

# THE MESSAGE OF 1 CORINTHIANS

*a summary for Messianic teaching and preaching*

What happens when you talk about the Epistle of 1 Corinthians to any of today's Messianic Believers?<sup>1</sup> Frequently, a great number of people within our Messianic faith community do not know what to do with this letter. Our engagement level with 1 Corinthians is too often limited to a verse or two quoted here or there. Do we really know what the Apostle Paul is addressing? Do we really understand the complex series of circumstances that have erupted among the Believers in Corinth? A few think that given the tenor of the Apostolic decree of Acts 15:19-21, that Paul has actually gone "rogue," and does not think that its mandatory requirements for the new, non-Jewish Believers to follow are that important. Others think that there was a huge spiritual deficiency present in the Corinthians, who had various slogans that Paul found it necessary to argue against—largely from a basis of logic as arguing from the Tanach may not have previously worked. **Only by examining 1 Corinthians as a whole can any of us grasp the magnitude of problems that faced this assembly of ancient Messiah followers.**

I remember when I was taking my New Testament Introduction course at Asbury Theological Seminary in 2007, and the interesting expression that I saw on the professor's face when we came to the Corinthian correspondence. Dr. Woody Anderson was honest in describing that many of today's evangelical Christians have difficulty understanding 1 Corinthians, given what can appear to be a disjointed letter in some places (it is less true of 2 Corinthians). *What is going on in Corinth?!* The reality is that the Apostle Paul is communicating to a divided and factionalized group of people, he is responding to things that they have written to him and what he has heard about them, and there is a need for readers to remember that there are places where he is repeating what the Corinthians have been saying—but what some people might think that Paul is saying *and* affirming. Sorting much of this out, especially the different slogans and possible sayings or responses of the Corinthians, is admittedly not an easy task.

Messianic readers of 1 Corinthians I have encountered can sometimes draw the unfortunate conclusion that Paul is somehow schizophrenic, thinking that he does not have any coherent form of argument or of addressing his Corinthian audience. They do not understand why he does not appeal directly to the Torah and Tanach/Old Testament in many instances where he could, and where he does with other audiences who need significant moral guidance. They are often frequently not aware of the possible slogans he responds to, they do not keep the intense factionalism and division of the Corinthians in mind, but above

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations in this article are from the New International Version (NIV).

all overlook how these Believers were severed from their connection to the local Jewish synagogue.

One of the most difficult places for a viable and healthy group of Believers to spring up in the First Century would have been Ancient Corinth. This city of anywhere from 100,000-150,000 people was a bustling metropolis of Greeks, Romans, and various Easterners. It was a “new city,” compared to the more established places of Athens or Sparta. It was both a melting pot and tossed salad of religious ideas and hedonistic ideologies. Corinth was known for not only being a rather progressive city, but also one where sexual promiscuity was quite commonplace. While the morals and ethics of the First Century Roman Empire are often believed to be quite low—Corinth was one of the places where it was *the lowest*—the verb *Korinthiazomai* actually being akin “to commit fornication.” Acts 18 records how a group of Yeshua Believers was first a part of the local synagogue in Corinth, but due to the leaders’ protestations to the good news they had to meet elsewhere. Not having a Jewish community with which the Believers could easily interact, certainly did not make things easier for the Corinthians to whom Paul writes.

The Apostle Paul opens 1 Corinthians by extending pleasant greetings (1:1-3), and thanking the Lord most gratefully for the Corinthian Believers (1:4), recognizing how they have been enriched by Him and have benefited from Paul’s time in teaching and guiding them (1:5-6). He encourages the Corinthians, “you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Yeshua the Messiah to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (1:7-8). Even with some negative things that he may have to tell the Corinthians, including a number of sharp rebukes, Paul knows that the faithful God he serves will see his Corinthian brothers and sisters through (1:9).

Paul gets right down to business, as he is quite concerned with the divisions that have erupted among the Corinthians (1:10). Some from Chloe’s home group have informed Paul of different factions which have erupted (1:11). There are those who follow after Paul, after Apollos, after Peter or Cephas, and then those who follow after the Messiah (1:12). Paul thinks this is completely absurd, and so he says, “Is Messiah divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (1:13). Paul only immersed a few people (1:14-16), because he was actually sent to them to proclaim the good news of salvation (1:17).

Early in 1 Corinthians, you get the impression that there are a variety of specific cliques, or perhaps even cartel-like groupings, which have emerged among the Believers. The first of these groups that Paul goes after are those who think they are wise, who may have once been Greek sophists (derived from *sophia*, meaning “wisdom”). The message of Yeshua’s death on the cross/tree/execution stake is one which “is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1:18), precisely because the Lord says He will confound the wisdom of those who think they are intelligent (1:19; cf. Isaiah 29:14). Jews and Greeks equally will be confused by the sacrifice of Yeshua, because it is only in Him that the power and wisdom of the Almighty God can be understood and realized:

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was

preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Messiah crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Messiah the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1:20-25).

While the Apostle Paul would by no means discount those who are intelligent-thinking people—and indeed there is no other way to understand his letters than appeal to God with one's mind (cf. 2 Peter 3:15)—the fact remains that in Yeshua there are some things that make little or no sense to mortal reasoning! Yeshua unjustly executed for the sins of the world, as One who willfully laid down His life to atone for a human race which will largely reject Him—is certainly a mystery that limited people will never fully be able to understand. Yet it is because of who Yeshua is and what He has done, where all people—regardless of their influence or status at birth—can be found to boast in Him (1:26-30; cf. Jeremiah 9:24). When people come to know Yeshua, it is often realized that “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1:27), precisely because in the world's estimation, Yeshua's humiliation and death are a failure. But, to those who are in Him, Yeshua is **“our righteousness, holiness and redemption”** (1:30)! The Messiah, and the final atonement for sin He provides, is the center of a born again Believer's life and existence. Paul testifies to his Corinthian audience that when he came to them to speak of Yeshua, he did so with a demonstration of God's power by the Spirit:

“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Yeshua the Messiah and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power” (2:1-5).

The fact for those seeking wisdom, according to Paul, is that for Believers “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began” (2:6-7). The plan for the ages has been manifested in the great work of the “crucified...Lord of glory” (2:8); the significance of such can only be supernaturally revealed by the Spirit of God (2:9-11; cf. Isaiah 64:4; 52:15). This same Spirit of God is what has enabled the redeemed in Yeshua to speak forth the words of truth, something which enables His followers to possess the Messiah's mind **but** is something that natural, carnal people find largely un-understandable (2:12-16; cf. Isaiah 40:13).

