

A LITURGICAL CONVERSION OF THE IMAGINATION: Worship and Ethics in 1 Corinthians

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In a 1999 article, Richard Hays showed how St. Paul uses Scripture and Jewish apocalyptic eschatology in 1 Corinthians to reorient his readers' understanding of their identity and destiny.¹ By his Old Testament quotations and allusions, Paul, in effect, writes the Corinthians into Israel's story, grafting his Gentile converts onto the family line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moreover, in applying the Scriptures to the Corinthians' circumstances, Paul seeks to shape the way they comprehend their future, calling them to lead their lives in light of the resurrection and the expectation of Christ's return.

Scripture and eschatology are only two of the tools Paul drew upon in addressing the pastoral needs of the Corinthians and his other congregations, as Hays notes. The purpose of this article is to explore a related and complementary tool he used with the Corinthians—namely, the liturgy. Hays agrees that “liturgical traditions” are among the tools Paul used in his letters.² I hope to show that the way Paul situates these practices vis-à-vis their Old Testament roots plays a vital role in 1 Corinthians. Cultic language, including temple imagery and references to Jewish festival practices, pervades Paul's argument and plays a recurring role throughout most of the letter.³ Indeed, to adapt an image from Hays, one could say that liturgy constitutes the “substructure” of 1 Corinthians.⁴ I will show that for Paul the identification of the Corinthian church as the Temple of God entailed liturgical practices that provided the basis for rightly ordering their communal life. These practices, in turn, were intended to shape both the way the Corinthians related to one another and their stance in relation to the culture of the Roman

1 Richard B. Hays, “The Conversion of the Imagination: Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians,” *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 391–412, revised and reprinted in Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 1–24. All citations are taken from the revised essay.

2 Hays, “Conversion of the Imagination,” 8.

3 See Albert L. A. Hogeterp, *Paul and God's Temple: A Historical Interpretation of Cultic Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence*, Biblical Tools and Studies 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006); John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth: Rhetorical and Archaeological Approaches to Pauline Imagery*, Studies in Biblical Literature 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

4 See Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002). I do not mean to imply that liturgy plays exactly the same role that narrative plays in Hays' reading of Galatians. I am simply suggesting that liturgy and cult undergird a substantial portion of Paul's argument.

Empire, which tempted the Corinthians with a variety of conflicting cults and allegiances.

Thus, I hope that this article might also make a contribution to the broader scholarly discussion about the cultural and political implications of Paul's teaching—that is, what these teachings mean for Christians' relationships with the society around them, both in Paul's day, and in ours.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul recalls the story of Israel in the wilderness to warn the Corinthians against participating in idolatry. These things happened as "types" (Greek: *typikōs*) Paul says, for the Christians "upon whom the ends [*ta telē*] of the ages have come."⁵ Given that Paul rarely makes explicit reference to the Exodus account,⁶ one might ask why he appeals to these specific episodes here. Most obviously, the wilderness accounts deal with two major problems Paul needs to address in 1 Corinthians: idolatry and sexual immorality. But there may be another reason. As some commentators note, the primary purpose of the Exodus was not simply Israel's political emancipation from Egypt.⁷ Rather, the Exodus was ordered toward Sinai, where Israel was given the Law and instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle.⁸ Moreover, right worship and right relationships within the community of Israel were inextricably bound up with one another.⁹

Whether or not Paul consciously intended such a close association between worship and justice, the way he addresses many of the problems facing the Corinthian church reflects the implicit connection between liturgy and ethics that runs through Exodus and much of the Old Testament.¹⁰ With the image of the

5 1 Cor. 10:11; note that the Revised Standard Version translates *typikōs* as "a warning."

6 One exception being 2 Corinthians 3; note also the brief allusion in 2 Cor. 8:13–15.

7 See Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 20: "Worship is a central theme of Exodus. The overall movement of the book is from slavery to worship. The concern for the proper worship of Yahweh is also evident throughout the book, seen both in specific content and in the fact that liturgical usage of this material has shaped the literature." Indeed, the Israelites' freedom is ultimately oriented toward the worship of God. See Exod. 3:18; 7:16; 8:1; 9:1, 13; 10:3.

8 See again Fretheim, *Exodus*, 21–22, who notes the close connection between God's "tabernacled" presence and Israel's obedience to the Law. For an insightful theological discussion of the interrelatedness of worship, law, and ethics, see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 13–23.

9 See, for example, Exod. 22:20–21, where a warning against sacrifice to other gods is followed immediately by a commandment not to mistreat the resident alien, the widow, and the orphan. This idea is not unique to Exodus, but appears frequently in the prophets, as well. Temple worship without justice is worthless (Amos 5:21–24). Conversely, caring for the poor and oppressed does not obviate the need to honor God by keeping the Sabbath, for example, but rather invests it with meaning (Isa. 58:6–14).

10 Although some scholars label 1 Corinthians 8–14 as the section in which Paul deals with "liturgical issues," one could argue that the letter as a whole relates to liturgy in the sense that Paul addresses many of the problems facing the Corinthians in terms of their liturgical identity and praxis. Michael Gorman, for example, labels this section of the letter, "Addressing Liturgical Chaos: The Cross and Worship." See Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified*

Church as the Temple of God, the description of Christ as our “paschal lamb,” the contrast between the activities in pagan temples and what takes place in the Church of God—time and time again Paul grounds his ethical imperatives in the Corinthians’ life of worship.¹¹

“You Are God’s Temple”: The Liturgical Substructure of 1 Corinthians

Paul’s first explicit use of cultic language appears in 1 Corinthians 3. Rebuking the Corinthians for their infantile attraction to the eloquence of different Christian ministers, Paul describes the Corinthian church as a temple. Scholars have puzzled over Paul’s decision to use temple imagery in this chapter and still debate where in the text this idea begins. The actual term “God’s Temple” (*naos theou*) does not appear until 1 Corinthians 3:16. But D. R. De Lacey argues convincingly that Paul had the image in mind earlier, when he referred to the Church as “God’s building” and spoke of the building of its foundation.¹²

G. K. Beale also reads 1 Corinthians 3:9–15 in terms of the Temple, but he sees Tabernacle imagery as well.¹³ Indeed, Paul describes himself as a “wise master builder” (*sophos architekton*), which evokes Israel’s construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness.¹⁴ In the Greek Septuagint translation of the Exodus account, Bezalel, the builder of the Tabernacle, was to be filled with a “divine Spirit of wisdom” (*pneuma theion sophias*) so that he might “construct” (*architekton*)

Lord: *A Theological Introduction to Paul and his Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 255.

