine purposes in his people.²⁴

²⁰ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 287.

²¹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 254.

²² Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 255.

²³ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*.

²⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 576.

Paul links gifts, service, and workings to broaden the Corinthian perception of spiritual gifts to include humble, everyday acts of service.²⁵ In verse 6, Paul follows the noun “activities” (ἐνεργημάτων) with the verbal form of the same root word (ἐνεργῶν) to affirm that it is the same God at work in each of them as they receive and use their various gifts.²⁶ As the Corinthians are acquainted with the singular origins of the spiritual gifts, they are exhorted to use them as a reflection of Christ, rather than self—using them as an instrument of unity.

Verse 7 further elaborates the nature of the spiritual gifts.²⁷ Fee convincingly suggests that Paul is stating a thesis, which is then illustrated in verses 8–10 and restated in verse 11 with a slightly different emphasis.²⁸ Fee is likely correct, and Paul is at least clarifying the previous verses and setting up the illustration that follows.

Paul conveys that each gift manifests the Spirit among his people.²⁹ He reaffirms the divine source with the passive verb “is given” (δίδοται) to further undermine any notion of Corinthian pride regarding these gifts and expresses that “each one” possesses a gift, and thus has valuable work to contribute.³⁰ The Spirit’s manifestation in “each one” fulfills Old Testament texts such as Joel 2:28–29 and Ezekiel 36:26–27; 37:14 and emphasizes the sovereign grace of God in distributing those gifts.

Paul employs the word translated “common good” (συμφέρον) elsewhere

²⁵ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 577.

²⁶ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 255–56.

²⁷ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 256.

²⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 653.

²⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 571.

³⁰ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 256.

for “that which is not beneficial” (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23)—indicating to the Corinthians that their lives and use of gifts are to orient around benefitting others, which is God’s intended purpose in distributing them.³¹ If these gifts are intended for the common good, then they belong to the church, not merely for the individual’s indulgence—though corporate benefit does not mean the individual cannot enjoy personal spiritual benefit.³² Employing spiritual gifts for the common good anticipates chapter 13, where Paul will teach the superiority of love. Spiritual gifts are diversely given by grace from God for the good of the community, thus the diversity is intended to unite the church.³³ As Carson notes, “God establishes his brand of harmony by a lavish grant of highly diverse gifts, each contributing to the body as a whole.”³⁴ Paul exhorts the Corinthians to identify with Christ by embracing this diversity of gifts for their edification.

One Body with Many Parts (12:8–13)

Paul illustrates verse 7 by offering an extended list of spiritual gifts.³⁵ Though interest abounds regarding the nature of these gifts, Paul’s intention is not to highlight their nature, but their diversity.³⁶ Ciampa and Rosner helpfully note that some of these gifts are already identified with the Spirit in the Old Testament, such as wisdom and knowledge (Exod 32:3; 35:31; Isa 11:2; Dan 1:4; 5:11–12), healing (Isa 61:1; 2 Kgs 2:15–16; 4:32–36; 5:3–14), prophecy (Num 11:29; Joel 2:28; 1 Sam

³¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 571–72.

³² Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 578. Garland provides the example that an individual privately speaking in tongues to God is permitted and beneficial to the individual, which in turn is beneficial to the congregation as a whole.

³³ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 265.

³⁴ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 32.

³⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 654.

³⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

10:6, 10; 19:20, 23; 2 Sam 23:2), and miracles (especially regarding the ministries of Elijah and Elisha).³⁷

These gifts have been categorized variously, but most notable is the placing of tongues last. Given how Paul diminishes the significance of tongues in chapter 14, he likely lists it last because the Corinthians were prone to exalt it.³⁸ Carson compares this placement to the lists of disciples—where Judas Iscariot always comes last.³⁹ Notably, gifts of wisdom and knowledge come first. As Garland points out, “It is this ministry of the word that most benefits the church and strengthens its mission to the world.”⁴⁰ There is certainly no reason to believe that Paul intends to offer an exhaustive list, but rather illustrates how various manifestations of the Spirit equip the church to unite in identity with Christ. Witherington notes, “The three lists of gifts and functions in vv. 8–10, 28, and 29f. (cf. 14:26) are representative, not exhaustive. Paul’s point is simply to show that there are varieties of gifts. He does not explain or comment at any length on the gifts, except those that were causing problems in Corinth.”⁴¹

The message of wisdom is best understood in light of Paul’s earlier argument in 1 Corinthians 1–4 regarding true and false wisdom—recognizing God’s power and wisdom in Christ crucified, which is foolishness to the world.⁴² Given its distinction as a gift that not all possess, this gift of wisdom seems to be some special

³⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 572.

³⁸ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 36.

³⁹ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*.

⁴⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 581.

⁴¹ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 257.

⁴² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 575.

endowment by the Spirit.⁴³ While popular charismatic teaching considers a “word of knowledge” to refer to a supernatural communication of personal information, it was reflected in the apostles and prophets through God-given, Spirit-filled knowledge that was saturated in the Scriptures.⁴⁴

While wisdom is sometimes viewed as practical knowledge, with the gift of knowledge being abstract, Schreiner notes that both probably refer to the gift of teaching and are juxtaposed without sharp distinction. In fact, the two words commonly occur that way in the Old Testament (Exod 31:3; 35:31; 2 Chr 1:10; Prov 1:7; 2:6; 14:6; Eccl 1:18; 2:21, 26; Isa 11:2).⁴⁵ Fee recognizes a relation between the two and suggests that wisdom and knowledge at least need to be understood in a parallel way.⁴⁶ Even if one were to distinguish these gifts from one another, the application of either gift results in instruction, thus making Schreiner’s argument convincing.

Most scholars take the gift of faith to refer to a miracle-working faith. This understanding is further confirmed in the following chapter when Paul refers to faith that can move mountains (1 Cor 13:2). Ciampa and Rosner helpfully note that mountain-moving faith is an eschatological motif that speaks of God’s judgment and the removing of obstacles to restore God’s presence with his people (Isa 40:4; 41:15; 42:15; 49:11; 54:10; Luke 3:5; Rev 6:14; 8:8; 16:20).⁴⁷ Having sanctified his name through powerful acts of redemption (Ezek 36:22–27) among the Gentiles such as the Corinthians, this faith exhibits great confidence in God’s redemptive power to

⁴³ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 288.

⁴⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 576–77.

⁴⁵ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 257.

⁴⁶ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 657.

⁴⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 577.

move amidst his church.⁴⁸

Scholars commonly maintain that gifts of healing refer to healings of sickness, disease, handicaps, and other such matters. Most likely, to possess this gift is to be either a recipient or channel through which such a healing occurs. Paul mentions both gifts of healing and miracles in the plural—leading some to speculate the reason. It is possible that (as with wisdom and knowledge) Paul intends to parallel these gifts because of their similar nature. Carson draws this connection by noting an overlap that can occur with healings and miracles as sometimes miracles are acts of healing.⁴⁹ Carson also proposes that the plural suggests that there were different gifts of healing given under different circumstances at certain times—a suggestion that implies the same for miracles.⁵⁰ Thiselton argues similarly regarding healing, but warns against imposing a dualism of “supernatural” and “natural” upon how God chooses to operate.⁵¹ Paul’s ambiguity regarding these gifts makes Thiselton’s argument convincing as over-specifying a definition is speculative.

Paul’s earlier emphasis on parallels between Israel’s exodus and the Corinthian experience makes his mention of miracles notable. Ciampa and Rosner note:

Miracles, such as those that were experienced at the exodus and through Elijah and Elisha, were also expected at the time of the new exodus when God’s presence would be fully restored to his people and would manifest itself in great power. That the Corinthians are participating in a new exodus was already suggested by Paul’s stress on the parallels between their experiences and those of the Israelites during the first Exodus and wilderness journey in 10:1–11.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 578.

⁴⁹ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 39.

⁵⁰ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 39–40.

⁵¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 948.

⁵² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 580.

The miracles remind them of their identity as the people of God. Given Paul's exodus warnings in chapter 10, the miracles are a gift to help the Corinthians remain faithful.