The sad reality for many of the Corinthians is that they are spiritual infants, considered by Paul to still largely be “worldly” (3:1). In previous teaching he had given them instruction akin to “milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready” (3:2). In all of the division and factionalism in Corinth, the people have acted quite worldly (3:4-5), for they have failed to recognize the unique functions of how teachers and leaders within the Body of Messiah are to each contribute to the spiritual growth of those newly

planted in faith (3:6-9). The Apostle Paul laid a foundation in Corinth that others could build upon (3:10-15), and he asks them to truly consider that together, “you yourselves,”<sup>2</sup> are the Temple of God (3:16), striking down any significant individualism. If anyone comes in and defiles God’s Temple, then the whole suffers (3:17). To counteract the division, the Corinthians *together* are to consider themselves a corporate Temple. He once again emphasizes human foolishness contrasted to God’s wisdom, and how He knows their every move (3:18-23; cf. Job 5:13; Psalm 94:11).

Paul is upset with the Corinthians in letting themselves get so split up, especially in terms of taking sides over which spiritual leader to follow (4:6-7). He informs them that people “ought to regard us as servants of Messiah and as those entrusted with the secret things of God” (4:1). Furthermore, “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (4:2), and Paul attests that while he does not care that much for the judgment of the courts, or even his own judgment, the judgment of the Lord does especially matter (4:3-5). What Paul as an apostle has to endure in His service for Yeshua is quite severe, as his apostolic ministry required great sacrifice, ridicule, humiliation, and poverty:

“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Messiah, but you are so wise in Messiah! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world” (4:8-13).

There might be a few rhetorical points in these words to get the Corinthians to reconsider their spiritual poverty and problems needing resolution. But, would the Corinthians *really appreciate* what a man like Paul has had to endure, in order to ably teach, guide, and mentor them? Surely, if Paul has to suffer a great deal in order to see Believers like the Corinthians flourish in the Lord—then they can take the time to listen to him. *They have their basic needs met*, and should give Paul the courtesy of a few moments. Similarly, do any of us today step back and look at what various people who serve the Body of Messiah have to go through, in order to be the most able teacher or leader they can be? When they give us instruction, do we take the time to listen to what they need to speak into our lives? In the case of the Corinthians, all Paul urges is that they imitate him, and so he is sending Timothy to help them along (4:14-15). While the Corinthians are not likely to go penniless, they do need to rely more and more on God—and less on themselves. Paul intends to visit the Corinthians when the time is right, but is not sure if he should come in a gentle or harsh demeanor:

“Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant

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<sup>2</sup> The verb *oidate* is a perfect active, second person plural. The intention is that “you know” is plural, meaning that the Corinthians *together* compose the Temple of God.

people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?" (4:18-21).

From chs. 5-15 onward the Apostle Paul issues a variety of instructions on problems and misunderstandings that have erupted among the Corinthian Believers. The most pressing of these controversies is the presence of gross sexual immorality within the faith community. Paul does not mince his words; he is utterly in shock. **"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and put out of your fellowship the man who did this?"** (5:1-2). This significant grievance is something which affects the entire Body of Messiah, including Paul who is not present with them (5:3a). Paul says that he had already passed a degree of judgment on the offender, who says that he is to be ex-communicated in the hope that as his flesh deteriorates from the physical sin, he might still be saved (5:3b-5).<sup>3</sup> Still, even with such a sharp action taken, it did not seem to phase many of the Corinthians.

While a selection of the Corinthians seem to have widely abandoned key ethical and moral aspects of God's Torah, they are still involved in keeping things like the Passover (5:6-8). Because of this, Paul is poignant to ask, "Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are" (5:7). Perhaps the sexually immoral in Corinth were only a few, yet the problem is that their influence can spread rather quickly—especially given a biologically-rooted issue like sex. A previous letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians had directed them "not to associate with sexually immoral people" (5:8). And Paul states that he is not speaking of people of the world who the Corinthians will encounter in many every-day affairs, **but** so-called "Believers" who commit sexual immorality, are greedy, are idolaters, slanders, drunks, or swindlers (5:9-11b). The Corinthians are not even to eat with such false brethren (5:11c). The Corinthians have been too delinquent in issuing discipline to members of the assembly, in particular in needing to cast out wicked people with unrighteous influences (5:12-13; cf. Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7).

Certainly within much of religion today, there are people who commit sexually immoral sins—they are unfaithful to their spouse, they have affairs, they have had homosexual liaisons, or they just look at "naughty pictures"—but are able to keep it secret until (dramatically) caught. In the Corinthian situation, known sexual offenders and significantly amoral people were associating with Believers, *in an already tense situation* due to factionalism. We could stop reading 1 Corinthians right now and understand that the Apostle Paul **was significantly upset**. As important as remembering the Passover was to Paul, including the admonition "Therefore let us keep the Festival..." (5:8), it might very well have been that various Corinthians gave more significance to religious activities and less to congregational ethics. How much of this is also true of various parts of the Messianic

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<sup>3</sup> The Torah prescribes capital punishment for such sexual offenses, but Paul prescribes ex-communication. This is a strong indication that while Paul still viewed the Torah's standard of sin in full effect, that Yeshua the Messiah had absorbed in His sacrifice the capital penalty for such sin (Colossians 2:14).

movement, even if we do not necessarily have to face down significant sexual sins? Outward Torah observance counts for something—but inward attitudes and ideas and negative viewpoints are not addressed and confronted?

The divisions in Corinth were so bad that the Corinthian Believers were going to the local law courts to sort out their issues (6:1). Paul is dismayed about this. Why would the Corinthians go to the courts of non-Believers, **who did not even remotely acknowledge the God of Israel**, to find resolution for their problems? Is it not true that in the future age the redeemed will be those who rule the world with the Lord *and* judge angels (6:2-4)? Paul laments, “I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers” (6:5-6). Aside from the immaturity that would cause the need for such secular lawsuits (6:7-8), what kind of a negative testimony would this be for the Messiah followers in Corinth? The pagan Corinthians will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven (6:9-11)—*but* given much of the so-called Believers’ behavior, who would want such a Kingdom of Heaven?!

One of the most trying sections for Messianic readers of 1 Corinthians is the statement made **“Everything is permissible for me”** (6:12), often poorly translated as “All things are lawful for me” (NASU). The actual statement is *Panta moi exestin*, with *exesti* meaning “*it is allowed, it is in one's power, is possible*” (LS),<sup>4</sup> and not a term like *nomimōs* or “lawfully” (cf. 1 Timothy 1:8). Another viable rendering is **“I am free to do anything”** (NEB). Interpreters are actually in wide agreement that 1 Corinthians 6:12 includes a slogan of the Corinthians that Paul must counter using logic, **not** that this is a statement made by Paul himself.<sup>5</sup> Many modern versions (i.e., RSV, NIV, NRSV, ESV, HCSB, CJB) include this statement in quotation marks “ ”, to indicate the opinion that many of the Corinthians, either by a letter to Paul or what Paul has been told about them, have been saying this.