- 11 One flaw in Lanci’s helpful study, *A New Temple for Corinth*, is his failure to adequately acknowledge the differences Paul would have seen between the status of the Corinthian church as the Temple of God and pagan temples. Although there are no doubt parallels to be drawn between Paul’s image of the Corinthian church as a temple and pagan temples with regard to general sacrificial practice and the identity-forming function of temples, Paul would not have considered a comparison with pagan temples to be “neutral” or innocent, as we will see when we turn to 1 Cor. 8 and 1 Cor. 10.
- 12 See 1 Cor. 3:9, 11–12, 17; D. R. De Lacey, “*Hoitines este umeis* [That which you are]: The Function of a Metaphor in St Paul,” in *Templum Amicitiae: Essays on the Second Temple presented to Ernst Bammel*, ed. William Horbury, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 48 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 391–409. In 1 Cor. 3:9, as in 1 Cor. 3:16–17, Paul uses the second person plural form *este* (“you [all] are”), indicating that it is the Corinthian community as a whole that is God’s building or Temple. De Lacey argues persuasively that the “building” Paul refers to is a temple. He notes that the idea of the Spirit of God dwelling among the Corinthians as described in 1 Cor. 2 prepares the way for temple imagery. Indeed, Paul explicitly connects the indwelling of the Spirit with the nature of the Corinthian church as a temple both times he uses the image (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). Also, the nature of the building materials that Paul lists in 1 Cor. 3:12–13 is odd if he is talking about a generic building. As De Lacey notes, “wood is a much more reasonable building material than gold for the average building, and thatch must have been a common roofing.” Only if the building Paul describes in 1 Cor. 3:9–15 is a temple does the unsuitability of wood, hay, and straw make sense. De Lacey, “*Hoitines este umeis*,” at 404–405.
- 13 See 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: InterVarsity, 2004), 247.
- 14 1 Cor. 3:10.

the Tabernacle.¹⁵ Moreover, Bezalel is to build the Tabernacle with gold and silver—two of the materials Paul uses to describe the building of the Church.¹⁶ This language of wisdom, construction, and precious metals appears in a second description of the Tabernacle's construction in Exodus.¹⁷ Thus, it is likely that Paul had these passages in mind here, especially when one considers that he uses Exodus imagery elsewhere in the letter.¹⁸

How does the temple imagery in 1 Corinthians 3 fit into Paul's argument? As most commentators note, in this first major section of the epistle (1 Corinthians 1–4) Paul addresses the issues of factionalism and division in the community; this, then, is the primary context in which the imagery should be understood.¹⁹ Having challenged the Corinthians' allegiances to different ministers, Paul uses the temple imagery to address two issues: the unity of the community and the responsibility of Christian ministers.

Lest the Corinthians come under the false impression that Christian ministers would not be held accountable for their actions, Paul deploys the image of the Church as a temple built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. He warns his fellow ministers that the day will come when each one's work of "building" upon that foundation will be tested. Those whose work remains will receive a reward; those whose work is burned up will suffer loss.²⁰

Though in this immediate context Paul is speaking of Christian leaders, the way he continues to use the imagery of "building up" throughout the letter²¹ suggests his warning has a broader application—all believers in the community are called to build up the Church in holiness.²² Holiness is another important idea associated with Paul's temple imagery. Because the Corinthians are "God's Temple," the Spirit of God dwells among them, and they are therefore called to holiness.²³ Paul does not develop this idea in the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 3; however, his mention of holiness anticipates a theme that will return throughout the rest of the epistle.²⁴

15 Exod. 31:3–4.

16 Compare Exod. 31:4; 1 Cor. 3:12. Beale also points to the description of the building of the Temple in 1 Chron. 29:2; *Temple*, 247.

17 See Exod. 35:31–35.

18 For instance, in referring to Christ as the "paschal lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7), and in retelling of part of Israel's wilderness wanderings (1 Cor. 10).

19 For a persuasive argument that combating this factionalism is the primary purpose for Paul's writing of the entire letter, see Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).

20 1 Cor. 3:14–15.

21 1 Cor. 8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:4, 17.

22 See Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 70–71.

23 1 Cor. 3:17; see also Hogeterp, *Paul and God's Temple*, 324.

24 Brian S. Rosner, "Temple and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 5," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991): 137–145, at

Scholars recognize the repetition of both of these characteristics of temple imagery—holiness and “building up”—in 1 Corinthians.²⁵ The repetition of these themes suggests that the Temple at Jerusalem provides the governing principle for Paul’s ethical exhortations.²⁶ Less often noted is the emphasis on right worship and how Paul integrates Christian worship into his exhortation: the holiness of the community is bound up with the Christian “Passover,” the Eucharist;²⁷ this worship in the Christian Temple of the Church precludes pagan practices such as prostitution associated with pagan cults²⁸ and eating meat sacrificed to idols²⁹; moreover, according to Paul’s exhortations to the Corinthians, participation in the table of the Lord excludes participation in pagan sacrificial practices³⁰ and should shape relations within the community.³¹

This emphasis on the significance of worship and sacrifice, as well as its importance in ordering daily life, should come as no surprise given the role of the Temple and sacrifice in first century Judaism. As E. P. Sanders notes, in the ancient world “religion was sacrifice.”³² Considering the nature of temples in the ancient world, it strains credulity that Paul would use temple imagery with no thought to sacrificial worship. Perhaps even more important for understanding Paul, Judaism was distinguished from other ancient religions by its concern for the totality of human life.³³ Sacrifice and ethics went hand-in-hand, most likely stemming from the tradition established in Exodus.³⁴ It makes sense, then, that one of Paul’s primary goals in writing to the Corinthians was to reorient and reshape their worldview and common life in light of the logical implications of proper worship.

Holiness and the Eucharist in the Christian Temple

Paul turns to problems of sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 5–7. Brian Rosner argues that Paul’s instructions here pick up on his theme of the holiness of God’s

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25 For example, 1 Cor. 5–7; 8; 10; 14; see also Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth*, 70–71.

26 Hogeterp, *Paul and God’s Temple*, 295–298.

27 1 Cor. 5:7.

28 1 Cor. 6.

29 1 Cor. 8; 10.

30 1 Cor. 10.

31 1 Cor. 11–12.

32 E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 B.C.E. -66 C.E.* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1992), 49.

33 See again Sanders, *Judaism*, 50: “As a religion, [Judaism] was not strange because it included sacrifices, but because it included ethical, family and civil law as well.”

34 Some might point to Hos. 6:6 as a text that prioritizes ethics over worship, but the point of this text is rather that sacrifice apart from care for the poor is not pleasing to God; see Gale A. Yee, *Hosea*, New Interpreter’s Bible 7 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 252; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary 31 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 110.

Temple.³⁵ Paul's call to cast out the offender recalls Old Testament precedents that prescribe excommunication from both the Temple and the community for offenses that imperil the people's holiness.³⁶ In addition, his language about "destruction," connects his disciplinary admonishment here with his earlier temple imagery.³⁷ This connection further strengthens the idea that the holiness of the Corinthian community as God's Temple undergirds Paul's instructions regarding the incestuous couple referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:1.

In addition to the motifs of purity and holiness that bind these passages together, Paul's use of Passover imagery in 1 Corinthians 5:7–8 reinforces the connection with 1 Corinthians 3:16–17.³⁸ The Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread, which figures prominently in the way Paul addresses the incestuous relationship, is closely associated with the Temple.³⁹ Moreover, the cleansing of leaven, another image used by Paul, is linked with the cleansing of the Temple prior to Passover.⁴⁰ As we will see again and again, Paul teaches that it is the holiness of the Corinthian community as God's Temple that governs how it ought to address matters such as sexual immorality.