The gift of prophecy is a subject of various interpretations. Paul devotes a great deal of his argument in chapter 14 to tongues, interpreting tongues, and how it relates to prophecy.⁵³ Garland simply defines it as "the declaration of God's will to his people."⁵⁴ Fee sees it as the fulfillment of Joel 2:28–30, indicating a widespread phenomenon that consists of "spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, intelligible messages, orally delivered in the gathered assembly, intended for the edification or encouragement of the people."⁵⁵ Thiselton views prophecy as a gift where the Holy Spirit provides pastoral insight that leads to utterances, unprompted or prepared, that build up the addressees, but is not above the possibility of human error and thus, must be tested.⁵⁶ Similarly, Grudem highlights Paul's use of prophecy in this text to argue that New Testament prophecy (unless given by the apostles) did not carry Scriptural authority like the Old Testament prophets based on 1 Corinthians 14:29, where Paul exhorts the church to weigh the prophecy to determine whether or not the prophet was in error.⁵⁷

Schreiner insightfully argues against the fallibility of prophecy because if the utterance is wrong, it is not from God and on account of the similarity of Agabus' prophecy (Acts 21:11) to Old Testament prophets followed by Paul's

⁵³ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 290.

⁵⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 582.

⁵⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 660.

⁵⁶ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 964–64. This view is also followed by Ciampa and Rosner.

⁵⁷ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 61–62. Grudem also distinguishes New Testament prophecy from Old Testament prophecy by examining a broad use of the term in first century Judaism.

affirmation (Acts 28:17).⁵⁸ These insights lead Schreiner to conclude that prophecy is an utterance that is often spontaneous and hold the authority of the Old Testament prophets.⁵⁹

Paul follows prophesy with distinguishing between spirits, which most likely suggests evaluating prophecy⁶⁰—especially considering chapter 14, where he exhorts the Corinthians to weigh prophecy (1 Cor 14:29). Thiselton believes the gift includes both an ability to discern genuine activity of the Holy Spirit and a “pastoral discernment” regarding how the Spirit works.⁶¹ It seems that Paul lists this gift after prophecy in preparation for his later exhortation regarding weighing prophesy, even though the gift to discern between spirits could be used more broadly.

The nature of tongues has proven difficult to find scholarly consensus. Forbes details major viewpoints as: 1) “miraculous ability to speak unknown human languages”, 2) “the miraculous ability to speak heavenly or angelic languages”, 3) some combination of the previous viewpoints, 4) “a kind of sub—or pre-linguistic form of speech”, 4) “an idiosyncratic form of language, a kind of dialect for prayer, in which archaic or foreign terms dominated.”⁶² The basic meaning of the word “tongues” (γλῶσσῶν) is languages. Paul’s letters only mention this gift in 1 Corinthians, but tongues occur in Acts as different groups show a manifestation of the Spirit when that group first receives the gospel (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). In Acts, each instance appears to occur in recognizable languages, leading many such as

⁵⁸ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 260–61.

⁵⁹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 261.

⁶⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 582. Ciampa and Rosner argue against Carson, who suggests this gift refers back to the gift of miracles. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 40.

⁶¹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 967.

⁶² Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr, 1995), 57–58.

Schreiner to consider this gift as referring to foreign languages.⁶³ Interpretation naturally accompanies tongues since Paul considers the purpose of the gifts are to edify the church—anticipating his later argument that speaking in tongues without an interpreter does not edify (1 Cor 14:5).

In verse 11, Paul summarizes his argument regarding spiritual gifts. Each member is apportioned individual gifts under the sovereign will of God. Fee considers this statement as Paul’s version of “the wind/Spirit blows where it/the Spirit wills (John 3:8).”⁶⁴ Paul refers to “all these” to stress that this variety of gifts come from one source (God) to build up the church in unity as they identify with the Lord.

This Christocentric identity is further solidified in verse 12 as Paul refers to the church as Christ’s body. As Paul employs the body analogy to describe church unity through diversity, he concludes with “so it is with Christ” to further exhort the Corinthians to embrace a Christocentric identity as their gifts unite them. As Schreiner notes, “The members of this body belong to Christ and they express Christ to the world.”⁶⁵

Further emphasizing the singular source of their diverse gifts, Paul incorporates the body analogy by stating that the church was all baptized into this one body—furthering the notion of Christocentric identity while emphasizing their common bond with one another. It is most reasonable to interpret this baptism as a baptism of the Spirit, as prophesied by John the Baptist (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16).⁶⁶ All members of Christ’s body, regardless of background or status, share a

⁶³ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 261.

⁶⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 664.

⁶⁵ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 263.

⁶⁶ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*.

common bond as they are immersed in the Holy Spirit through the work of Christ.

Application

When Paul dissociates the Corinthians from their pagan past in verse 2, he teaches that they are not who they used to be.⁶⁷ As Christians, we need to remember that we are a new creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10). We are no longer bound to the influence of our pagan past. Our thinking is to be shaped by God's revelation.

In discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, we must understand that power and gifts are not the true evidence. Rather, it is the exaltation of Jesus expressing itself in love for others. Fee notes,

The presence of the Spirit in power and gifts makes it easy for God's people to think of the power and gifts as the real evidence of the Spirit's presence. Not so for Paul. The ultimate criterion of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord, which in turn expresses itself in loving concern for others. Whatever takes away from that, even if they are legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move away from Christ to a more pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself.⁶⁸

We must caution against discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit primarily by visible manifestations. Rather, we must determine the Spirit's presence by faithful obedience.

As this text teaches the diversity of gifts all come from God alone. Only God can provide for our every need. The various ways he gifts the church for their edification declares God's trustworthiness to provide for us.

When Paul teaches in verse 7 that the gifts are for the common good, we understand that while we can certainly benefit from our gifts, we are not to hoard them for ourselves, but to offer them freely for the church's edification. As Paul

⁶⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 563.

⁶⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 645.

moves toward chapter 13—where he describes love as the greatest gift—we are to understand that love is to motivate how we employ the gifts God has given us.

Conclusion

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to identify with Christ in unity by embracing the church's diversity of spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit for their edification by defining spiritual discernment at its most basic level, explaining that the Spirit is manifested in a variety of ways in the church—reflecting the Trinitarian nature of God, and by exemplifying various gifts and how they constitute the church into a body identified with Christ. This exhortation prepares the Corinthians to receive Paul's words in chapter 13 regarding love and in chapter 14 regarding the proper use of prophecy and tongues.

CHAPTER 7

CHRIST RISEN (1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–11)

The thesis for this chapter is that Paul defends the historical reliability of Christ's resurrection as he stresses its centrality to the gospel message. This thesis is supported by first examining Paul's reminder to the Corinthians of the gospel they accepted (1 Cor 15:1–2). It then probes Paul's description of the gospel's foundational components (1 Cor 15:3–8). Finally, this chapter surveys how Paul highlights apostolic consistency regarding the resurrection's centrality to the gospel message (1 Cor 15:9–11).

As Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel he preached to them, he leaves no room for innovative thinking regarding its content. Scholars commonly note that the Corinthians seem to have been influenced to doubt the historical reliability of the resurrection. Paul reminds them that every facet of the gospel he preached was according to the Scriptures—not human innovation. While Paul's reference to the Scriptures is mostly general, several Old Testament passages come to light and seem to inform his thinking—especially Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. As new creations in Christ, the Corinthians need to be informed by the Scriptures rather than the world while holding to the gospel they originally received from Paul.

Need

As alternative views pervade the church regarding the gospel message, the church needs to be reminded of the gospel's basic content. The Corinthians need to focus on the basic message of the gospel so that it defines the church's hope and theological emphases. The church cannot ignore the components of the gospel that

go against the grain of society. While the postmodern world rejects the notion of authoritative truth, the church must be bold to proclaim the whole counsel of God.

Main Point

Paul teaches the Corinthians that their Christian identity is centered on Christ's resurrection.