The rebuttal issued is that various Corinthians may say “Everything is permissible for me,” so Paul says **“but not everything is beneficial”** (6:12a). Various Corinthians may say “Everything is permissible for me,” and Paul says **“but I will not be mastered by anything”** (6:12b). Why does he not appeal to Tanach Scripture here? By this point in Paul’s trying to correct this faction of the Corinthians, which included *a previous letter*, he had to argue from different means. When people think they have the freedom to do anything, they then often find themselves to be slaves to the idea, habit, or significant offense or error *they think* they can control. This is especially true of what one does with his or her body (6:13), and the Apostle Paul is quite insistent that those who think that they can do whatever they want dishonor both themselves **and the God who redeemed them** by joining in sexual intercourse with prostitutes (6:14-18; cf. Genesis 2:24). The Corinthians are to compose a temple of the Holy Spirit, and subsequently must honor God with their bodies (6:19-20).

The instruction Paul gives in 1 Corinthians ch. 7 is particularly difficult to understand, because it specifically pertains to “the matters you wrote about” (7:1a), *meaning* that the

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<sup>4</sup> H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 273.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that “Everything is permissible for me” was a deliberate Corinthian misunderstanding of something Paul had said to them, perhaps along the lines of many things being permitted for Messiah followers.

Corinthians had sent Paul a piece of correspondence, asking him various questions. These Corinth-specific issues, coupled with the various conditions at work—along with the regular presence of the verb *menō*, meaning either “remain,” “abide,” or “continue”<sup>6</sup>—complicate one’s reading a great deal. The rendering of *menō* as “remain” can be a bit misleading, for the specific reason that a static-permanence in a particular condition is not intended for *any* Messiah follower. The verb *menō* appears in Yeshua’s word of John 15:7: “If you remain [*menō*] in me and my words remain [*menō*] in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” Nobody can honestly argue that by “abiding” (cf. NASU, RSV) in Yeshua people are not to grow in their relationship with and understanding of Him, and with such growth integrate various changes, both expected and necessary, in condition. Similarly for the Corinthian situation, abiding in the current sphere of one’s life should not dismiss the possibility of future changes.

Failing to approach ch. 7 for a Corinthian-specific situation *first*, in the scope of all of the other problems and issues present for this ancient group of people, can lead to errant conclusions like Paul not highly valuing the estate of marriage, and that he thinks that young men staying unmarried is always best (7:1b). Perhaps for someone such as the Apostle Paul, who had a significant ministry duty to spread the good news among his fellow Jews and the nations in the Mediterranean, an unmarried condition was to be preferred, as he could dedicate his time exclusively to God (7:32-35). Yet, he must also observe that because of the presence of fornication in Corinth, men and women should not only marry—but they should be mutually submitted in body to each other (7:2-9). Paul definitely looks down upon divorce (7:10-11), and especially thinks that if a wife is married to a non-Believer, she is to minister to him via acts of sanctification (7:12-14). A spouse who is a non-Believer, if he or she leaves, is to let the person go (7:15-16).

The Pauline axiom in play here is, “as the Lord has distributed to each man, as God has called each, so let him walk. So I command in all the assemblies” (7:17, HRV). This is further detailed as, “Each one should remain in the situation which he was when God called him” (7:20), with *klēsis* actually meaning “calling” (KJV/NKJV/ASV). One way to approach this is that each person has been called to a particular vocation, which they are to not leave. If held rigidly, then this means that no changes to such a vocation are to be allowed—no “growth” in other words (or even “continuance”). Another, and we should think more preferred way to view 1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, is that the *klēsis* or “calling” pertains to the calling into salvation by the Lord, per a paralleling word like Ephesians 4:1: “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (NASU). The individual Corinthians are not to allow themselves to be influenced by any outside or inside persons or factions to change the fact that they each had different personal conditions allotted to them when they received salvation. Being within the sphere of the Messiah Yeshua, “abiding” in Him (*menō*), anything that might actually change is entirely incumbent upon their maturation, growth, and furtherance in Him, as “continuance” in their calling to salvation moved ahead.

An example provided is circumcision status. Paul asks, “Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised” (7:18a). This actually happened to

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. F. Hauck, “*ménō*,” in *TDNT*, 581.

many Jews during the Maccabean crisis via the process of epispasm, whereby steps were taken to regrow the skin that had been removed from the male sexual organ (1 Maccabees 1:15). It would be unthinkable for Paul for any male Jewish Believer to remove the mark of circumcision he had received from time of birth! Paul further says, “Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised” (7:18b). Circumcision or non-circumcision status is not to be a pre-condition of one’s calling into Messiah faith, and none of the non-Jewish Corinthians should be pressured to being physically circumcised and/or going through ritual proselyte conversion.

What is intriguing here is that Paul follows his statement with, “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts” (7:19). Obviously as far as salvation is concerned, circumcision status does not matter. But when Paul says “obeying the commandments of God is everything” (NRSV), what does this mean? All of God’s commandments *except* those of circumcision? It all comes down to how 7:20 is viewed with “Everyone should continue [*menō*] in the state in which he heard the call of God” (Phillips New Testament). Does abiding or continuing in God imply any kind of furtherance (cf. Ephesians 4:1)?

The First Century Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds did not know of the medical practice of circumcision as we know today,<sup>7</sup> as circumcision was widely regarded as an ethnic mark of the Jewish people. A man circumcised to Greeks and Romans was guilty of defacing the body, *and* for many Jews being circumcised was the quintessence of being elected of God, as for many Jews, an ethnic status as a Jew was believed to guarantee someone a place in the world to come (*m.Sanhedrin* 10:1). Given this reality, I think it quite unlikely that many non-Jewish male Believers were ever physically circumcised as a simple act of obedience to God, because they would have had to do it most discretely. Yet for today’s Messianic community, non-Jewish male Believers who are uncircumcised can be physically circumcised as a simple matter of obedience and progression in holiness, because the social and religious pressures against it from the First Century are largely not there any more—and the fact that in the Messianic Age, the implication one sees is that all will be circumcised of flesh (Ezekiel 44:9). (But, circumcision does **not at all** merit a male eternal salvation!)

The fact that the condition in which one was found, when being called into Messiah faith, can change, is realized in how those who are slaves are to take the opportunity to be freed should it present itself (7:21-23). *Continuing* with God, means that *He directs* the changes to one’s original status (7:24). He is the One who would tell a physically uncircumcised man today, to go get physically circumcised, as he progresses in holiness.