In what sense does Paul understand Christ as the "paschal lamb," and what does he mean when he exhorts the Corinthians to "celebrate not in the old leaven or in the leaven of wickedness and evil, but in the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"?⁴¹ Does this imagery point only to the crucifixion, and is Paul's mention of "leaven" simply a metaphor for cleansing out evil from the community, or is there more to the image? Interpretation of Paul's festival language as referring to the Christian life in general has a long and venerable tradition, dating at least as far back as St. John Chrysostom.⁴² Nevertheless, there are reasons to think that Paul is also referring here to the Eucharist.

35 Rosner, "Temple and Holiness," 142.

36 See Deut. 23:2–9; Ps. 15; Isa. 23:14–17; Ezek. 20:38–40; cited in Rosner, "Temple and Holiness," 138–139.

37 Compare 1 Cor. 5:5 ("You are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh") and 1 Cor. 3:17: ("If anyone destroys God's Temple, God will destroy that person. For God's Temple is holy, and you are that Temple"). Paul uses different words for "destruction" in these passages, but nonetheless there is a thematic similarity.

38 Rosner, "Temple and Holiness," 144–145. Compare J. Paul Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, New Interpreter's Bible 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 851: "By a clever use of Passover analogies, such as yeast, dough, and unleavened lump, Paul elaborates the theme of believers' being God's Temple that must not be corrupted."

39 Though Passover and Unleavened Bread originally constituted two different feasts, by the first century the two had been merged to form one. See the helpful discussion in Sanders, *Judaism*, 132–138.

40 Rosner, "Temple and Holiness," 144–145, citing 2 Chron. 29:5, 35; 35:1–19; Ezra 6:13–18.

41 1 Cor. 5:7–8.

42 See St. John Chrysostom's homilies on 1 Cor. 15, in Judith L. Kovacs, trans. and ed., *1 Corinthians: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*, The Church's Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,

First, to read Paul's reference to Christ as "paschal lamb" only with regard to the cross leaves out an important element of the Passover, namely the meal.⁴³ While such a reading is possible, other passages in 1 Corinthians indicate that Paul saw a correspondence between the Jewish Passover and the Christian liturgy. Second, his reference to "unleavened bread," a common feature of the Passover meal, would most likely also evoke the Eucharist, the sacrificial meal of bread and wine in which believers commemorated the death of Christ and communed with him and with one another in anticipation of his return.⁴⁴ Indeed, it is striking that 1 Corinthians is the only letter in which Paul explicitly appeals to the Eucharist, and the only letter in which he refers to Christ as the "paschal lamb." Finally, since elements of the Exodus tradition influence Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, both of which address the implications of the Eucharist for the Corinthians, it stands to reason that here in 1 Corinthians 5, which also clearly draws on the Exodus tradition, Paul is also referring to the Eucharist on some level.⁴⁵

Developing the temple imagery of 1 Corinthians 3 to include the Corinthians' liturgical practices, Paul exhorts his readers to lead their lives in a manner worthy of the Eucharist, the new paschal sacrifice that takes place in the Church as God's Temple.⁴⁶

2005), 86: "When Paul said, let us celebrate the festival, he did not say this because Passover was at hand, or the feast of Pentecost, but to show that all time is a festal time for Christians, because of the abundance of blessings bestowed on them."

43 That the Passover was a meal in addition to being a sacrifice goes as far back as the origins of the festival described in Exod. 12 and was an important feature of the feast in first-century Judaism. See Sanders, *Judaism*, 132–138.

44 1 Cor. 10:16–17; 11:23–26. Such a connection is all the more likely given that early Christian tradition closely associated the institution of the Eucharist with the Passover. For a judicious discussion of the relevant issues, see Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 871–874. See also Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University, 1995), 195. Gordon Fee suggests, "It is just possible, however, that this further reference to celebrating the feast also includes an allusion to their sitting at the table of the Lord." See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 218–219. Joseph Fitzmyer offers similarly tentative support for such a reading: "Paul may be using the image of a Christian Passover to make his hortatory point." See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 32 (New Haven: Yale University, 2008), 242. Compare Hogeterp, *Paul and God's Temple*, 354.

45 Further support for this reading may be found in 1 Cor. 5:11, where Paul warns the Corinthians "not even to eat" with someone who takes the name "brother" (that is, a member of the Church) but practices the vices listed earlier in the verse. Fee (*First Corinthians*, 218) tentatively suggests that "an allusion to the table [of the Lord] in the context of expelling a brother would certainly be fitting, especially in light of the command in verse 11 that they not even eat with him." Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 243–244) takes 1 Cor. 5:11 to refer to both the Lord's Supper and regular meals.

46 There is no need, then, to pose the dichotomy that Fee (*First Corinthians*, 219) proposes: "Paul's immediate concern is not with the table, but with their overall behavior." On the contrary, Paul

Temple imagery continues to shape Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 concerning another instance of sexual immorality, a passage that is complicated, confusing, and fraught with exegetical difficulties.⁴⁷ As is often the case in 1 Corinthians, one is faced with the task of discerning when Paul is speaking in his own voice and when he is quoting the arguments of factions in the Corinthian community. Additionally, scholars have long debated what Paul means by the ambiguous word *porneia* (variously translated “immorality,” “sexual immorality,” and “fornication”). Does it refer to all kinds of sexual immorality or to a specific kind? If the latter, then what offense does Paul have in mind?

Older commentators took the term *porneia* to refer to sexual immorality in general.⁴⁸ Such a reading, however, fails to take account of the term “prostitute” (*pornē*) in 1 Corinthians 6:15.⁴⁹ At least some of the ambiguity of the term *porneia* should be cleared up by Paul's use of the noun “prostitute,” though the nature of the prostitution Paul describes remains the matter of some debate.⁵⁰

Based on literary and cultural context Rosner makes the helpful suggestion that Paul is referring to prostitution associated with pagan festivals.⁵¹ Wisely distinguishing between cultic prostitution as part of a sacred rite, for which evidence is tenuous at best, and prostitution that would spring up around festivals as part of the celebration, Rosner argues that the latter practice is the object of Paul's condemnation.

A number of phrases connect Paul's discussion of prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6 with his admonitions against idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10.⁵² His warning to “flee sexual immorality” shares the same structure and language as the warning to “flee idolatry,”⁵³ and in both passages Paul quotes the Corinthian slogan

is concerned with their behavior because it is not in keeping with the nature and symbolism of the table, as we will see below.

47 See Brian S. Rosner, “Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20,” *Novum Testamentum* 40 (1998): 336–351, at 336.

48 Fee (*First Corinthians*, 250, n. 10) suggests that this is the standard view of older commentaries. See, for example, Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985), 95 and John C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965), 86, cited in Rosner, “Temple Prostitution,” 337, n. 6. More recently, Raymond F. Collins translates the term as “sexual misconduct”; see *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina 7 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 239–241.