Preview

The passage can be arranged as follows:

1. The Gospel Received (15:1–2)
2. The Resurrection's Centrality to the Gospel (15:3–8)
3. The Church's Embrace of the Resurrection (15:9–11)

Context

Paul frames the body of this letter with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. After his introduction and thanksgiving in chapter 1, he stresses the crucifixion. In chapter 15, he ends the main body of the letter with a lengthy discussion that stresses the resurrection. Knowing this framework, this chapter serves a climactic role in the letter.¹ Paul has moved from discussing idolatry (chapters 8–10) to proper understanding of gifts and worship (chapters 11–14), and in chapter 15 he discusses the hope of our future resurrection, made sure by the resurrection of Christ. Before discussing the future eschatological resurrection in the latter part of the chapter, Paul reminds the Corinthians of Christ's resurrection and its essential role in establishing a future for those identified in him.

¹ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 736.

Exposition

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel they received, centered on Christ's death and resurrection, and provides eye-witness testimony to its historical reliability.²

The Gospel Received (15:1–2)

Paul asserts his intention to remind the Corinthians of the gospel they received. This reminder stresses that their spiritual standing depends on this gospel, which Paul brought to them—calling to mind 1 Corinthians 14:36, “Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?”³ Paul seems to be speaking to the Corinthian pride in knowledge and reminding them that they are recipients and not the authority regarding the gospel message—a matter further cemented when he speaks of eye-witnesses to the resurrected Christ. The word remind (γνωρίσω) can be translated “reveal”—furthering the notion of a rebuke on their pride as they have to be reminded of the basic principles of the gospel.⁴ Conzelmann asserts that this word is used as a ceremonious introduction to Paul's ensuing exposition—the gospel transmitted to them.⁵

The words gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) and preached (εὐηγγελισάμεν) hearken back to Old Testament promises of return from exile (Isa 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 61:1).⁶ This return is associated with the coming of a new creation (Isa 65:17; 66:22).⁷ As new creatures in Christ, their hope depends on Christ's resurrection from the dead.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 301.

³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 743.

⁴ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Scribner's, 1961), 331.

⁵ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975), 250.

⁶ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 302.

⁷ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*.

While Israel stood in exile for their sin, Isaiah prophesied of a new exodus (11:11–15; 40:3–11; 42:16; 43:2, 5–7, 16–19; 48:20–21; 49:6–11; 51:10) and Paul views the gospel of Christ crucified and risen as the fulfillment of God’s promise of deliverance.⁸ He reminds them that this gospel is the message they received and thus if they fail to persevere in it, they join the ranks of Israel’s wilderness generation—failing to endure and coming short of ultimate deliverance in the Promised Land.⁹

In verses 1–2, Paul elaborates on the Corinthian reception of the gospel by stating that: 1) he preached it to them, 2) they received it, 3) they stand on it, and 4) they are being saved by it.¹⁰ Paul’s reference to their experience speaks to their past (“you received”), present (“you stand”), and future (“you are being saved”)—indicating that they owe their very existence as a new creation to the gospel.¹¹ Paul aims to humble them by expounding on the basic contents of the gospel in verses 3–8, as the Corinthians should not need Paul to clarify its contents.¹² Coupled with this reminder is the warning that their participation is in vain if they fail to endure.

Paul’s assertion that he preached the gospel to them should set the Corinthians minds back to what Paul has already taught them. Receiving the gospel from him recalls 1 Corinthians 11:23, where Paul employed the same language regarding his transfer of the Lord’s Supper tradition to them—implying that they have deviated from his teaching.¹³ Garland notes that they are confused, but not

⁸ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 302.

⁹ In 1 Cor 10:1–13, Paul established the wilderness generation as a type that serves as a warning regarding failure to endure.

¹⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 743.

¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 800.

¹² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 743.

¹³ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 682.

willfully perverting the gospel.¹⁴ This stance seems correct considering Paul's confidence in their standing (1 Cor 1:8–9; 6:11). He indicates that just as they had received the Lord's Supper from him, they received the gospel from him—entering into a new identity in Christ. He now warns them about the danger of deviating from that message.¹⁵

Paul then refers to his preaching once again to present the frightening possibility that the Corinthians may have believed in vain. Thiselton notes that *εὐηγγελισάμεν* already means to proclaim the gospel and *λόγῳ* often denotes not merely word or message, but also the “content or substance”—indicating that Paul is emphasizing the subject matter of the gospel message.¹⁶ In a Corinthian culture that emphasized oratory skill and manner of speech, Paul lauds the content of the message—content he will spell out in the following verses.

Paul's emphasis on the resurrection in chapter 15 reveals its centrality to the gospel message. He warns them in verse 2 that to deny the resurrection is to believe in vain because it is essential to the gospel. Paul's prior affirmation regarding the Corinthian's positive response seems to indicate not that they are blatantly rejecting the resurrection, but that they are confused. Thiselton explains,

Here Paul envisages the possibility of such a superficial or confused appropriation of the gospel in which no coherent grasp of its logical or practical entailments for eschatology or for practical discipleship had been reached. Incoherent belief is different from believing in vain.¹⁷

Garland concurs with Thiselton, but adds that “we cannot exclude the possibility that Paul also has in mind the ultimate outcome of such a truncated faith (Rom 13:4;

¹⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 682.

¹⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 744.

¹⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1185.

¹⁷ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1186.

Gal 3:4; 4:11), since it has an impact on their salvation.”¹⁸ The word translated “in vain” (εἰκῆ) also implies “to no purpose” and introduces an emphasis in the chapter that if Christ did not raise from the dead, then believers remain under the power of sin and death.¹⁹ Fee notes that warning anticipates verses 14–19—stating that the Corinthians entire existence as believers depends on Christ’s bodily resurrection and if they do not hold fast to this truth, then their belief is futile.²⁰ If their identity is in Christ and Christ is not raised, then they are identified with the dead and not the living God.

The Resurrection’s Centrality to the Gospel (15:3–8)

After reminding the Corinthians of their reception of the gospel and the need to hold fast to it, Paul expounds on its content. With the word “for” (γὰρ), Paul introduces the gospel message in the same way he did the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:23)—indicating that both Christ’s atoning death and his resurrection were well-formed realities before Paul became a follower of Christ.²¹ The fact that he had received this information about Christ does not contradict Galatians 1:11–12, which states that he received the gospel through revelation from Jesus Christ. Ciampa and Rosner note,

While the basic gospel message was received by revelation from the Lord, the formulation he used in preaching the gospel included elements that had been passed on to him by those who were Christians before him, perhaps including the fact that *Christ died for our sins* and that it was *according to the Scriptures*, that his resurrection took place *on the third day* and that that was also *according to the Scriptures*, and the information about the witnesses to Christ’s

¹⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 683.

¹⁹ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 371.

²⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 801.

²¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

resurrection.²²

Whether the content of Paul's gospel explanation originates from creedal material or with Paul is debated. Most commentators, such as Thiselton, contend that these verses originate with an early creed based on Paul's reference to receiving and passing on.²³ Garland, however argues that Paul probably originated this formula as he "summarizes the historical basis of the gospel in a nutshell."²⁴ Regardless of origin, the main point is that Paul restates the key facts of the gospel message.

Paul's gospel description consists of four concise statements that he considers of utmost importance. The first and third statements speak to the necessary gospel facts of Christ's death and resurrection—stressing their accordance with the Scriptures. The second and fourth follow those necessary components to reinforce their historical reliability. Christ's burial solidifies the reality of his death and his appearances solidify his resurrection.²⁵

Paul's reminder that Christ's death and resurrection occur in accordance with the Scriptures indicate God's sovereignty over these events. His use of the plural (Scriptures) suggests a general reference to the Scriptures as a whole, rather than a specific text.²⁶ Barrett notes that this general reference shows God's will and determination behind Christ's death and resurrection. This event stands between the present age and the age to come as God brings his purpose of salvation history to

²² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 745.

²³ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1186.

²⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 684.

²⁵ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 371.

²⁶ Stephen Dempster, "From Slight Peg to Cornerstone to Capstone: The Resurrection of Christ on 'The Third Day' According to the Scriptures," *Westminster Theological Journal* 76, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 371–409. Dempster explores how the third day theme in the Old Testament and the temple motif correlate and point forward to the resurrection.

completion.²⁷ He also notes that the gospel message is to be understood through Old Testament categories such as sacrifice, atonement, suffering, and vindication.²⁸

Jesus told his disciples on numerous occasions of his coming death and resurrection (Matt 16:21; 17:22–23; Luke 9:21–22, 44; 18:31–33) and that it would occur as fulfillment of the Scriptures. Jesus said in Luke 18:31–33, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” Jesus reminded them again after the resurrection and “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44–47).