A great deal of how one approaches 1 Corinthians ch. 7 is contingent on how Paul is issuing advice to a group of people who have been divided and confused. He issues instructions to those who are yet to be married, suggesting that it is best that they do not seek marriage (7:25-28). Some see some eschatological urgency in Paul’s tone, whereas it could

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<sup>7</sup> On 10 January, 2010, I heard a Jewish medical doctor, Isadore Rosenfeld on FoxNews Sunday, encourage couples expecting a male child to seriously consider medical circumcision, not worrying about the religious implications. The relevant video clip, “New Reasons to Circumcise Your Child” can be downloaded at <<http://video.foxnews.com>>.

also be viewed as an inference that there is too much to do in the Kingdom of God at the then-present time to be unnecessarily burdened with family responsibilities (7:29-31). Still, Paul does not discount the value of marriage, and does not at all consider marriage or re-marriage for the widow or widower to be sin (7:36-40).

A much larger problem for the Corinthians, concurrent with the sexual immorality that was present (chs. 5-6), was what to do about meat sacrificed to idols. Some of the Corinthians were doubtlessly thinking themselves much more spiritually mature or knowledgeable than they were, and were not exhibiting the love of God as they ought (8:1-3). Paul says that it is very true that an idol in and of itself is nothing, and that there is only One Supreme Being (8:4). Paul applies the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 in a rather unique way, attesting “for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (8:5-6; cf. Malachi 2:10). Both Father and Son are recognized and packed together as being “one”—the One God **and** the One Lord—the primary object of our attention, adoration, and worship.<sup>8</sup>

There were many Corinthians who still struggled with recognizing the supremacy of Israel’s God over all other spiritual forces, and who really thought that if they ever ate meat sacrificed to idols they would be committing unforgivable sin (8:7-8). Other Corinthians did not care about this, and so Paul scolds them: “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (8:9), with their “liberty” (NASU) being something the Corinthians thought they could demonstrate **without** any significant consequences. For these people, the Apostolic decree might have not worked (Acts 15:19-21), and so once again Paul has to offer the benefit of reason and basic logic. If such Corinthians are caught eating within one of the local temples or shrines, there will undoubtedly be younger and weaker Believers who will relapse back into paganism (8:10-13). And so, those who think they have some kind of knowledge, may ultimately be shown to not have it.

Paul has previously described the difficulties of his apostolic service (4:8-13), and has to clarify misunderstandings of what “freedom” in the Messiah actually is. Various Corinthians took it as meaning that they could do whatever they wanted, which is the furthest thing from Paul’s mind. On the contrary, the freedom that comes with the redemption available in Yeshua *to someone like Paul* means the ultimate requirement of working for the cause of the gospel. Paul is free, Paul is an apostle, and Paul even saw the Lord Yeshua (9:1). The Corinthians considered him an apostle (9:2), yet how many of them realized that he gave up many of the due privileges of other apostles like that of having a family and perhaps even being provided for to some degree by the faith community (9:3-6)? One can sense a little frustration in Paul that some of the Corinthians really do not care for him, because they have failed to adequately help him—in spite of knowing his personal conditions (9:7-12a; cf. Deuteronomy 25:4).

Still, Paul’s view is “we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Messiah” (9:12b), using the example of the Jerusalem Temple service and how the priests benefit from it as how those who serve the interests of the good news will receive support (9:13-14). But,

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<sup>8</sup> For a further discussion, consult the author’s article “What Does the Shema Really Mean?” (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

Paul has not made any effort to claim any due support (9:15-17). He instead thinks, “What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it” (9:18). One can think that because of Paul’s previous activity in trying to once decimate the early Believers (cf. Galatians 1:13), that he conducted his ministry work most humbly, not asking for many of the benefits that he could have surely partaken of.

The Apostle Paul’s ministry ethic is to be able to identify with as best as he can to those he encounters. He says, “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (9:19). Four groups of people are specifically considered here:

1. “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews” (9:20a).
2. “To those under the law [*hupo nomon*] I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law” (9:20b).
3. “To those not having the law I became like one not having the law...so as to win those not having the law” (9:21a,c).
4. “To the weak I became weak, to win the weak” (9:22a).

Paul’s intention is, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (9:22b-23). Some have concluded that Paul fluctuates in his own person, almost acting like a kind of spiritual chameleon, when around various groups of people. He acts Jewish around Jews, a pagan around pagans. *This is a faulty conclusion.* Paul has to recognize the perspective of those “under the Torah,” meaning those who are not “under grace” (cf. Romans 6:16)—the ones who are condemned by the Torah to be sinners. These could be Jewish people who know that they have difficulty keeping God’s Law but do not quite know what to do about it, *and* it would also include non-Jewish people aware of the God of Israel and His Torah, but not quite able to be in line with its statutes although convicted by them—**both** similar to the struggling “I” sinner of Romans 7. Likewise, Paul has to recognize the perspective of pagans who lack the Torah of God, and communicate the good news ably to them like what is seen in Acts 17:16-34 with him debating the Epicureans and Stoics in Athens. And, Paul has to understand the difficulties of those who are weak, infirm, and just down and out in the world. **All of these people needed Yeshua!**

Does Paul dismiss the value of the Torah in the remarks of 1 Corinthians 9:20-22? Not at all. Paul might not be “under the law” and condemned by the Torah as an unredeemed sinner, but he does say “I am not free from God’s law but am under Messiah’s law” (9:21b). The clause *ennomos Christou* is far better translated as “within law to Christ” (YLT), akin to “the framework of *Torah* as upheld by the Messiah” (CJB). Paul’s apostolic service in identifying with the diverse groups of people he encounters is girded up by Yeshua’s interpretation and application of Moses’ Teaching. It involves a steadfast, lifelong endurance, like an athlete competing in a race, who must consistently train (9:24-27).

The Apostle Paul affords the highest value to the instruction of the Torah. He is clear to tell all of the Corinthians, “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all

baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Messiah” (10:1-4). All of the Corinthians, be they Jews who knew that their ancestors participated in the Exodus and wilderness trek, *or* non-Jews who are made a part of the community or Kingdom realm of Israel by their faith in the Messiah (cf. Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:11-12), are to heed the lessons of Ancient Israel’s past. As Paul informs them, “God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert” (10:5). The mistakes to most certainly be avoided are those of the idolatry committed during the golden calf incident, and the sexual immorality spurred on by Balaam (10:6-10; cf. Exodus 32:6; Numbers 25). Paul instructs the Corinthians,

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (10:11-13).