49 Rosner, “Temple Prostitution,” 338.

50 Will Deming argues that in 1 Cor. 6:12–20 Paul continues to address the problem of the incestuous relationship between the man and his stepmother first noted in 1 Cor. 5:1. There are a number of problems with his approach, not the least of which is that there is no evidence for the practice of prostitution between family members. See Deming, “The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5–6,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1992): 289–312.

51 Rosner, “Temple Prostitution,” 338.

52 Rosner, “Temple Prostitution,” 345–346.

53 Compare 1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14.

"all things are lawful."⁵⁴ In the first instance the slogan seems to be used to justify the solicitation of prostitutes, and in the latter, idolatry. On this reading, Paul's description of the Corinthians' bodies as a "Temple of the Holy Spirit,"⁵⁵ makes sense as a contrast between their new existence in Christ and the prostitution practiced in the pagan temples.

Scholars have raised one important objection to this reading of 1 Corinthians 6: there is no unambiguous evidence for the practice of cultic prostitution in first century Corinth.⁵⁶ Does this mean that Paul was opposing non-cultic or secular prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6, as some suggest? Not necessarily. There is a third type of prostitution, distinct from cultic and secular prostitution, that makes sense of Paul's context and is historically attested: "prostitution at cultic events of a festive nature."⁵⁷ Although the evidence for sacred prostitution as part of the temple cult in first-century Corinth is practically non-existent, the association of prostitution with the festivities of the pagan temples is more widely recognized. Many Old Testament writings, as well as some Jewish writings of the first century, commonly associate the pagans' ritual feasting with sexual immorality.⁵⁸

There is one more possible objection to this line of interpretation: if Paul opposes prostitution at least in part because of its association with pagan temples, why does he not deal with it in the context of his discussion of temple attendance in 1 Corinthians 10?⁵⁹ Rosner suggests that Paul chose to follow a pattern common to Hellenistic Jewish exhortations in which similar topics are grouped together. So, Paul first addresses incest, homosexuality, prostitution, and marriage together before moving on to the Christian's relation to pagan temples. This suggestion has some merit. There can be no gainsaying that 1 Corinthians 5–7 treats sexual matters together, while 1 Corinthians 8–10 deals more explicitly with idols and meat served at pagan temples. Nevertheless, I believe another theme ties together

54 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23.

55 1 Cor. 6:19.

56 Rosner, "Temple Prostitution," 347–348. The only description of sacred sex in Corinth, the Greek geographer Strabo's well-known account of the one thousand prostitutes who would descend upon the city from the temple of Aphrodite, refers to the city destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C., not to first-century Corinth. Moreover, some scholars dispute the accuracy of the remark. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, for example, suggests that "sacred prostitution was never a Greek custom, and were Corinth an exception, the silence of all other ancient authors becomes impossible to explain"; see his *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, Good News Studies 6 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 56.

57 Rosner, "Temple Prostitution," 348.

58 Rosner ("Temple Prostitution," 348–50) cites Hos. 4:13–14; Isa. 57:3; Wisd. 14:12–27; 2 Enoch 10:4–6. He also notes some pagan writers who describe sexual intercourse as a natural activity following a banquet, though the texts cited do not refer explicitly to temples, but rather feasts in a home. See Catharine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 186–190.

59 Rosner, "Temple Prostitution," 350.

all of 1 Corinthians 5–10, and indeed continues through to 1 Corinthians 14—the implications of the Corinthians’ liturgical practices for their interaction with pagan culture.

The Food of Demons and the Table of the Lord

As we discussed, in 1 Corinthians 5 Paul addresses the problem of incest by appealing to Christ’s paschal sacrifice and, by implication, the Corinthians’ eucharistic praxis. With that imagery in the background, it can hardly be a coincidence that toward the middle of 1 Corinthians 6 Paul introduces one of the Corinthian slogans, “Food is meant for the stomach and stomach for food, and God will destroy both the one and the other.”⁶⁰ One could take this slogan to refer to food in general or perhaps as a dismissal of food laws. However, in light of what we have said about the type of prostitution Paul is condemning, several features of this passage suggest that Paul has a more specific kind of food in mind.

First, if Paul’s warnings against prostitution imply a festal context, then it would make sense that the food described in the slogan also has some kind of cultic association. Second, if the food to which Paul refers has cultic associations, this would better explain why he refers once again to the Corinthians as the Temple of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:19. Third, with one exception, “food” (*brōma*) in 1 Corinthians is always associated with cultic contexts.⁶¹ For instance, in 1 Corinthians 8, the first explicit discussion of meat sacrificed to idols, Paul warns the Corinthians about the potential dangers of such “food” (*brōma*), noting that this food would be of no benefit to them and may in fact cause scandal to some.⁶² In 1 Corinthians 10, his other major discussion of meat sacrificed to idols, Paul describes the manna in the wilderness as “spiritual food [*pneumatikon brōma*].”⁶³ These three factors lend further weight to the suggestion that the latter half of 1 Corinthians 6 refers to pagan festival customs. Revelry in the form of food and sex were common at these feasts, and so it makes sense that Paul would discuss these two topics together, as he does implicitly in 1 Corinthians 10.

But why does Paul so briefly introduce the theme of temple food in the midst of a discussion of sexual immorality? At first glance this reference to food and the stomach seems out of place. Upon further consideration, however, the presence of the temple theme—both explicitly in 1 Corinthians 6:19 and implicitly in the mention of food in 1 Corinthians 6:13—suggests that Paul here continues to base his exhortation on the exclusivity of Christian liturgical praxis. Given the cultic nature of the argument, it is possible that Paul’s quotation of the Corinthian

60 1 Cor. 6:13.

61 The exception is 1 Cor. 3:2, where Paul uses *brōma* as a metaphor for teaching.

62 1 Cor. 8:8, 13.

63 1 Cor. 10:3.

slogan about food serves as a subtle reminder of the significance and implications of the Eucharist.

This might explain the initially jarring juxtaposition of the slogan asserting that bodily concerns do not matter ("Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both the one and the other.") with Paul's rebuttal, which emphasizes the importance of the body ("The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body, and God raised the Lord and will raise us by his power.").⁶⁴ The combination of the food slogan with an appeal to the union between the believer and Christ begins to make more sense, though, if Paul has in mind not simply an abstract union with Christ, but rather the communion that comes about through the Eucharist.

Such a reading of the passage may seem far-fetched, but a number of factors speak in its favor. First, if the "food" Paul is referring to is that offered in pagan temples, then Paul's reminder to his readers that they are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), would evoke the kind of food they receive in their temple, that is, the Eucharist. Second, we saw how Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5, appealed to Christ's paschal sacrifice, and by inference to the Eucharist, in addressing the Corinthians' indifference to sexual immorality. If here in 1 Corinthians 6 Paul still has the Eucharist in mind, then his exhortation continues that line of thought begun earlier. Further, his earlier reference to unleavened bread, together with the warning not to eat with believers caught in egregious sins,⁶⁵ would prepare readers for a subsequent reference to the Christian paschal sacrifice celebrated at the Lord's Supper, particularly as it relates to another kind of sexual immorality.