Christ was the true embodiment of Israel. Ciampa and Rosner point out that “a crucial part of the Old Testament background for understanding Christ’s death and resurrection appears to be found in the ubiquitous prophetic tradition of Israel’s own prophesied and then historical exile and (promised) restoration.”²⁹ They helpfully note that Ezekiel 37 and Hosea 6:1–2 speak of Israel’s exile and return in terms of death then life.³⁰ Garland exemplifies how Mark’s passion narrative alludes to numerous Psalms about the righteous sufferer.³¹ Schreiner notes that the resurrection seems to be indicated in some Psalms such as the change from suffering

²⁷ C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 338.

²⁸ Barret, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 339.

²⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 747.

³⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

³¹ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 685. Garland notes these allusions as follows: Mark 14:1/Ps 10:7–8; Mark 14:18/Ps 41:9; Mark 14:34/Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5; Mark 14:41/Ps 140:8; Mark 14:55/Ps 37:32; 54:3; Mark 14:57/Ps 27:12; 35:11; Mark 14:61/Ps 38:13–15; 39:9; Mark 15:24/Ps 22:18; Mark 15:27/Ps 22:16; Mark 15:29/Ps 22:7; Mark 15:30–31/Ps 22:8; Mark 15:32/Ps 22:6; Mark 15:34/Ps 22:1 (11, 19–21); Mark 15:36/Ps 69:21; Mark 15:40/Ps 38:11.

to victory in Psalm 22:22.³² He also highlights Isaiah's suffering servant as prolonging his days (Isa 53:10), seeing the "light of life" (Isa 53:11) and receiving "a portion among the great" (Isa 53:12) as further indication of the resurrection.³³

Paul recognizes Christ's resurrection occurring on the third day, which recalls an Old Testament pattern where God revealed himself to his people on the third day (Gen 22:4; Exod 19:11, 15–16; Joh 1:11; Judg 20:30; Hos 6:2; Jon 1:17).³⁴ Jesus recognized this pattern when he predicted his death, burial, and resurrection by comparing it to Jonah's experience of being in the belly of the whale for three days—revealing Jonah's experience as a type of Christ (Matt 12:39–40; 16:4; Luke 11:29–30).

Dempster draws a connection between the third day motif and the temple theme in the Old Testament. Christ's own prophecy in John 2:19 draws this connection when he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."³⁵ During the Lord's Supper, Jesus referenced the bread as his broken body and at the first post-resurrection communion he shared with the disciples, Luke notes that they recognized Jesus as he broke bread (Luke 24:30–31, 35), which further connects his bodily resurrection to the temple.³⁶ As a people identified with Christ, the Corinthians must embrace these biblical truths about him if they are truly his people.

Stating that his death was "for our sins" reflects the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Considering that the Jews did not interpret this passage messianically Fee

³² Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 304.

³³ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 304.

³⁴ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*.

³⁵ Dempster, "From Slight Peg to Cornerstone to Capstone," 374–401.

³⁶ Dempster, "From Slight Peg to Cornerstone to Capstone."

points out that whoever made this connection is the founder of Christianity, which is Jesus, since he interpreted his death according to Isaiah 53 at the Lord's Supper.³⁷ Just as Jesus identified his people with himself at the Lord's Supper, so Paul also draws this connection and identifies Christ's death with the church. Christ's death was on their behalf as an atoning sacrifice for their sins. If they were identified with him in death, they are identified with him in his resurrection if they are indeed his people.

Paul's shift from the aorist tense to describe Christ's death (ἀπέθανεν) to the perfect to describe his resurrection (ἐγήγερται) seems to stress that the resurrection effects the present reality for those identified in him.³⁸ As new creations, Christ's resurrection is firmly fixed at the core of their present existence. To deny its reality is to remain under sin's curse.

Just as Paul warrants Christ's death with his burial, in verse 5 he warrants Christ's resurrection with his appearances. Paul does not offer an exhaustive list of all appearances, nor does he go into detail. His intention is simply to validate the historical fact of Christ's resurrection to a Corinthian church that seems misguided on this point. In verses 5–8, Paul repeats the phrase “he appeared” four times in short order.³⁹ Witherington notes that the term ὡφθη speaks objectively of the appearances. It's not just that people claimed he appeared, he actually appeared.⁴⁰

Rather than listing all post-resurrection appearances, Paul seems to focus on Christ's appearances to the apostles—assuming that apostles would be present

³⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 804.

³⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 686.

³⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 749.

⁴⁰ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 301.

when he appeared to the 500 brothers.⁴¹ These multiple appearances to multiple people cumulatively emphasize the resurrection's validity to those who doubt.⁴² Schreiner suggests that perhaps Paul's reason for skipping the appearances to the women was because he wanted to appeal to witnesses accepted by Roman society as he sought to secure in the Corinthians minds the resurrection's factual truth.⁴³

Paul's list begins with Peter, who was the first apostolic witness at the empty tomb. Ciampa and Rosner suggest a pattern in this list where Peter is followed by the twelve, then James followed by the Jerusalem church, tying each to the group they were known to lead.⁴⁴ Most commentators concur that the twelve does not refer to a specific number, but to the name that was attached to that group of twelve that originally followed Jesus. Paul mentions that most of the five hundred were still alive and could further confirm the historical reliability of the resurrection.

Scholars commonly agree that the James listed is the brother of Jesus who became the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13–21; 21:18–25). Taylor notes that by referring to Peter and James by name, Paul links his gospel message with the Jewish mission as he does in Galatians 1–2.⁴⁵ Though he was not a believer during Jesus' ministry (3:31–35; John 7:2–4), James appears to be considered an apostle (Gal 1:19). Paul is possibly emphasizing the church's unified conviction regarding the resurrection by linking Peter to “the twelve,” James to the Jerusalem church, then Paul to the mission to the Gentiles—each a representative apostle to different facets of the early church's mission.

⁴¹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 749.

⁴² Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 304.

⁴³ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*.

⁴⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 749.

⁴⁵ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 375.

This notion is further solidified when he continues his list by noting Jesus' appearance to all of the apostles. Scholars commonly suggest that these apostles might be a larger group than the twelve. While the specific occurrence Paul refers to is unknown, he is showing the Corinthians that the apostles are universally united in seeing and affirming to Christ's bodily resurrection. Every apostle in every facet of leadership universally agrees on this matter. The Corinthians, therefore, are alienated from the apostolic message if they deny the historical authenticity of the resurrection.

Paul references himself as the last apostle to see the resurrected Christ. Referencing himself as the "last of all" probably indicates that the circle of apostles has been brought to its completion.⁴⁶ Paul's inclusion in this apostolic list reminds the Corinthians that Paul's teaching on the resurrection carries authority and that his view concurs with all the apostles. Fee suggests that Paul is defending his apostleship against his opponents.⁴⁷ While this assessment is possible, Garland warns against taking everything Paul says as a defensive remark.⁴⁸ His main concern in this text is stressing the reality of the resurrection, not the validity of his apostleship.

The nature of Paul's apostolic calling differs from the rest as he refers to himself as "one untimely born" (ἐκτρώματι). This word occurs only here in the New Testament and Paul's intention for the word is debated. The LXX uses the word in reference to a stillborn child (Num 12:12; Job 3:16; Eccl 6:3), leading some scholars to assume the word carries anti-Pauline sentiment as Paul responds to his critics.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Peter R. Jones, "1 Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle," *Tyndale Bulletin* 36, no. 1 (January 1985): 28.

⁴⁷ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 814.

⁴⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 691.

⁴⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 814.

Considering the context, Paul is most likely speaking to the timing of his spiritual rebirth. Ciampa and Rosner follow the BDAG definition of the word, which speaks to the timing of birth. They propose that Paul is speaking of a birth that goes beyond term.⁵⁰ Schreiner helpfully notes that in context, the reference most likely speaks to abnormality of birth.⁵¹ However obscure his birth, Paul will stress the power of God's grace in his appointment to apostleship given by the resurrected Christ.