So, because of this, the Corinthians are to understand that when they share things like the Lord’s Supper at the Passover, they all participate together in honoring Him (10:14-17). Likewise, those who participate together in the Temple service in Jerusalem intend to honor God (10:18). Yet, if any of the Corinthians associate at the local temple or shrine—even with the God of Creation being supreme (8:4-6)—they will find themselves participating in the veneration of Satanic demons (10:20-22). At the very least, this will arouse some kind of displeasure from the True Lord.

Paul must again respond to the errant Corinthian slogan *Panta exestin* or “Everything is permissible,” telling his audience that “not everything is beneficial” and “not everything is constructive” (10:23). What follows is teaching about what to do if any of the Corinthian Believers get invited to a non-Believer’s home to eat. This is an extremely difficult section of Paul’s letter for many Messianics to consider (especially those who consider themselves a part of the “Torah movement” and are overly rigid in their *halachah*). Paul observes, “Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience” (10:25), because of the specific reason that all creatures are ultimately made by God and are to some degree “good” (10:26; cf. Psalm 24:1; 50:12; 89:11). But are the Corinthian Believers those who are buying the meat *or* is it those non-Believers who might invite them to dine at their homes? The latter audience is to be preferred: “If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising question of conscience” (10:27).

If there is an invitation issued to a Messiah follower to go to a non-Believer’s home—and the invitation is *accepted* (meaning that it **could be turned down**)—such a person is to eat whatever is put on his or her plate with no questions or comments made (obviously if food is passed around certain things do not have to be self-served). *And yes, there might at times be non-kosher items served to a Believer,*<sup>9</sup> but to immediately make a kind of scene would be

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<sup>9</sup> Sometimes, today’s Messianics need to remember that according to the Torah eating unclean things is *not* a capital offense.

disrespectful to the host's hospitality—especially if you use the invitation as a means to speak about Yeshua and the good news. **But**, the Apostle Paul is clear that once it is known to everyone that if meat served has been sacrificed to idols, **then the meat is to be refused**. This is not only due to the presence of weaker brothers and sisters within the Body of Messiah, but how one's non-believing host would see a conscious dereliction of one's faith in action (10:28-30). Still, potentially eating meat sacrificed to idols at someone else's home is a far cry from participating in idolatrous activity with such meat at one of the local temples. In whatever eating or drinking activity the Corinthians participate in, they are to do it for the glory of God, and so that Jews, Greeks, and Believers in Yeshua equally do not stumble (10:31-11:1). *As such, they are to use caution*. Even in our time, reaching out to diverse groups of people, and doing it well, can be quite difficult.

In today's Messianic application of 1 Corinthians, there is perhaps no more "intriguing" part of this letter than 11:1-16, which is complicated because of the presence of a specific "headcovering clique" (or in some cases a "cartel") in our broad faith community. What does the Apostle Paul think about the issue of headcoverings? Are men to have uncovered heads, and women to have covered heads—no garment on one, and a continual garment on another? This is an area of Paul's letter where there are *significant* First Century cultural issues to be considered, and where *various hairstyles* of ancient times would communicate things—particularly in terms of sexual lewdness—which today might actually communicate a degree of conservativeness. Thankfully, there has been some significant research conducted in this area, which may shed some important light on applying this passage.

This section of 1 Corinthians begins with Paul's appreciation for many within his audience for following the traditions he passed to them (11:2). He wants the Corinthians to understand the significance of how "the head of every man is Messiah, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Messiah is God" (11:3). This *kephalē* or "head"<sup>10</sup> is to be understood in the context of the Messiah originating from God via the Incarnation, similar to how the first woman originated from the first man. Paul says later, "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man..." (11:8). How men and women groom themselves is supposed to demonstrate appropriate honor toward each of the sexes, in their origination, and most especially to the God who they serve and the conduct He requires.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:4, *pas anēr proseuchomenos ē prophēteuōn kata kephalēs*, "Every man praying or prophesying, having *something* down from the head..." (my translation). Many versions add something like "with his head covered" (NIV) or "who has *something* on his head" (NASU), but does this really do justice to the clause *kata kephalēs*? Would it really be disgraceful for a First Century Jewish man, or even a Greek or Roman man, to wear something on his head during a time of prayer or prophecy? **No**. Paul specifies in 11:14 that there is something which could be down from a man's head that would disgrace him: "if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him." Long hair on a man hanging down, could communicate something in Corinth that might not be very good for the Believers. At the very

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<sup>10</sup> Note the *LS* definition for *kephalē* including: "the head or source of a river" (p 430); it is a mistake for readers to think that "head" in the Bible is always akin to some kind of "authority."

least, some males with long hair hanging down, from certain angles, could possibly be confused as being female. Philip B. Payne further describes,

“Something ‘down from’ (κατά [*kata*] with the genitive, ‘lit. hanging down fr. the head,’ BDAG 511 A.1.a) or ‘over’ the head of men leading in worship was disgraceful. Paul does not in this verse identify what was down from the head, so any explanation, to be convincing, needs to cite evidence from this passage and its cultural context. What hanging down from a man’s head would be disgraceful for men leading worship in Corinth, a Greek city and a Roman colony? Many assume it is a toga (*himation*). It was not, however, disgraceful in the cultural context of Corinth or in Jewish culture for a man to drape a garment over his head. The *capite velato* custom of pulling a toga over one’s head in Roman religious contexts symbolized devotion and piety, not disgrace. Jewish custom and the Hebrew Scriptures also approved head-covering garments for men leading in worship<sup>11</sup>...Thankfully, Paul identifies in verse 15 what ‘hanging down from the head’ causes disgrace: ‘If a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him.’”<sup>12</sup>

Continuing in 11:5a, Paul issues instruction regarding *pasa de gunē proseuchomenē ē prophēteuōusa akatakaluptō tē kephalē*, “every woman praying or prophesying, with the head uncovered...” (my translation) is to be regarded as having dishonored her head, even as though her head were shaved (11:5b). Having a shaved (Grk. verb *xureō*) head in ancient times, whether in Ancient Israel, Second Temple Judaism, or even Greco-Roman culture, was frequently a sign of mourning and/or humiliation. The challenge for interpreting a “head uncovered,” is that it is frequently read from the perspective of it meaning that a woman praying or prophesying must have some kind of a garment present. Is wearing a headcovering garment really the issue? A significant usage of the adjective *akatakaluptos* in the Septuagint is Leviticus 13:45, speaking of “the leper who has the plague in him, his garments shall be torn, and his head shall be **uncovered** [*akatakaluptos*]” (LXE).<sup>13</sup> *Akatakaluptos* actually renders the Hebrew verb *para*, meaning “to let the hair on the head hang loosely” (*HALOT*),<sup>14</sup> as “The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head **hang loose** [*para*]...” (Leviticus 13:45, RSV).<sup>15</sup> If this background is kept in view, than a Corinthian woman who had her head “uncovered,” is one who actually had her long hair hanging loose for all in the assembly to see. It is true that when modern readers encounter a term like “uncovered,” it

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Exodus 28:4, 37, 39; 29:6; 39:28, 31; Leviticus 8:9; 16:4; Ezekiel 24:17; 44:18; Zechariah 3:5.