Third, Paul draws a similar connection between idolatry and liturgical practice later in the letter, there framing his warning to "flee from idolatry" in terms of the mutually exclusive "table of the Lord" and "table of demons."⁶⁶ Paul's description of the Eucharist as a "participation in the Body of Christ"⁶⁷ provides the rationale for his appeal to union with Christ as the basis for abstention from union with a prostitute in 1 Corinthians 6. Finally, we see a similar concentration of the language of "the body" and "the Lord" in 1 Corinthians 11:23–34. In this more explicit discussion of the Eucharist, building on his warnings about the table of the Lord and the table of demons, Paul again warns the Corinthians not to approach the Eucharist frivolously.

Given these considerations, reading 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 as another example of Paul drawing on Christian liturgical practice to warn the Corinthians against sexual immorality ties the passage both to what precedes it and to what follows. Building on the images of temple in 1 Corinthians 3 and Christ as paschal

64 1 Cor. 6:13–14.

65 1 Cor. 5:8, 11.

66 See 1 Cor. 10:3, 6–8, 14–22.

67 1 Cor. 10:16.

lamb in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul continues to draw out the implications of right worship for life in Christ.⁶⁸

A New “Shema” for the New Temple

Although the word “temple” does not appear again after 1 Corinthians 6, Paul continues to use the temple motif implicitly in exhorting the community not to partake in the pagan rites. As John Lanci notes, the Corinthian correspondence is saturated with the imagery of upbuilding, most often in the context of “building up” the community.⁶⁹ One explanation for this is that the imagery of the Church as temple continues to play a role in Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians.⁷⁰

Paul uses this imagery in his warnings against the pagan cults, taking up in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 what already lay subtly beneath the surface in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20. At root, the problem Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 8 is once again that of liturgy and worship. At least some of the Corinthians were being tempted for a variety of reasons to attend the pagan temples for a meal, and in the process some seem to have reverted to their old pagan ways, or at least to have been tempted to do so.

Several scholars have suggested that the crux of Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 8 lies in his appropriation and reinterpretation of the Shema, the traditional Jewish prayer stemming from Deuteronomy 6:4–5.⁷¹ N. T. Wright, for example, argues that in 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul expands the Septuagint’s version of

68 See the similar reading in Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), 77: “In order to express fully the intensity and reality of this fusion, Paul compares what happens in Holy Communion with the physical union between man and woman. To help understand the Eucharist, he refers us to the words in the creation story: ‘The two [man and wife] shall become one’ (Gen. 2:24). And he adds: ‘He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit [that is, shares a single new existence in the Holy Spirit] with him’ (1 Cor. 6:17).”

69 See Lanci (*A New Temple for Corinth*, 71; 85, n. 85), where he notes the occurrence of the verbal form *epoikodomeō* (“to build up, build upon”) in 1 Cor. 3:10 (twice), 12, 14; of the noun *oikodomē* (“building”) in 1 Cor. 3:9; 14:3, 5, 12, 26; 2 Cor. 5:1; 10:8; 12:19; 13:1; and of the cognate verb *oikodomēō* (“to build”) in 1 Cor. 8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:4, 17.

70 Lanci (*A New Temple for Corinth*, 59–61, at 60) notes that much of Paul’s construction language could have metaphorical as well as literal connotations. Nevertheless, he says, “In light of the social and economic location of Paul’s correspondents, it is plausible that the construction and building language found in 1 Cor. functions on a literal as well as a metaphorical level. The imagery and vocabulary together sustain a single theme describing the creation of the Christian community in terms of a building.”

71 See N. T. Wright, “Monotheism, Christology and Ethics: 1 Corinthians 8,” in *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 120–136; Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd. ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 97; James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: SCM, 1980), 179; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 97–104, 210–218; D. R. De Lacey, “One Lord’ in Pauline Christology,” in *Christ the Lord: Studies in*

the Shema to gloss the terms “God” (*theos*) and “Lord” (*kyrios*) with references to the Father and to Christ, respectively:⁷²

But for us there is one God, the Father,
from whom are all things and we for him,
and one Lord, Jesus Christ,
through whom are all things and we through him. (1 Cor. 8:6)

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. (Deut. 6:4)⁷³

In addition to the common terminology (“one,” “God,” “Lord,” “us, our”) Paul’s introductory reference to loving God (“But if one loves God ...”) lends further support to the argument that the text from Deuteronomy (“You shall love the Lord your God ...”) lies in the background.⁷⁴ In appropriating this quintessential Jewish prayer, Paul emphasizes Israel’s monotheism to rule out allegiance to the many “so-called gods”⁷⁵ ubiquitous in Corinth and throughout the ancient world. At the same time, Paul’s reworking of the Shema yields what Wright describes as “christological monotheism”—a belief in the one God of Israel that includes Christ within the divine identity.⁷⁶ In a way analogous to his earlier use of Passover imagery to describe Christ’s death, Paul here redefines another central feature of Israel’s belief and practice to include the risen Christ.

Paul’s redefinition of the *Shema* may also be connected to his use of temple imagery. It is widely known that the *Shema* served as the Jews’ common daily prayer in the first century.⁷⁷ Less often noted is the *Shema*’s connection to the service in the Jerusalem Temple. In the Mishnah, the tractate *Berakhot* (“Benedictions”) begins with a question concerning when a man should recite the *Shema*.⁷⁸ Although

Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie, ed. H. H. Rowdon (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), 191–203.

72 Wright, “Monotheism, Christology and Ethics,” 126–132.

73 Following De Lacey’s translation of the Septuagint, where the Greek runs *Akouē, Israēl, kyrios ho theos hēmōn, Kyrios heis estī*; see “One Lord” in Pauline Christology,” 196.

74 Compare 1 Cor. 8:3; Deut. 6:5. See Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 100.

75 1 Cor. 8:4–5.

76 Wright, “Monotheism, Christology and Ethics,” 129, 136.

77 The Jewish historian Josephus, for example, notes that Jews recited the *Shema* twice daily in gratitude for Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 4, chap. 8, 13. For further discussion of communal prayer in first century Judaism, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 69–73.

78 For a discussion of the waning association of the *Shema* with the Temple cult over the course of the development of rabbinic Judaism, see Carl M. Perkins, “The Evening *Shema*: A Study in Rabbinic Consolation,” *Judaism* 43 (1994): 27–36. Quotations of the Mishnah are taken from Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1933).

this tractate was compiled some time after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., the rabbis in the text nevertheless offer three different answers—all three of which closely associate the prayer with the Temple cult.⁷⁹ Moreover, this tradition is likely to date to the first century, as it would be odd for the rabbis to invent a practice so closely associated with the Temple no longer standing and no priesthood to perform the sacrificial rites referred to.

