



1 Corinthians

Chapters 7-11

The church in Corinth needed correction.

Their letter to Paul and reports that Paul receives indicate a growing divergence between the church in Corinth and Paul. Paul's return letter (1 Corinthians) is written to address these concerns he hears about them and the concerns they have about him. The letter divides into these two main concerns. He first addresses the concerning reports he has heard about them in chapters 1-6. Then in chapters 7-15, he addresses the several questions and concerns that they have about Paul and his teachings to them.

The crux of the Corinthian error in beliefs and practice was the intersection of their understanding of Spirit and Body. In this letter, Paul addresses both major subjects using the two controlling paradigms of Temple of the Lord (1-6) and Body of Christ (7-15).

The Literary Structure of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians	Chapters 1-16	
Letter Opening	1:1-9	
Responding to Reports: Violations against the Temple of the Lord (1-6)	Violations against the Unity of the Temple of God—Divisions caused by False Wisdom	1:10-4:20
	Violations against the Sanctity of the Temple—Sexual Immorality and Lawsuits	5:1-6:20
Responding to Concerns about Paul and his Teachings—Bodies and the Body of Christ (7-15)	The Sexual Body: Marriage and Sex	7:1-40
	Food for the Body	8:1-11:1
	Expressions of the Body in Worship	11:2-16
	The Sacrament Body of Christ: The Lord's Supper	11:17-34
	The Church as Body: Spiritual Gifts	12:1-14:40
	Resurrection of the Body	15:1-58
Letter Conclusion	16:1-24	

What does it mean to be a Spiritual Person? In the first 6 chapters, Paul explains that we are to see ourselves as the Temple of the Lord—temple that is not to be destroyed or defiled.



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Paul concludes the first section of the letter with this statement:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Cor. 6:19-20

The body is the temple of the Spirit. Thus, Paul has provided a controlling principle to help govern life in the body: “you are not your own, for you were bought with a price.” In chapters 7-15, Paul will expand on what it means to glorify God in our bodies.

Responding to Concerns about Paul and his Teachings—Bodies and the Body of Christ (7-15)

In chapters 7-11, Paul first addresses errors about individual bodies. The Corinthians had arrived at some erroneous beliefs about their individual bodies and how those bodies relate to sexual relationships in marriage (7) and eating and drinking in relationship to food sacrificed and dedicated to idols (8-11).

In chapters 12-15, Paul turns to the corporate body of Christ. He first addresses expressions of the Body in worship. Then, he discusses the implications of the bread and wine of communion as the Body and Blood of Christ. Next, he turns to spiritual gifts and unity of the Body of Christ as a spiritually gifted church. Finally in chapter 15, he focuses on the resurrection of the body.

The Sexual Body: Marriage and Sex (7:1-40)

The Gospel of Luke provides us with the content of the Apostle Paul’s teaching of the story of Jesus. The Corinthians confusion about marriage and the embodied life in this age likely stemmed from the recorded words of Jesus to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34-36:

And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 1 Cor. 7:34-36

While we do not have the entire letter written to Paul to the Corinthians, we can glean from his response to them that there were some Corinthians who had conceived of themselves as being of the character of the resurrected age. In other words, they had already conceived of their bodies as “equal to the angels” and were no longer giving of themselves in the context of marriage. Paul pulls them back to this age in their bodies, yet at the same time affirming their orientation to the age to come (chapter 15).



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Some in the church had begun a practice of denying the sexual rights of their partner in marriage. This is likely what was leading to the sexual immorality among some of the members addressed in chapter 5 and 6. Paul argues that marriage is the appropriate God ordained context for sexual expression for those who would otherwise be tempted to “sexual immorality” by the falling prey to the temptations of Satan because of lack of self control. Indeed, it is wrong to deny a marriage partner (7:3-5) So Paul affirms that, we are still living in “this age” (Luke 7:34).

At the same time, Paul affirms the future orientation toward the resurrection age to come for those who can live according to the calling of celibacy in order to be “free from anxieties” that come with living in this age. Paul himself had adopted this practice as his own personal discipline as a way of expressing “undivided devotion to the Lord” (7:35); however, he recognized that not all are able to live this way because of “strong passions” (7:36). So, it is not a sin to marry but holy and appropriate as God’s provision for this age.

Food for the Body (8:1-11:1)

Paul is now going to expand on a principle he provided in Chapter 5 with regard to association of the body with the idolatry. He wrote:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler— not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” 1 Cor. 5:9-13

The challenge again is how to live the embodied life as the “temple of the Lord” in this age. What does it mean to live in this world but not of this world? They are not separate from unbelieving idolaters, “for that would mean you would need to go out of the world” (5:9). But, they are to avoid idolatry within their midst as the body of Christ. Practically speaking, how are they to work this out?

This section on the Christians relationship to food sacrificed to idols. Apparently, there were some who were advocating that because of their super-spiritual “knowledge” that they had the right to partake of food sacrificed to idols in the temple and marketplaces without consequence or concern for conscience. Paul, addresses the issue by dividing the question into two:

Paul forbids eating sacrificed food *at* temples in the presence of idol/demons for ethical reasons (8:1-13) and theological reasons (10:1-22). Ethically speaking, those who think in their freedom that they have



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“rights” of conscience to do whatever need to be very careful not to cause the “weak” to stumble. Theologically, the pagans are sacrificing to demons in their idolatry. God is jealous for his people.

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? 1 Cor. 10:21-22

Paul defends his own freedom, but uses his own example of not seeking to place stumbling blocks before anyone as an example to be followed. (9:1-27)

Paul makes allowance for eating food sacrificed to idols which is sold in the marketplace and eaten in private homes. Idols are nothing and food is food. But if someone invests the food with the association with idolatry—it is not to be eaten (10:23-11:1)