The Church's Embrace of the Resurrection (15:9–11)

Paul's abnormal birth as an apostle uniquely relates him to the early Gentile believers, who experience a sort of abnormal birth themselves (v. 9). They are grafted into the new Israel from outside of Judaism. Fee contends that Paul's encounter with the resurrected Christ formed his theology of grace as he saw how God was gracious to him who stood as an enemy—leading him to realize that God's grace is offered this way to Jew and Gentile alike.⁵² While the other apostles went through a more normal process, Paul opposed Christ as a persecutor of the church (Acts 8:1; 9:1, 13, 21; 22:4, 19; 26:10).

While recognizing his own apostolic authority, Paul acknowledges that that he does not deserve the title. Just as he emphasized God's grace when he spoke of the Corinthian gifts, he emphasizes God's grace in receiving apostleship. Comparing his apostolic calling to a new birth, like being born again, his apostleship was not a matter of human will, but a gift of God's grace.⁵³ While Paul left no room for the Corinthians to boast about their gifts or standing, Paul leaves himself no

⁵⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 751.

⁵¹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 306.

⁵² Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 814–15.

⁵³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 751.

room to boast regarding his apostleship (1 Cor 4:7; 1 Tim 1:5–16).⁵⁴ His teaching is consistent that as people identified in Christ, everything about the Christian life is ascribed to God's grace. He applies his teaching against Corinthian pride to his own situation.

Referencing his hard work as a response to God's grace shows the Corinthians that all of Paul's efforts are not cause for his boasting, but cause for God to be glorified as his grace reveals itself at work. Paul is not implying that his response is some sort of transaction with God, but that his efforts are God's grace at work in him. Robertson and Plummer illustrate this point likening Paul to a child who gives his father a birthday gift with his father's own money.⁵⁵

Paul's very work as an apostle provides evidence of Christ's resurrection. He may be reflecting on Isaiah's lament in Isaiah 49:4, "I have labored to no purpose" to stress that because of the resurrection, his labor is not in vain as God's grace works through him.⁵⁶ Paul continues this reflection a few verses later by reminding the Corinthians that if Christ had not been resurrected, his work would be in vain (1 Cor 15:14).

Remembering that Paul's work is accredited to God, his indication that he worked harder than the other apostles should not be taken as a self-righteous comparison, but a testimony to the power of God's grace. Luke 7:41–47 teaches a correlation between a greater sense of forgiveness and a greater love and commitment to the one who has forgiven. Paul's sense of unworthiness and God's forgiveness fuel his passion to spread the gospel.⁵⁷ This description highlights God's

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 306.

⁵⁵ Robertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 342.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 377.

⁵⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 754.

grace, rather than Paul's giftedness and efforts—exemplifying the opposite of Corinthian pride. Paul's perspective on his ministry as an apostle embodies what it means to be identified in Christ.

Paul's personal example builds to his main point in these verses: the apostles universally place the resurrection at the heart of their gospel message, which is the same message that led to the Corinthians conversion. He first referred to the apostles to confirm the reality of the resurrection and here expresses their universal agreement regarding the resurrection's centrality to the gospel message. Paul's use of the present tense (*κηρύσσομεν*) indicates that it continues to be their concurring message.⁵⁸ This statement drives home the point that the resurrection is a non-negotiable component of the gospel which the Corinthians received and to deny its reality is to walk away from the Christian faith. For the Corinthians to be identified in Christ, they must recognize Christ's resurrection.

Application

In this text, Paul shows that the gospel is not merely an innovative idea. It fulfills Old Testament Scripture written across many generations and was universally accepted by the early leaders of the church. The world was unlikely to believe the reality of such a miracle. As a result, Paul based his argument on eyewitness testimonies—pointing to both the testimonies of reliable individuals and Christ's appearances to large groups. As Christians, we should not preach the gospel with uncertainty because we preach a message that bears the best evidence of historical reliability.

When Paul considered himself the last of the apostolic circle, we need to recognize that there are no more apostles. Some denominations continue to consider

⁵⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 695.

certain leaders as apostles, yet Paul's words indicate a different reality. Additionally, the closing of the apostolic circle reveals to us a closed canon of Scripture.⁵⁹

Even though Paul was formerly a persecutor of the church, God showed grace and made him an apostle. This remarkable act of grace encourages us to see that God can both save and use anybody—regardless of their past. One of the most applicable principles from Paul's testimony is that we cannot out sin God's grace. When we are burdened with guilt and shame over our past, we must recognize that to think we are beyond God's grace is to think too much of ourselves and too little of God.

Paul's experience of God's grace exemplifies for us the effect it has on believers—spurring us to action. While God gives his grace freely, its impact leads to a response of good works. We should honor people for the good they do (Phil 2:29), but ultimately the focus should lead us to a deeper appreciation and awe of God every time we see his grace at work in those who identify with him.

Conclusion

To clarify the gospel against Corinthian doubt, Paul defends the historical reliability of Christ's resurrection by stressing its centrality to the gospel message. He affirms this centrality by reminding them of the gospel he preached, explaining its basic components, and emphasizing the universal concurrence among the apostles regarding the resurrection. As he explains the basic components of the gospel, he stresses that Christ's death and resurrection are not innovative ideas that can be weighed and reconsidered. They are historical facts that happened in perfect accordance with the Scriptures. Further cementing the historical reliability of the resurrection, Paul appeals to a variety of reliable witnesses that consist of every

⁵⁹ Jones, "1 Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle," 30.

apostle (himself included) who all agree on the same conclusion—Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. If the Corinthians are identified in Christ, they will recognize the fact of his resurrection.

CHAPTER 8

A NEW BODY (1 CORINTHIANS 15:35–58)

The thesis for this chapter is that Paul removes all reason to doubt the resurrection by alluding to God's power to overcome our corruption and transform our bodies after the glorious likeness of Christ. This thesis is first supported by considering Paul's earthly analogies that speak to God's power to resurrect bodies (1 Cor 15:35–41). Second, this chapter examines Paul's contrast between the mortal body present and the resurrected one (1 Cor 15:42–49). Third, it analyzes his description of a future transformation that inspires labor for God's kingdom (1 Cor 15:50–58).

Though Paul does not use the words specifically, new creation plays a major role in this text. He speaks of bodily corruption and the resurrection in terms that incite the creation narrative. He speaks of the body as seeds (Gen 1:11–12), contrasts heavenly and earthly bodies (Gen 1:14), and stresses variations regarding kinds of flesh (Gen 1:20–22; 24–26). He also alludes to Genesis 5:3 to contrast the earthly body (bearing the likeness of Adam) with the resurrected body (bearing the likeness of Christ).

Need

The church needs to understand the difference between our corrupted state and future hope. This text offers an extensive description of what Christians will become in the resurrection as they are transformed more fully into the likeness of Christ. Setting the mind and hope on this future resurrection forms a Christocentric identity. The church needs to see the shortcomings of life as it is now

so that our hope is in Christ—leading us to the future he has in store for his bride in the resurrection.

Main Point

Paul offers assurance of the future resurrection by speaking of God's power to resurrect bodies into a glorious state and by promising a future hope that makes Christian labor worthwhile.

Preview

The passage can be arranged as follows:

1. Earthly Analogies (15:35–41)
2. The Difference in Bodies (15:42–49)
3. Future Transformation (15:50–58)

Context

While discussing the proper use of gifts, Paul described the church as a body (1 Cor 12:1–13). After then discussing proper order of worship, he concludes the main body of his letter with a lengthy discussion of the resurrection. He begins by detailing Christ's bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:1–11) and its essential role in creating a future for those identified in him. After establishing its historical reliability, Paul discusses the theological ramifications of this event (1 Cor 15:12–34). He asserts that our hope rests on Christ's bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:14) and that Christ is the firstfruit of the resurrection for believer's (1 Cor 15:23).

Paul describes how the body that was sown in weakness is made new in power and glory. The former, which followed Adam, is made new in the resurrection under the new and greater Adam who came from heaven. With the hope of a new resurrected body, Paul encourages the Corinthians that their hope is not in vain.