The *Berakhot* is not the only section of the Mishnah to associate the *Shema* with Temple sacrifice. The Mishnah tractate *Tamid* (“The Daily Whole-Offering”), which outlines regulations for the daily sacrifice in the Temple, notes that the *Shema* was an integral part of the ritual. Immediately following the sacrifice of a lamb, a grain offering, and a drink offering, but before preparing the incense, the priest would recite the *Shema*.⁸⁰

Given this background, Paul’s redefinition of the *Shema* in the context of a discussion of temple food can hardly be reduced to only a *doctrinal* debate over monotheism, though it certainly has doctrinal implications. The problem with the Corinthians’ behavior is not solely or even primarily one of *doctrine*,⁸¹ the Corinthians, after all, claimed to know that the so-called gods in the pagan temples were not real.⁸² The fundamental problem was rather one of *praxis*. Paul sees the problem of idol meat as a clash of competing liturgies.⁸³ The Corinthians have yet to work out how their new liturgical life ought to shape their everyday actions.

Paul takes up and redefines the fundamental first-century Jewish prayer—a prayer liturgically oriented toward the Temple—to remind them that Christian worship and pagan worship are mutually exclusive, even if one acknowledges that the gods worshipped in the pagan temple are not real.⁸⁴ In other words, for Paul,

79 See Mishnah *Berakhot* [“Benedictions”] 1:1, in Danby, *Mishnah*, 2.

80 Mishnah *Tamid* [“The Daily Whole-Offering”] 5:1. I am grateful to Brant Pitre for bringing this text to my attention. See also Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 64–73.

81 Contrast, for example, Wright, “Monotheism, Christology and Ethics,” 125: “Monotheism was therefore exactly the *doctrine* to which one would appeal in going back to first principles when faced with the question as to how a group that asserted its continuity with the (Jewish) people of God (compare 1 Cor. 10:1, etc.) might behave when faced with living in a pagan society.” Emphasis added. Bauckham comes closer to the mark when he writes, “[Paul] is, in fact, shifting the emphasis from the mere existence or otherwise of gods (which the Corinthians’ use of the statement quoted in verse 4 stressed) to the question of *allegiance, devotion and worship*” (*Jesus and the God of Israel*, 211, emphasis added). He does not, however, draw a connection to Paul’s temple imagery.

82 1 Cor. 8:4.

83 Compare De Lacey (“One Lord’ in Pauline Christology,” 201): “In the context of 1 Corinthians 8–10, the eating of idol-meats is contrasted with the Christian meal at the table of the *Lord*.”

84 To put the emphasis on *praxis* rather than on *doctrine* is not, however, to deny the significance of the latter. To be sure, Paul would have considered those whom the pagans worshipped at best as demons (see 1 Cor. 10:20) rather than divine in the same way as the God of Israel revealed through Jesus Christ.

Christian confession of the redefined *Shema* entails Christian participation in the cult of the Christian Temple and excludes participation in the pagan cults of Corinth, a point he makes more explicitly in 1 Corinthians 10.

The Table of the Lord and the Table of Demons

If in 1 Corinthians 8 Paul describes the damaging effects that their nonchalant approach to pagan temple food might have on the “weak,” in 1 Corinthians 10 he turns to the danger of such behavior for the “strong” Corinthians. Lest they think that their “knowledge” would spare them any negative consequences for trifling with pagan temples, Paul appeals to the Exodus tradition as a cautionary tale about the real harm such actions could cause.

As we have noted, this appeal to the Exodus tradition in this context makes sense on at least two levels. Most obviously, the account describes the punishment of the Israelites for their sexual immorality and idolatry, two major problems facing the Church in Corinth. On a deeper level, this tradition closely relates liturgy and life, which, as we have seen, is a recurring theme in the letter. Just as the Israelites’ lapse into idolatry led them to other offenses, so too the failure of the Corinthians to work out the logic of their identity as God’s Temple has led to the numerous problems Paul is forced to address in his letter.

Paul retells the Exodus episode in a manner that would help the Corinthians identify more closely with the story. As Hays points out, Paul’s description of the Israelites as “our fathers” implicitly draws the Gentiles in his audience into Israel’s story.⁸⁵ In a sense, they can no longer consider themselves Gentiles, a point he will later make explicit when he begins a new exhortation with the words: “When you *were* Gentiles.”⁸⁶ Paul also reshapes the account using Christian sacramental language: the Israelites were “baptized into Moses,” they “ate the same spiritual food,” and they “drank the same spiritual drink.”⁸⁷

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul describes Christian liturgical practice using Passover imagery; here he depicts the Exodus drawing on Christian liturgical language. The “spiritual food and drink” of the Israelites corresponds to the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The Israelites all ate “the *same* spiritual food” and drank “the *same* spiritual drink”; similarly, the Corinthians all partake of “*one* bread.”⁸⁸ These similarities ultimately serve as a warning for the Corinthians. Just as many of the Israelites despised the gifts of God and were destroyed because they succumbed to idolatry, the Corinthians run the risk of destruction should they mingle their participation in the table of the Lord with participation in the table of demons. Just as Israel had not yet reached the Promised Land and so could still fall short, so too

85 1 Cor. 10:1; see Hays, “Conversion of the Imagination,” 9.

86 1 Cor. 12:2.

87 1 Cor. 10:2–4.

88 1 Cor. 10:17.

the Corinthians were risking their salvation during their time “in the wilderness” at the turn of the ages,⁸⁹ by not realizing the exclusivity of the Christian liturgy or the significance of its symbolism.

Thus, the practical implication of Paul’s liturgical symbolism in 1 Corinthians 10 is the same as that of 1 Corinthians 5, and it is a point we have seen again and again in the letter—right worship of the God of Israel excludes sexual immorality and idolatry. The Corinthians’ sexual dalliances, along with their other mistakes, stem from their failure to work out the moral logic that flows from their liturgical practice.⁹⁰

The cause of their temptation is not difficult to discern: as former pagans, the Corinthians were accustomed to frequenting pagan temples and to participating in the sacrifices. In order to help them overcome their old habits Paul sets forth the Eucharist as an alternative to the pagan cults and as a way of escaping temptation.⁹¹ Two factors suggest that Paul sees a parallel between the Eucharist and pagan feasts. First, Paul has warned the Corinthians several times against participating in pagan cults,⁹² and the wider context of 1 Corinthians 10:1–22 relates to proper and improper worship. Second, Paul compares the Eucharist to two other kinds of meals: Jewish sacrificial meals associated with the Temple cult and the tables of pagan gods found in their temples.⁹³

Significantly, the phrase “table of the Lord,” which Paul uses to describe Christian worship, appears in the prophetic writings of Malachi and Ezekiel as referring to the altar of sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple.⁹⁴ By implication, Paul understands and presents the Eucharist as a sacrificial meal. Specifically, it is the sacrifice that takes place in the Temple of the Holy Spirit that is the Corinthian church; it is a sacrifice that precludes participation in all other sacrifices.

Perhaps equally important for Paul, participation in the Eucharist creates unity among the Corinthians: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”⁹⁵ Partaking in the Christian cult not only prevents the Corinthians from practicing idolatry; it also fosters the unity that is one of the main needs in the Church at Corinth.⁹⁶

89 1 Cor. 10:11.

90 It is significant that the only two places where Paul warns the Corinthians to “flee” from something are in 1 Cor. 10:14 (“Flee from idolatry!”) and in 1 Cor. 6:18 (“Flee from sexual immorality!”).