<sup>12</sup> Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), pp 141-142.

<sup>13</sup> NETS similarly has: “let his clothes be loosened and his head be uncovered [*akatakaluptos*].”

<sup>14</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:970.

<sup>15</sup> Payne, 167 further states,

“The only occurrence in the text Paul cited the most, the LXX [Septuagint], of ‘uncovered’ (11:5; ἀκατακάλυπτος [*akatakaluptos*] in Lev 13:45) translates פָּרַח [faru’a], from פָּרַח, which Hebrew scholars agree means ‘to let the hair on the head hang loosely.’ It is the earliest instance of the word ‘cover’ (κατακάλυπτος [*katakaluptos*]) occurring with ‘head’ in the TLG database...‘Uncovered’ is explained twice in verses 5-6, using ‘for’ (γάρ [*gar*]). Both reasons explain the uncovering as equivalent to hair being clipped or shaved. This associates the covering as hair and fits most naturally if ‘uncovered’ refers to a woman with her hair let down.”

is more natural for us to think that the Corinthian woman was to probably be wearing some sort of head garment. But wearing or not wearing a head garment would not have been as problematic as a female having loosed hair flowing freely. In a largely progressive and so-called “sexually liberated” city like Corinth, a woman with free-flowing loose hair **was anything but respectable**. In fact, such a hairstyle would be like a prostitute advertising her wares! Payne details,

“Loosed hair was disgraceful (11:5) and symbolized sexual looseness in Roman, Greek, and Jewish culture....Loosed hair fits the cultural influence and specific practice of the Dionysiac cult, which was popular in Corinth and explains why women in Corinth might have let their hair down.”<sup>16</sup>

Contrary to women with “uncovered” heads—heads with hair freely flowing down—respectable women would have “covered heads” with their hair arranged in a kind of bun, something attested in the artwork of the broad First Century.<sup>17</sup> A Corinthian woman with an “uncovered” head meaning free-flowing long hair, hair that has not been arranged in a proper manner, makes sense of Paul’s prescription that such an “uncovered” woman’s hair be cut or shaved off—which was definitely a sign of dishonor (11:6). A proper recognition of the genders is in view here (11:7-8), including being aware of how at a previous time in Biblical history (e.g., Genesis 6:4) women may have been able to tempt the angels (11:10).

Both man and woman—especially if they are married—are to understand that they are not independent of one another, with all originating from God (11:11-12). With the realization that “covered” and “uncovered” probably relates to hairstyles of short hair or hair pulled up, and free-flowing long hair, how does this change our reading of Paul’s further direction? When people would attend home gatherings of the Corinthians, *including* any visiting pagans, what impression would it give of the Messiah followers and the Lord Yeshua?

“Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered {**meaning:** with free-flowing long hair}? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering {**meaning:** arranged in a pulled up style}. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the [assemblies] of God” (11:13-16).

It is difficult at first for us to consider covered/uncovered to relate to hairstyles, which either communicated lewdness or promiscuity or just general disrespectfulness to wider society—but it is a much better way for us to understand the issues of 11:1-16. The actual issue in Ancient Corinth regarding male and female heads that are “covered” and “uncovered” **actually pertained to specific hairstyles**. Men should not have long hair, being “covered.” Women should have their long hair put up, being “covered,” as being “uncovered” would mean letting the hair go. The association that such hairstyles would have, could not only

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>17</sup> “What about having one’s head ‘uncovered’ would cause shame to a woman leading in worship in the cultural setting of Corinth? The extensive evidence from portraiture, frescoes, sculptures, and vase paintings in Greek and Roman cities of Paul’s day almost universally depicts respectable women with their hair done up. Women in everyday public settings are not depicted with their hair hanging loose over their shoulders” (Ibid., 151).

communicate a degree of prostitution-promotion (female *and* male) to outsiders, but perhaps also associate the Corinthians as participating with local pagan religious activities. The Apostle Paul clearly did not want something like this communicated to outsiders in the gatherings and worship activities of the Messiah followers!

I have never seen the perspective of “covered” and “uncovered” relating to Ancient Corinthian hairstyles ever really considered in today’s Messianic movement. Many believe that “covered” and “uncovered” relates to head garments like the *kippah/yarmulke*, various uses of the *tallit*, or some kind of female head garment. While not all of these items as we know them were in use in the Biblical period, ultimately the issue of headcovering garments for men and women is one that is **entirely traditional and cultural**. It is something that all Messianic Believers need to be sensitive about in their *halachah* to be certain (like men wearing a *yarmulke* at the Western Wall in Jerusalem), **but headcovering garments are not the real issue** of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16.<sup>18</sup> The main thrust of this part of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians pertains to how various grooming styles can damage the credibility of the faith community. In First Century Corinth, women who let their hair go “uncovered”—long and loose—were communicating something bad. Today, long hair on a woman (perhaps in a pony tail or other style) in some places might instead communicate conservativeness.<sup>19</sup> As far as shorter or longer degrees of hair length on a woman *or* man are concerned: they regard the general evaluation of their (Twenty-First Century [Western]) cultural context, and what may be considered respectable.

Paul’s displeasure at the different hairstyles present among the Corinthians is not the only thing he is upset about. He dislikes what happens when the Corinthians gather together to eat a communal meal—with many becoming drunkards and gluttons (11:17-22), and many others going hungry because all the food available is quickly gone (11:33-34). Paul emphasizes the severity of remembering the Lord’s Supper in association with the final meal, a Passover *seder*, He held with His Disciples (11:23-26). While today’s Messianics may not always be agreed as to whether this is to be an annual or a more regular remembrance, the fact that it is supposed to be a significantly reverent time cannot be disputed (11:27-32). To all of this, Paul communicates “when I come I will give further directions” (11:32b). Various modern Messianic congregations and fellowships may remember the Lord’s Supper during their yearly Passover observances *or* at designated periods throughout the year. Regardless of

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<sup>18</sup> Please note that I have always been in favor of all Messianic men wearing a *kippah/yarmulke* in weekly *Shabbat* services **and most especially** during the high holy days of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. Likewise, those who also don a *tallit* for prayer and worship should not do so without a *kippah/yarmule*. While it is a tradition, the wearing of the skullcap is nonetheless considered to be a sign of a man’s reverence for God in mainline Judaism.