Exposition

Paul promises hope of the future resurrection as he speaks to God's power in earthly terms that differentiate between the earthly and spiritual—inspiring the Corinthians to set their hearts and labor on the resurrection to come.

Earthly Analogies (15:35–41)

Paul shifts his dialogue in verse 35 to address the fact that at least some of the Corinthians were denying the resurrection. He posits two hypothetical questions pertaining to God's ability to raise the dead and what that body is like. While some argue that the issue at hand in Corinth is unclear,¹ the idea of resurrection from the dead was unfamiliar in the Greco-Roman world, so Paul provides preemptive response to a question that would likely arise if it had not already.² Fee argues that the amount of energy spent in response to these questions would make little sense if they were merely hypothetical.³

The initial questions alone seem like innocent inquiry until Paul gives his response: “You fool (ἄφρων)!” Whether he is anticipating an objection or putting words into the mouth of an imaginary objector, this rebuke confronts the false notion of wisdom that Paul has devoted a great deal of his letter to address.⁴ The word “fool” also echoes Psalm 14:1,⁵ which Paul quotes in Romans 3:11–12 to evoke the Old Testament motif of the fool as one who lacks spiritual and moral judgment.⁶

¹ Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975), 280.

² Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 799.

³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 858.

⁴ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 401.

⁵ “The fool (LXX ἄφρων) says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 800.

He has already established (as addressed in the previous chapter) that to deny the resurrection is to deny the gospel. The next few verses echo the creation narrative as Paul demonstrates the power of God using an earthly analogy and indicates that to deny the resurrection reveals a profound lack of insight regarding the diverse nature of God's creation and of God himself.⁷

God's creative power is evident in Paul's seed analogy. Rather than viewing life as proceeding death, Paul shows that because of the resurrection, death precedes life in its fullest. Taylor helpfully points out that the seed dying, then being made alive recalls his earlier discussion of Adam/Christ typology in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."⁸ Though a seed does not die in the ground scientifically, Paul's intention is not to explain the scientific process of seed germination. He is illustrating the bodily resurrection by comparing it to a seed going into the ground and that kernel being risen and transformed into a far superior existence. The resurrection entails new creation as God gives to each seed its own body as he has determined.⁹ If God can raise up seeds in this manner, then it is not difficult for him to resurrect bodies in a comparable way.

Thiselton rightly notes that God's sovereignty and grace are manifest in verse 38, which establishes that it is God who determines what kind of body we will have and God who gives that body—reflecting back to how God apportions gifts to the church as he chooses (1 Cor 12:18).¹⁰ The variety of seeds speaks to God's sovereignty and power made evident in the creation narrative when God made plants

⁷ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 402.

⁸ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 403.

⁹ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*.

¹⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1264–65.

and seeds yielding according to their kinds (Gen 1:11–12).¹¹ This illustration also recalls Paul’s earlier description of the Corinthian church as God’s field (1 Cor 3:9). He stated that he planted and Apollos watered, but God gave the growth (1 Cor 3:6–7). Paul’s agricultural metaphor stresses God’s sovereignty and places the Corinthians own growth experience as a testimony to the resurrection.

Paul’s reference to a seed is literally a “naked seed,” which seems to reflect the nakedness of the first humans in Genesis 2.¹² Calling the body a naked seed also draws an organic relationship between the present and resurrected bodies while indicating that there is a great discontinuity regarding characteristics and appearance.¹³ Garland suggests that Paul is answering the second question “With what kind of body?” by saying “With its own body” but transformed.¹⁴ Just as God is able to transform and raise a seed from the ground, he can transform and raise the dead.

Following his seed metaphor, Paul recalls three of the days of the creation narrative in reverse order to highlight God’s power to create various kinds of flesh and bodies with varying degrees of splendor.¹⁵ By stating in verse 39, “For not all flesh is the same” he cautions the Corinthians against assuming that a resurrected body is like the present one.¹⁶ Paul’s argument is based on Genesis 1 as it describes God creating various creatures designed to move within their particular habitats,

¹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 320.

¹² N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 344.

¹³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 802.

¹⁴ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 729.

¹⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 804.

¹⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

such as fish in water and birds in the sky (Gen 1:21–23) and animals on land (Gen 1:25).¹⁷ Paul’s point in this illustration is that God has the power to make any kind of body he chooses to fit into the environment for which it will live, so he is certainly able to resurrect his people into a transformed body that is suitable for his new creation.

In verse 40, Paul shifts from earthly to heavenly bodies to show that they each have their own unique beauty and splendor.¹⁸ The radiance of the sun differs from that of the moon (Gen 1:16). By illustrating the variety of bodies on earth, then transitioning to the variety of bodies above, Paul shows that earthly bodies have one kind of glory and heavenly bodies have another as objects on earth do not shine like those in heaven.¹⁹ Ciampa and Rosner suggest that this transition is intended to help the Corinthians grasp something of the difference between “our present bodies (or Christ’s pre-resurrection body) and the resurrected bodies that await us (and the one that Christ already has).”²⁰ The radiance that Paul saw in the resurrected Christ informs the radiance that he anticipates in the bodily resurrection of those identified in Christ.

Bonneau helpfully notes that while the agricultural metaphor focused on before and after, Paul’s cosmic metaphor distinguishes between below and above.²¹ This difference is accentuated by the words “flesh” and “glory.”²² This glory anticipated in the resurrection is a glory that our present bodies do not have. Chase

¹⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 805.

¹⁸ Shreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 321.

¹⁹ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 345.

²⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 808.

²¹ Normand Bonneau, “The Logic of Paul’s Argument on the Resurrection Body in 1 Cor 15:35–44a,” *Science et Esprit* 45, no. 1 (January 1993): 85.

²² Bonneau, “*The Logic of Paul’s Argument on the Resurrection Body in 1 Cor 15:35–44a*,” 85.

points out that this connection between heavenly lights and resurrection bodies reflects Daniel 12:2–3, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”²³ The same God who promised this future is powerful to make it happen.

The Difference in Bodies (15:42–49)

For the past several verses, Paul developed his analogy of bodily distinctions based on the creation narrative. In verse 42, he begins applying his analogies to the resurrected body. As Paul compares what is sown with what is raised, then ties it to Adam/Christ typology, he continues to clarify that the resurrection from the dead is organically connected to Christ’s resurrection—further identifying the Corinthians with Christ. As Ciampa and Rosner put it, “Christ, the eschatological Adam, is the founder of a new and better humanity.”²⁴

The language of sowing returns to the agricultural metaphor. Paul already used sowing language to establish the idea of fuller life after death, and in verse 42 he contrasts what is sown (perishable) with what is raised into that more abundant life (imperishable). His aim is to help the puzzled Corinthians to understand the difference between the present humanity in its earthly state (ready to return to dust) and the new type of humanity in the new creation, where the body is no longer temporal, but permanent.²⁵

Paul’s sowing metaphor continues as he contrasts the present body with

²³ Mitchell Loyd Chase, “Resurrection Hope in Daniel 12:2: An Exercise in Biblical Theology” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 213.

²⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 809.

²⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 347.

the resurrection in terms of dishonor and glory. This contrast follows the pattern of Christ himself (Phil 2:7–9), who was dishonored and risen to glory. The dishonor that resulted from the fall was experienced and overcome by Christ's death and resurrection, so those identified with him follow this pattern as well. Paul connects this transformation to Christ in Philippians 3:21 by saying of Christ, "who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." Anticipating this transformation from dishonor to glory identifies the Corinthians with Christ. It also identifies them with God's original design for humanity (Gen 1; Ps 8:5).

Paul then contrasts between weakness and power. While the body is plagued by illness, injury, and death, the resurrected body will display strength. Elsewhere, Paul boasts in his weakness (2 Cor 11:30; 12:5, 9–10; 13:9) because it identifies him with Christ and displays God's power.²⁶ Paul makes the Christocentric identity behind this contrast explicit as he states in 2 Corinthians 13:4, "For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God." This contrast identifies the Corinthians with Christ in unity, rather than the world around them that influences them to divide over weakness and power according to Roman society. Ciampa and Rosner state,

A distinction between strong and weak people was common in the Roman world, but Paul reemploys the weak-powerful dichotomy so that it no longer reflects a line drawn through the middle of the church of Corinth, but is one in which both rich and poor, humble and elite find themselves on the same side both in this world and the next.²⁷

Paul intends for the Corinthians to unite together in Christ as they properly understand this weak/powerful dichotomy.

²⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 815.

²⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 816.

Paul then contrasts between the natural (ψυχικόν) and spiritual (πνευματικόν) body. The Corinthians would not have taken these words as a material/immaterial contrast as many post-Enlightenment Westerners. As scholars commonly note, the word ψυχικός simply refers to “soul” or “natural identity.” Paul is contrasting between the existence common to corrupted humanity (ψυχικόν) and existence guided by the Holy Spirit (πνευματικόν).²⁸ This contrast is common in the New Testament as the natural (ψυχικός) person is described as a non-believer instead of being spiritual (1 Cor 2:13–14), embracing wisdom that is earthly and demonic rather than spiritual wisdom (Jas 3:15), and devoid of the Spirit (Jude 19).²⁹ All humanity receives the natural body under the first Adam (Rom 5:12–19) and though Christians receive the Holy Spirit at salvation, they will also receive spiritual bodies in the end.³⁰

Paul’s statement “If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44) states the thesis for his argument using Adam/Christ typology in verses 45–49 to answer the question “What kind of body” (v. 35).³¹ He quotes Genesis 2:7, describing Adam becoming a living soul after God breathed life into him. Ciampa and Rosner helpfully suggest that Paul’s use of Genesis 2:7 derives from the text read in light of Ezekiel 37, where God promises a resurrection in terms of breathing life into the dead (Ezek 37:6, 9, 10, 14).³² Paul is emphatic that the natural comes first, followed by the spiritual—establishing a chronological order between creation and new creation. The natural (first Adam) preceded the spiritual

²⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 348–53. Wright offers extensive analysis of this verse regarding the various interpretations of the word ψυχικόν.

²⁹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 322.

³⁰ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*.

³¹ Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 407–08.

³² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 821.

(last Adam), which also parallels the experience of all Christians.³³ The difference between Adam's body and Christ's resurrected body also parallels the difference between the Christians earthly body and resurrected body.³⁴ Paul employs these correspondences to show the reality of the bodily resurrection and what that body is like (modeled after Christ).

Paul continues his Adam/Christ reference by speaking to their origins—shifting from his contrast between “spiritual” and “natural” to a contrast between “earthly” and “heavenly.”³⁵ Paul's argument has already referenced the creation narrative throughout as he sets Corinthian hope on the new creation. In verse 47, he turns to a fundamental component of creation to contrast the present body with the resurrection. Wright explains, “Paul draws into the discussion the most fundamental aspect of creation, heaven and earth, as in Genesis 1:1, showing how the new creation represents, at last, the Jewish dream of the kingdom, embodied in the new humanity that, as in Philippians 3:20–21, comes ‘from heaven.’”³⁶ The first Adam came from the dust of the earth, but the final Adam comes from heaven. Paul's explanation of Adam coming from the dust of the earth is founded on Genesis 2:7 and emphasizes Adam's perishability with Christ's eternal nature and heavenly origin.³⁷ Paul is stressing to the Corinthians that the Christian experience follows these origins: The first body is identified with Adam, but in the resurrection, that body is made new in line with Christ and his resurrected body from heaven—identified with Christ.

³³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 821.

³⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

³⁵ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 822.

³⁶ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 313.

³⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 822.

The Corinthians are to recognize themselves as bearing the image of Christ together. This text undermines any social elitism based on earthly status. Being identified in Christ's resurrection reinforces the reality that all the Corinthians, regardless of status in this world, share a heavenly future that nothing in this world can achieve.³⁸

In verse 49, Paul explains this contrast in terms of image-bearing. Genesis 1:26–27 says that God made mankind in his image, but Genesis 5:3 describes Adam's children as bearing the image of Adam. Human's born after Adam certainly continue to bear the image of God (Gen 9:6), but that image is tarnished and in need of renewal. The body bearing Adam's image lacks much of God's original design for humanity, but the image of the heavenly Adam (Christ) reflects God's glory in its incorruptible, powerful, and spiritual nature.³⁹ Those who bear this image are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Proper understanding of the resurrection identifies people with Christ, rather than this world. The following verses speak to how the perishable flesh cannot inherit the eternal kingdom, thus necessitating the resurrection.

Future Transformation (15:50–58)

Up to this point in his discussion on the resurrection, Paul has established the historical reliability of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:1–11), the theological ramifications of his resurrection (1 Cor 15:12–34), addressed God's power to resurrect bodies (1 Cor 15:35–41), and distinguished between the two bodies (1 Cor 15:42–49). In the closing verses of chapter 15, Paul concludes his argument for the resurrection of the dead by emphasizing that the polarity between the earthly and

³⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 823.

³⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 824.

spiritual bodies will be overcome when God transforms both the living and the dead.⁴⁰ The body that was unfit for heavenly existence will be transformed to suit heavenly existence.

In verse 50, Paul asserts that flesh and blood (what is corruptible) cannot enter the kingdom of God. Some argue that Paul is contrasting between “flesh and blood” (those currently alive) and “perishable” (those already dead).⁴¹ More likely, the two are synonymous with “flesh and blood” referring to the “perishable” body.⁴² Paul acknowledges the incompatibility of the perishable with God’s kingdom, then proceeds to describe the necessary change that will occur.

He begins describing this change by acknowledging that when Christ returns some Christians will have died and some will still be alive, but all will be changed as is necessary to enter God’s imperishable kingdom. This event will happen in a sudden unit of time comparable to a glance. This explanation of God’s intervention occurring in a flash reflects on Old Testament understanding that God would bring eschatological intervention suddenly (Isa 29:5–6; 30:13; 47:11; 48:3; Jer 6:26; 15:8; 18:22; 49:19; 50:44; 51:8; Mal 3:1).⁴³ The trumpet blast is a signal for the day of the Lord, which recalls Isaiah 27:13, Joel 2:1, and Zephaniah 1:14–16.⁴⁴ This trumpet blast signals Christ’s return (Matt 24:31; 1 Thess 4:16). Harkening back to the Old Testament hope of the Day of the Lord, Paul shows the Corinthians that they are the new Israel—the people of promise who are being made into a new

⁴⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 740.

⁴¹ C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 379.

⁴² Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 411; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 884; Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 828.

⁴³ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 830.

⁴⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*.

creation in the likeness of Christ. As scholars commonly note, Paul speaks of this event in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 to inform his readers that the living believers will be snatched up to meet Christ in the air and the dead believers will be raised. What Paul teaches the Corinthians here is that in this event, our bodies will be changed so that they are no longer corruptible and perishable, but incorruptible and imperishable.

In verse 53, Paul explains that this change is necessary because what is corrupted cannot be in the presence of God.⁴⁵ Paul’s clothing imagery likens this transformation to adding a new garment to an existing body.⁴⁶ Paul’s clothing imagery may be recalling Zechariah 3:1–8, where Joshua the high priest stands in filthy garments and the Lord removes those garments and clothes him in pure vestments, signaling forgiveness, renewal, and fitness to serve in the presence of God. Paul may also be influenced by Isaiah 61:10, which also uses clothing imagery to prophecy salvation, saying, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” The Old Testament speaks of God being clothed in his glory (Job 37:22; Ps 104:1) and those identified in him will be clothed in his image. Paul’s clothing imagery describes this bodily transformation in the resurrection by recalling Old Testament hope of salvation and shows how this righteousness and salvation is placed on the believer in the resurrection to transform them to more fully reflect the image of God.

Paul then relates how the resurrection vanquishes death by quoting Isaiah 25:8—a verse that is part of a prophecy that speaks to God deliverance of “all

⁴⁵ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 324.