91 1 Cor. 10:13.

92 1 Cor 6:12–20; 8:1–13; 10:1–13.

93 1 Cor. 10:18, 21; see Hays, *First Corinthians*, 167.

94 See Mal. 1:7, 12; Ezek. 44:16; the latter uses the phrase “my table,” which in context clearly refers to the Lord’s table.

95 1 Cor. 10:17. For further discussion, see Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 390–391.

96 1 Cor. 1:10; Mitchell (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 142) notes such a connection: “Again,

“Discerning the Body”: Sacrifice and Unity in Corinth

The problem of factionalism, in many ways the central issue addressed in 1 Corinthians, plays a prominent role in the liturgical abuse plaguing the local Church. Picking up the term with which he introduced the problem, in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul upbraids them for yet another failure to live out the practical implications of their worship: “I hear that there are divisions [*schismata*] among you.”⁹⁷

Though the emphasis shifts from concerns about idolatry to distinctions some Corinthians were making based on social class, the root of the problem may also relate to the on-going participation in the pagan cults by some in their ranks. Again, we see that this problem, like so many others in Corinth, stems from the people’s failure to understand their identity as the Temple of God and the symbolism of the new Christian liturgy.

The most obvious and likely explanation of the abuses Paul decries has to do with first-century meal practices. It was common to divide guests at meals based on social status, with those of higher status receiving more sumptuous food than the poor.⁹⁸ When they gathered to celebrate the Eucharist, the Corinthians also shared a common meal, but did so according to the common practice—the wealthy gorged themselves on food and drink, while the poor went hungry, as Paul describes it.⁹⁹ Such behavior, he teaches, strikes at the heart of the unity of the Church and contradicts the symbolism of the sacrament that brings about this unity.¹⁰⁰

Paul’s accusation that “some are getting drunk” at these common meals,¹⁰¹ while perhaps an exaggeration to heighten the contrast between rich and poor, is nonetheless puzzling.¹⁰² What could have led the Corinthians to think that feasting to the point of gluttony was acceptable in the context of the celebration of the Eucharist? Again, the problem relates to a misunderstanding of the nature of Christian worship. The Corinthians were obviously familiar with pagan festivals, which included various kinds of revelry, and some even continued to frequent the pagan temples, if only to purchase meat, rationalizing their attendance with

[Paul’s] application of the cultic unity here in the argument is to the social unity which should be its natural consequence.”

97 1 Cor. 11:18; compare 1 Cor. 1:10.

98 Hays (*First Corinthians*, 194–197) uses the helpful contemporary analogy of the distinction between first class and coach passengers on airplanes.

99 1 Cor. 11:20–21.

100 1 Cor. 10:17.

101 1 Cor. 10:17.

102 Fee (*First Corinthians*, 542–543) suggests that we should not take the accusation of drunkenness literally, but rather as an image highlighting the extravagance of the eating of the wealthy in contrast to the little given to the poor.

an appeal to their “knowledge” of the true God.¹⁰³ Moreover, the context of 1 Corinthians 11 suggests that Paul and the Corinthians regarded this common meal as “cultic” in some sense.¹⁰⁴

Given this background, one can see how their understanding of the Eucharist as the Christian festival might lead them to expect the sorts of celebrations that accompanied the feasts to which they were accustomed. Even Paul acknowledges an analogy between the Eucharist and what goes on in pagan temples,¹⁰⁵ albeit one that demands exclusivity and an altogether different behavior stemming from the sacrifice. Given the Corinthians’ background, it is also possible that feasting of the sort described in 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 was, in part, a holdover from the Corinthians’ pagan past.

Paul addresses the problem by appealing to the tradition of the institution of the Eucharist in order to remind the Corinthians of the true nature of the Christian sacrifice. The Corinthians’ behavior runs completely counter to the attitude embodied in Christ’s last meal, which ought to be the center of their gatherings. Christ’s attitude of complete self-giving, symbolized and made real in the Eucharist, precludes the factionalism of the Corinthian church. The Christian Passover demands that believers count others better than themselves.¹⁰⁶ By failing to “discern the body”¹⁰⁷—by which Paul most likely refers both to the Eucharist itself and to the unity of the Church effected by the Eucharist—the Corinthians bring down condemnation upon themselves.¹⁰⁸ Their failure to live out the significance of the Eucharist leads to fracture and harm to the Body of Christ.

Christ’s Body: Liturgical Roots of a Metaphor

The unity effected through the Eucharist continues to shape Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 12, where he further develops the image of the body to address the question of spiritual gifts. Traditionally, many scholars have interpreted Paul’s use of the metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ in light of the ancient rhetorical tradition comparing a society to a human body.¹⁰⁹ There can be no doubt that the Corinthians would have heard Paul’s use of that metaphor, at least in part, according to these conventions. Nevertheless, rhetorical convention alone does not offer an adequate explanation of why Paul would use this trope in this particular

103 1 Cor. 8:1, 4.

104 See Fee, *First Corinthians*, 531–532; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 417–418.

105 1 Cor. 10:14–22.

106 1 Cor. 5:7; 11:23–26.

107 1 Cor. 11:29.

108 See Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 194–196.

109 Hays, *First Corinthians*, 213; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 600–601; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 458–459; Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 92–94.

letter.¹¹⁰ It can hardly be coincidental that Paul's discussion of the Church as the Body of Christ directly follows 1 Corinthians 10–11, where Paul discusses the Eucharist in two different contexts. Indeed, one could say that 1 Corinthians 12 combines themes from each of the two previous discussions and draws out further implications for the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul connects sacramental practice with the Church's identity as the Body of Christ,¹¹¹ while, as we have just seen, in 1 Corinthians 11 he castigates the Corinthians for not recognizing the social implications of their unity in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul brings these two aspects of the Eucharist together to develop the significance of the liturgy for the Corinthians' common life.

One can see the connection to worship by the way Paul begins the chapter, discussing the spiritual gifts in light of the Corinthians' turn from idolatry: "You know that when you were Gentiles, you were led astray after idols that cannot speak."¹¹² Paul further underscores the liturgical nature of his use of the imagery of the Body of Christ by connecting it not only to the Eucharist, but also to baptism: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."¹¹³ More than simply a rhetorical trope, the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ is for Paul a sacramental and liturgical reality, constituted by baptism and the Eucharist. Indeed, as we have already seen, the sacramental unity brought about by baptism and Eucharist forms the basis for Paul's warning against union with a prostitute.¹¹⁴

Though there are certainly affinities between 1 Corinthians 12 and Greek and Roman understandings of a society as a human body, Paul radically reinterprets the image.¹¹⁵ Whereas the Greco-Roman notion served to reinforce natural hierarchies and the proper role and place of each individual in society, Paul inverts this standard view by asserting that it is in fact the weaker members of the body who deserve more honor and care. This is in keeping with the reversal of the world's values that he says the Gospel entails.¹¹⁶

This concern for the weak also relates to the Corinthians' liturgical praxis. The Corinthians' gatherings were marred by divisions that blatantly cut against the symbolism of the Eucharist; their misunderstanding of the Eucharist damaged not only their gatherings, but also their life together as a whole. Thus, Paul reminds

110 It is worth noting that on most standard chronologies of Paul's letters, 1 Cor. would be the first letter in which Paul appeals to the imagery of the Church as the Body of Christ.