(On a further note, I am not at all opposed to a woman donning a *tallit* [although a feminine *tallit* in some kind of pastel is certainly less controversial] and a similar style of headcovering garment for worship, consistent with what is seen in various sectors of Conservative or Reform Judaism.)

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in our family’s experience in the Messianic movement since 1995, most of the average men and women in our faith community have little problems as it concerns our proposed reading of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16. They tend to have hairstyles and a mode of dress which communicate a rather conservative demeanor to society at large, consistent with much of respectable Judaism and Christianity, not at all being associated with much popular culture.

which practice they hold to: **it is to be a very special and sacred event, in which all congregational constituents should participate.**

Another area of confusion for the Corinthians was the proper use of various spiritual gifts (12:1). Paul is certain to tell his Corinthian audience how important the presence of the Holy Spirit is within them: “You know that when you were pagans, somehow you or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Yeshua be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Yeshua is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (12:2-3). Indeed, if many of us today might enter into seasons when we are unsure of our salvation or whether we have a bountiful relationship with God or not—the litmus test of 1 Corinthians 12:2-3 needs to be remembered! *A momentary spiritual down spell is **absolutely nothing** compared to cursing the Messiah.* I would go as far as to argue that for today’s Messianics, if they somehow do not curse Yeshua **but do** curse with the English name Jesus (Grk. *Iēsous*), they are still most-especially guilty! The Son of God *in whatever language* one knows Him will still be dishonored, disrespected, and treated as worthless.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s people is primarily to affect good works of service toward others. Some of this might include being given Spirit-inspired messages for others, specific wisdom or knowledge, an ability to see others healed, to prophecy, to discern the presence of evil spirits, or to speak and/or interpret other languages (12:4-10). The thrust of having all of these gifts is not to be envious of others, but rather to see the Spirit function through diverse people within the Body of Messiah. All parts of the Messiah’s community must work together in tandem one to one another (12:11-31). Encouraging *all* people to be all that they can be in the Lord Yeshua—contributing their Spirit-inspired gifts, talents, and abilities to the betterment of all—is just as much of a challenge for today’s Messianic movement as it was for the Ancient Corinthians! Yet, if the people of God can learn the great power of the *agapē* “love” He desires to see implanted within their hearts, then indeed the right employment of the various gifts of the Spirit *should come* (ch. 13).

Certainly in a great deal of contemporary Christianity, there can be much discussion over the meaning of the term *glōssa* or “tongue” in 1 Corinthians ch. 14. Within much of the charismatic movement, a person speaking in “tongues” is regarded to largely be uttering an un-intelligible form of gibberish which is stimulated by the action of the Spirit. Elsewhere, the Apostle Paul speaks of “groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26), which is perhaps something un-intelligible by mortal estimation—but is that what is being referred to here? The gift of “tongues” is regarded as not being as important as the gift of prophecy (14:1-12). In fact, Paul actually says “anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says” (14:13), further stating “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you” (14:18). What is this to mean? Aside from Paul needing to establish a proper attitude in the Corinthians toward this issue (14:14-17, 20-21; cf. Isaiah 28:11-12; Deuteronomy 28:49), Paul says that he speaks in “tongues” more than the Corinthians all do combined! What these “tongues” actually are is specified in his comments:

“Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole [assembly] comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some believers come in, will they not

say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” (14:22-25).

Prophecy as a gift which is to encourage repentance and a turning toward God and His ways is extremely significant, as with it naturally comes people being restored to a right relationship with Him and with other brothers and sisters. (With genuine prophecy can also come various predictions, or at least foretellings, of the future.) Tongues, as a sign for non-Believers, should be properly understood not as speaking in some kind of un-intelligible gibberish—but rather being supernaturally empowered to speak or be heard in a known language, similar to the Acts 2 scene at *Shavuot*/Pentecost when the good news was declared to all of those in Jerusalem. Unbelievers can be impressed when they hear the message of salvation in their own native language and/or dialect. But, this frequently does not happen, as the tongues are instead not understood. At the same time, hearing a vigorous prophetic message of repentance away from unacceptable sinful activities, in a known language, is **much more important**, but with it can come an outsider’s secrets known to all.

While the worship style of the early Messianic community was most closely associated with that of the Second Temple Synagogue, it is clear that the early Yeshua followers still allowed for a degree of spontaneity in their gatherings. People were able to contribute hymns, various words of instruction, or speaking in another language (remember that Corinth was very metropolitan, and the likelihood of people living in the city from diverse regions of the Roman Empire was very high).<sup>20</sup> There was to be careful deliberation over what was said, should someone speak a prophetic word (14:26-32). Paul reminds his Corinthian audience: “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (14:33).<sup>21</sup> The Holy Spirit might genuinely

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<sup>20</sup> When the Apostle Paul says, *pantōn humōn mallon glōssais lalō*, “I speak in tongues more than all of you” (14:18), it is likely an attestation that he was supernaturally empowered in his interactions in the Mediterranean to speak in languages other than Greek, especially given the presence of Latin-speaking Romans and regional dialects such as Phrygian present (cf. Acts 16:6). The idea present in various sectors of the current Messianic movement that an apostle like Paul would have exclusively communicated in Hebrew or Aramaic is without historical support. If anything, Paul was empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak excellent Greek, and perhaps excellent Latin and other regional pronunciations, dialects, and languages of the nations in order to spread the good news of salvation to all. The fact that the Apostolic Scriptures are preserved in Greek, the common language of business and commerce of the First Century, is a testament to this reality and **should never** be looked down upon.

If Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) had actually arrived on Earth in sometime from the Eighteenth Century to the present, the good news of His arrival would have been primarily communicated in the English language, the principal tongue of the British Empire and American colonies (and not necessarily French, Spanish, Dutch, German, or Russian).

<sup>21</sup> As it concerns the issue of women not being permitted to speak in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, it is noteworthy that earlier in 11:5 Paul recognized the role that women played in praying and prophesying in public. These two verses later would seem to contradict this. It might be suggested that female “chatter” (Grk. verb *laleō*) in Corinth could be the issue instead, but the authority of the Torah is notably appealed to justify a silence of women.

Various conservative, evangelical Christian interpreters have made a strong case in favor of 1 Corinthians 13:34-35 actually being an interpolation of a later copyist. Of significant interest would be the direct appeal made

move among many of the Corinthians, but they were to not at all speak out of turn. There was to be an order and reverence to everything (14:36-40).