⁴⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 744.

nations” (Isa 25:7). He follows by adding Hosea 13:14 to his quote and interprets it in light of the resurrection by turning it into a taunt to sneer defiantly at death’s feebleness before God’s power to forgive sins and raise the dead.⁴⁷ Thiselton explains how these quotations pull together Paul’s argument by stating, “Paul projects an eschatological vision of a stingless death precisely because Jesus Christ has himself absorbed the sting on the basis of how his death and resurrection addresses the problem of human sin and the law (v. 55–57).”⁴⁸ Paul shows the Corinthians that because of the resurrection, death’s sting has been drained of its poison and cannot harm God’s people, who will be raised with imperishable bodies because of Christ who precedes them in his resurrection.

Paul identifies the sting of death as sin, which recalls Eden (Gen 2:17; 3:3–4) and reminds the Corinthians of permanent separation from God if one is not identified in Christ (Rom 2:8–9; 2 Thess 1:5–9).⁴⁹ For the unbeliever, the law works as an ally to sin as it brings awareness and magnifies it (Rom 5:20). The law brings death (2 Cor 3:7).

Before offering a final exhortation, Paul gives thanks to God, who accomplishes this victory by his grace, not human achievement. In verse 38, he likened the resurrection to God giving a naked seed a body. In verse 57, he unpacks that illustration further to show that Christ giving his people resurrection bodies is part of what it means to have victory over sin.⁵⁰ Schreiner points out that this closing to his resurrection discussion connects to how it began: “Forgiveness of sins, and therefore victory over death, comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus

⁴⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 745.

⁴⁸ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1300.

⁴⁹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 326.

⁵⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 837.

Christ (1 Cor 15:1–4).⁵¹ Paul shows the Corinthians that to be a new creation means to be identified with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Paul concludes with an exhortation to be steadfast and labor for the Lord—knowing that because of the resurrection, their labor is not in vain if they remain in Christ. He encourages them to be immovable, rather than influenced by the world around them that caused them to doubt the resurrection. They are to remain steadfast in gospel work. Fee helpfully points out that Paul opened this discussion by referencing steadfastness in the gospel, lest they believe in vain (1 Cor 15:1–2), and concludes with the exhortation to be steadfast knowing that because of the resurrection, their faith is not in vain.⁵² Since God is powerful to resurrect the dead just as he raises seeds, and since he transforms earthly bodies to make them fit for his kingdom, the Corinthians can identify in Christ through his death and resurrection, knowing that their faith and labor is not in vain.

Application

This text shows us that the bodies we experience now are dying and in need of transformation. We are to set our hope on that future with bodies identified in Christ and not Adam. Thiselton notes, “In our own era after the turn of the millennium, when medicine has prolonged life beyond all earlier imagination, it is important not to lose sight of Paul’s emphasis on release from degenerating capacities.”⁵³

As Christians, we must recognize that the fullest life is yet to come and set our perspective on this reality. When we view every situation through a gospel-

⁵¹ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 326.

⁵² Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 894.

⁵³ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1297.

centered lens, our hope is not short-sighted to what we see here and now because we know something greater is coming. Ciampa and Rosner note,

The afterlife to which Christians ultimately look forward is not like the experience of a leaf after it has died and fallen from a tree only to rot away, but more like the experience of a seed that germinates and then enters into a flourishing life of color and beauty to which the previous existence is hardly capable of being compared.⁵⁴

Recognizing that there is an organic continuity between our present and resurrected bodies, we must be mindful to honor our bodies rather than defile them. This connection lies behind Paul's warning earlier in the letter against using the body for fornication as if it were disconnected from the future resurrected life (1 Cor 6:19).⁵⁵ The way we care for or defile our bodies now speaks to the way we hope in the resurrection.

The hope of final victory over sin and death should motivate us to endure and labor in the present age, knowing that gospel work makes a difference and has eternal effects.⁵⁶ Having this future before us, we do not need to be discouraged by our own weaknesses because Christ will transform us. Therefore, we can labor for the gospel knowing that whatever our weaknesses, our labor is not in vain.

Conclusion

Paul answers the question "How are the dead raised" (v. 35) with an agricultural metaphor that shows bodily transformation is no difficult task for God. The God who transforms seeds into lush plants can certainly transform a corrupted body into an incorruptible one. He asserts the necessity for a new body by contrasting the earthly/fleshly with the heavenly/spiritual and shows that God

⁵⁴ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 801.

⁵⁵ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 729.

⁵⁶ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 327.

creates them all. The kind of body that the Corinthians can anticipate in the resurrection is their own that has been transformed into a spiritual one that is incorruptible and suited for heaven. The bodies God's people will receive is modeled after Christ's resurrection, so those identified in him have victory over death. Knowing this victory is certain, laboring for the gospel is deeply meaningful. Paul removes all reason to doubt the resurrection by alluding to God's power to overcome our corruption and transform our bodies after the glorious likeness of Christ.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

A Christocentric identity that unites the church emerges through preaching the Word. Faithful preaching entails the use of biblical theology accompanied with sound exegesis. Biblical theology places the sermon's text within its place in redemptive history—centering the message on Christ. Thus, all application is drawn by considering the relationship between God and his people within that stage of redemptive history. Preaching in this manner proclaims God's intentions for the text in its content, application, and mission. This project sought to exemplify this model in a sermon series that highlights seven passages of Scripture in 1 Corinthians.

Paul viewed the Corinthians as a “new creation” and that the old had passed away (2 Cor 5:17), but in many ways the Corinthians were failing to live in a way that reflects this reality. Much of their identity was tied up in things such as cultural allegiances, specific teachers, financial and social status. Paul writes to exhort the church to identify with Christ. To accomplish this objective, he employs biblical themes to reveal Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises.

The thesis for this project is that 1 Corinthians employs the themes of new creation, new temple, new exodus, new covenant, and new Israel from the Old Testament and applies them to the church, exhorting the saints to adopt a Christocentric identity. Paul then urges the Corinthians to unite under Christ's lordship in light of this identity.

To support this thesis, chapter 1 offered an overview of the project that clarified terminology, theological presuppositions, and examined the literature on 1

Corinthians. Chapter 2 examined how Paul identifies the Corinthians as the saints, the New Israel who lives under their corporate head, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:1–9). Chapter 3 studies how Paul employs Edenic and temple imagery to call the church to unity as a new temple under a Christocentric identity (1 Cor 3:5–23). Chapter 4 explores a call for a Christ-centered perspective regarding Christian freedom as Paul applies principles from the Law to express his use of freedom under the New Covenant to waiver his rights for the greater purpose of promoting the gospel (1 Cor 9:1–23). Chapter 5 surveys how Paul identifies the church with Israel in the exodus to warn them of the danger of losing their identity in Christ (1 Cor 10:1–13). Chapter 6 highlights Paul’s view of Spiritual gifts within the New Covenant community (1 Cor 12:1–13). Chapter 7 assesses the necessity of Christ’s bodily resurrection for the church to have hope as a new creation in Christ (1 Cor 15:1–11). Chapter 8 reveals God’s power to overcome our corruption and transform our bodies as new creations in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:35–58).

Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul utilizes Old Testament types, themes, and metaphors to point the Corinthians to Christ as the fulfillment of these things under the covenant of his blood. Under this New Covenant, the church is a new Israel that finds its hope in its identity in Christ. When the church embraces this Christocentric identity, unity will result as they recognize themselves as bonded to Christ rather than the world’s institutions.

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ABSTRACT

ON WHOM THE END OF THE AGES HAS COME: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, PREACHING, AND CHRISTOCENTRIC IDENTITY IN 1 CORINTHIANS

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This project is a biblical-theological treatment of Paul's use of biblical theology in 1 Corinthians. Paul employs several Old Testament themes to exhort the Corinthians to unite as they identify in Christ. These themes include: new creation, new exodus, new temple, new Israel, and new covenant. While Paul expresses confidence in the Corinthians salvation (1 Cor 1:8–9; 6:11), in many ways they struggled to find their identity in Christ—leading to division in the church.

Paul's letter addresses several divisive issues in Corinth by pointing them to their new identity in Christ. They are the people of God on a new exodus as they await the hope of being made new in the resurrection. They are God's temple, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As people identified in Christ, love is to motivate their use of gifts as they recognize that the life lived in humble obedience to Christ is the greatest indicator of the Holy Spirit's presence.

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