111 1 Cor. 10:16–17.

112 1 Cor. 12:2.

113 1 Cor. 12:13.

114 1 Cor. 6:15–17. Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 266) rightly notes that Paul's talk of joining the "members of Christ" to a prostitute in 1 Cor. 6:15 anticipates the fuller discussion of the Church as the Body of Christ in 1 Cor. 12.

115 See again Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 92–94.

116 See 1 Cor. 1:18–31. See again Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 94–96.

the Corinthians of the significance of the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ: "But God has so arranged the body, giving greater honor to the inferior member, so that there might not be division (*schisma*) in the body, but the members might have the same care for one another."¹¹⁷ As with so many other problems facing the Corinthian church, the failure to understand the nature of worship leads to strife and disunity.

Scripture, Eschatology, Worship and Ethics in 1 Corinthians

The Hays essay with which we began this piece is subtitled: "Scripture and Eschatology in 1 Corinthians." It should be evident by now that Hays' approach and that taken in this essay overlap substantially. Here I would like to make more explicit some of the connections before offering some concluding comments on how Paul's liturgical exhortations relate to the broader question of the Christians' relationship to the Roman Empire.

Nearly all of the passages considered in this essay relate in some way to Scripture, eschatology, or both. We began by considering the nature of the Corinthian church as "God's Temple," suggesting that this image lays the groundwork for many of Paul's exhortations throughout the letter. Though no doubt the Corinthians were familiar with all sorts of temples, Paul draws primarily on Jewish tradition in developing the image. As should be clear from the examples we have considered, the liturgical symbols Paul evokes draw heavily from the Scriptures of Israel—the image of Christ as paschal lamb and unleavened bread; the redefinition of the *Shema*; Israel's tragic failure in the wilderness. Of course, the broader theme of the Temple also draws primarily on Israel's Scriptures, particularly as the Temple is contrasted with the practices of the pagans in their own temples. Many of the passages we have considered also have an eschatological orientation: Paul first appeals to temple imagery in a context of eschatological judgment,¹¹⁸ and elsewhere he warns the Corinthians of the consequences of tolerating sexual deviancy. He appeals to their status as people living at the turn of the ages,¹¹⁹ as the celebration of the Eucharist anticipates the coming of the Lord.¹²⁰

Perhaps no passage illustrates this interplay of Scripture, eschatology, worship, and ethics more clearly than 1 Corinthians 6:12–20. In this admonition all four of these elements come together to form a single argument against joining oneself to a prostitute. As I suggest above, the argument subtly relies in part on the Corinthians' liturgical practice. Paul reminds the Corinthian church what it means for them to be a Temple of the Holy Spirit. They are not to partake of food

¹¹⁷ 1 Cor. 12:24–25.

¹¹⁸ 1 Cor. 3:17. The eschatological perspective here most likely also relates to Scripture, as the imagery of the day of judgment and fire associated with the Temple plays a prominent role in Mal. 3.

¹¹⁹ 1 Cor. 10:11.

¹²⁰ 1 Cor. 11:26.

offered to idols, but rather they are to be fed on the Body of Christ.¹²¹ They are not to join themselves to prostitutes, because this is a practice associated with pagan temples, not with the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's argument draws on more than liturgy, though. Both eschatology and Scripture play a significant role here, as well. In contrasting food offered in pagan temples and communion with the Lord, Paul also appeals to the eschatological significance of this union: "The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body; and God raised the Lord and will raise us through his power."¹²² Union with Christ through the Eucharist has implications for the Corinthians' ultimate end, which in turn has consequences for how believers are to act in the present. This eschatological orientation of union with Christ is no anomaly, but rather is part and parcel of early Christian eucharistic praxis. According to the tradition Paul received, believers were to proclaim the death of the Lord "until he comes."¹²³

Paul supplements this eschatological argument by drawing on Israel's Scripture. Appealing to Genesis 2:24, he warns the Corinthians that joining oneself to a prostitute brings about a real union: "For [Scripture] says, 'The two shall become one flesh.'"¹²⁴ Sexual union with a prostitute is irreconcilable with the union that Christ establishes with the Church through the Eucharist. Scripture, eschatology, and worship: Paul brings these three together to reorient and reshape the Corinthians' self-perception and conduct in the hopes of persuading them to glorify God in their bodies.¹²⁵

Liturgy and Empire

In recent years a number of scholars have suggested that one essential element of Paul's Gospel is the challenge it posed to the Roman Empire.¹²⁶ Numerous terms in Paul's vocabulary certainly could have been heard by readers to constitute a challenge to the imperial cult and propaganda, among the most prominent "Lord," "Gospel," and "Savior."¹²⁷ Other scholars, however, remain unconvinced that such

121 1 Cor. 6:13–14.

122 1 Cor. 6:13–14.

123 1 Cor. 11:26.

124 1 Cor. 6:16.

125 1 Cor. 6:20.

126 See, for example, the essays in three volumes edited by Richard A. Horsley: *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1997); *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000); *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2004); see also John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004).

127 All three of these were applied at times to the Roman Emperor. For a helpful chart of various terms in Paul's letters that carried theo-political connotations in the Greco-Roman world, see

a challenge played any role in Paul's thought, much less a central role.¹²⁸ Moreover, debate continues over the nature and extent of the imperial cult in the first century.¹²⁹

What, if anything, does Paul's liturgical exhortation in 1 Corinthians have to say to the phenomenon of the Empire and the imperial cult? Very little, if anything, in the texts that we have considered could be taken as a direct assault on Rome or the Emperor. For much of the letter Paul concerns himself with the Corinthians' temptation to idolatry in general, not the imperial cult in particular. Nevertheless, we should not be led to the false conclusion that for Paul worship was an apolitical phenomenon that bore no relation to the workings of the Empire.

Whether or not Paul intentionally challenged the Emperor cult (assuming such a cult was widespread at the time of his writing), the exclusive nature of Christian worship as Paul describes it would certainly have constituted an indirect challenge to any alternative cult, be it the state-sponsored worship of the Emperor, the many and varied local gods and goddesses, or the more secretive mystery cults.¹³⁰ Being a part of the Temple of the Holy Spirit demands an allegiance entailing holiness of conduct in light of Scripture and the return of Christ, separation from the immoral and idolatrous practices of pagan cults, and an embrace of the Gospel's countercultural exaltation of the weak and the lowly—in short, Paul's Gospel calls his readers, now as then, to a liturgical conversion of the imagination.

Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 353.

128 For a recent critique of counter-imperial readings of Paul (as well as Luke), see Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

129 See, for example, the essays in the March 2005 issue of the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*.

130 I owe this point to John Barclay, "Why the Roman Empire was Insignificant to Paul," unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (San Diego, CA, November 19, 2007).