The final issue—and above all one of the most significant to be addressed—that the Apostle Paul must issue correction to the Corinthians about, is **the doctrine of resurrection**. It is not surprising why Paul would have to correct these people about this subject, because being a group of mostly Greeks and Romans, they would not have been raised in a religious culture that believed in any kind of resurrection. Within Greco-Roman religion and philosophy, the afterlife was often perceived as being either totally nil, with no existence beyond death, *or* a release of the human soul from the prison of the body<sup>22</sup> into some kind of great beyond, either to the underworld of Hades or into some kind of wraith or phantom-like state. The belief that at a future point in history all people who have died will have their bodily remains completely reassembled and reanimated, with a person's consciousness implanted into a permanently embodied condition, was *quite foreign* to Greeks and Romans. And, it cannot be overlooked how the Jewish Sadducees also denied the future resurrection as well.

Paul must establish the reliability of the gospel as something rooted within the Tanach Scriptures, and not only that Yeshua the Messiah died, but that He resurrected from the dead and appeared to many people—including himself (15:1-11). The significance of the doctrine of resurrection is important, because if there is no resurrection not only is the good news of salvation in Yeshua worthless—as **He failed to conquer the power of death**—but those who have died may be regarded as effectively “lost,” quantitatively without the assurance of final redemption in any kind of world to come. Without the resurrection of Yeshua, you have no future general resurrection (Daniel 12:2) and fulfillment of a restored Israel (cf. Ezekiel 37:1-14), and no world to come with a New Heavens and New Earth. All of the promises in the Scriptures about the eschaton are basically reduced to fairy tales without a future resurrection:

“But if it is preached that Messiah has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Messiah has been raised. And if Messiah has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Messiah from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Messiah has not been raised either. And if Messiah has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Messiah are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Messiah, we are to be pitied more than all men” (15:12-19).<sup>23</sup>

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to “the Law” in silencing women, especially as there is **no specific prohibition** in the Torah or Pentateuch that bars women from speaking in the assembly. This is a position that the editor is inclined to seriously consider.

Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp 699-708; “1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Did Paul Forbid Women to Speak in Church?”, in Payne, pp 217-267.

<sup>22</sup> Consult the FAQ, “Dualism.”

<sup>23</sup> Please keep in mind that the affirmation of an intermediate, disembodied afterlife between death and the resurrection is predicated upon the notion that there *will be* a future resurrection. An intermediate afterlife

The resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah assures us that one day the power of death will be completely conquered, as the significant pain and agony that it causes people will be a thing resolved to the past when His Kingdom comes (15:20-28; cf. Psalm 8:6)! Paul informs the Corinthians how the future resurrection will come to pass, as Yeshua the Messiah's own resurrection is to serve as a prototype (15:35-58; cf. Genesis 2:7; Hosea 13:14). Yet, if there is no future resurrection of the dead, then we might as well adopt the pagan views of this life being all that there is, "pleasuring it up" as it were all that we can (15:29-34; cf. Isaiah 22:13; 56:12).

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians ends with a number of requests, including the Corinthians' need to regularly collect offerings, which he intends to gather together and take to the Believers in Jerusalem (16:1-4). Paul speaks of his intention to visit Corinth after he has gone through Macedonia (16:5-9), and that Timothy might be coming to see them (16:10-11). Paul had to convince Apollos to come and visit them (16:12), which is not surprising given the complicated issues in Corinth. The Corinthians are to highly respect the commitment of the household of Stephanus for the Body of Messiah, especially considering the goodwill they issued toward Paul (16:15-18). Paul's final greetings, in spite of this being a difficult letter for him to compose, are rather warm *and* include a personal transcription with his own hand (16:19-24). The Corinthians are to **"Be on on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love"** (16:13-14).

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians does not need to be a book of the Bible that Twenty-First Century Messianic Believers have to fear. It is a piece of correspondence interjected into a very complex series of circumstances, ***which none of us would ever wish for***. Only by considering the tenor and themes of the Epistle of 2 Corinthians, can an interpreter really evaluate whether or not Paul's instruction was really heeded (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:7-10).

For our collective Messianic examination of 1 Corinthians, did the Corinthian Believers in this letter at all keep the Torah? Were they a group of people who were Torah observant *or* were they "Law free"? It is probably safe to say: **yes and no**. Yes, in terms of the Corinthians remembering things like the Passover (5:7), although they certainly needed some ethical corrections in doing so. No, in terms of the Corinthians permitting and tolerating known sinners within their midst, and taking a very lax view on various issues. Many of the Corinthians did not care that much about obedience to God, either because of being booted out of the local Jewish synagogue, still feeling the tug of non-believing family and friends, or just some errant attitudes as to the legitimate work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. With so much factionalism and division present in Corinth, the attention of the Believers was highly removed from even the most essential matters of disobedience to God: that things like sexual immorality were allowed to go on with no discipline issued to offenders. *Once again, none of*

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assures us that the human person resurrected is the same person who lived a life previously on Earth, with their personality-consciousness temporarily held in another dimension, rather than a re-creation or imposter-duplicate presented at the resurrected.

For a further discussion, consult the relevant sections of the author's publication *To Be Absent From the Body*. Also consider William Hasker, "Minds and Bodies," in *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), pp 57-80.

*us can overlook the fact that this was a letter written by the Apostle Paul to an ancient audience; 1 Corinthians was **not written** directly to Twenty-First Century Messianic Believers.*

In viewing the Corinthian situation in both Acts 18 and this epistle, one does legitimately wonder that if the Corinthian Believers had not been ejected from the local synagogue, how much of this would have been able to go on. The inference of the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:19-21) was certainly that submission to Moses' Teaching was expected of the new, non-Jewish Believers. More blame, however, has to be laid at the feet of the surrounding, rather "progressive" and morally decrepit, Corinthian culture itself. Quite sadly, in a New Covenant era (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27) when the Holy Spirit is supposed to supernaturally compel people to obey the Scriptures—many people can *get away* with claiming that the Holy Spirit did not "lead" them to do this or that, and then speak forth ridiculous slogans like "I am permitted to do anything..." (6:12; 10:13). Yet, Paul refuted these ideas, and did not confirm their legitimacy—as much as he had to argue whether or not they made logical sense.

Just like I originally experienced in my New Testament Introduction course in 2007, I know that future Messianic examination of 1 Corinthians will be difficult. We will need to dissect some of its passages and individual verses in more detail, weighing into our deliberations a variety of scholarly opinions. *This is a tough letter to understand.* I think that after Galatians, 1 Corinthians is the most challenging of Paul's letters to sift through. But, I think it is challenging not because of the Apostle Paul or what he tries to say, **but because of the Corinthians and their various problems.** Most thankfully, we have the further testimony of 2 Corinthians to consider, to see whether or not these people took the good Apostle's advice seriously...