

The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

Christ. This means that Paul would deny that a local assembly is but a partial ‘church,’ though he might say that it is a part of the universal *ekklēsia*. Each local congregation is a full representation, whether small or large, of the whole body of Christ and of the whole Christ....The local *ekklēsia* is...the visible manifestation of an eternal and universal commonwealth [referenced: Philippians 3:19ff; Galatians 4:25-27; Colossians 1:18-24].”³¹

While being called into fellowship with the Messiah most definitely involves a being redeemed from sins, it also involves being made holy by the power of the Lord, and as a part of the sanctification process serving Him in the interests of the good news. With this, understandably, comes a diverse representation of many gifts, talents, and skills to be employed for His glory.

Witherington’s example, of a single assembly representing all of the different “body parts” of the Messiah, is certainly something difficult for many Christian Believers today to think of. This is a direct consequence of there being so many religious options for today’s Christians to choose from, some denominational and others non-denominational. Yet, the Apostle Paul was writing to a Corinthian group of Messiah followers, which by this time had probably maintained the assembly adjacent to the Corinthian synagogue (cf. Acts 18:7), and had spread out to various associated fellowships. *They were to be representatives of Israel’s God and Messiah in Corinth*. It is much easier for Messianic congregations and assemblies to think of themselves in the terms Witherington presents, mainly because there really are very few Messianic people on the scene at present.

1 Corinthians 3:21-23

“All things are yours”

“So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Messiah; and Messiah belongs to God.”

Having just asserted how human wisdom is meaningless³² in light of God’s wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:18-20),³³ some intriguing statements are made by Paul to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, which have been beset with a variety of perspectives, some conflicting. The first assertion made by Paul here, *hōste mēdeis kauchasthō en anthrōpois* (ὥστε μηδεὶς καυχάσθω ἐν ἀνθρώποις), “So don’t let anyone boast about mere human beings” (1 Corinthians 3:21, Kingdom New Testament) or “So let no one boast about human leaders” (NRSV), is straightforward enough. The factionalism that has arisen in Corinth, immediately addressed in terms of those rallying around Paul or Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:4-9), bears no significance when these figures are human beings serving the Corinthians’, and all Believers’, interests. Rather than boasting in mortals, as Paul has previously directed, the Corinthians are to boast in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31; Jeremiah 9:23). Even with various differences of opinion expressed regarding 1 Corinthians 3:21b-23 following, Fee is generally right to direct,

³¹ Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, pp 91, 92.

³² This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.

³³ “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, ‘He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS’ [Job 5:13]; and again, ‘THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS OF THE WISE, THAT THEY ARE USELESS’ [Psalm 94:11]” (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

“[L]et no one among you still be bold enough to say ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos.’ That is to ground one’s confidence in the creature, mere mortals all. Rather, Paul will now direct their focus one final time to the Creator, who is God over all.”³⁴

The second statement appearing in 1 Corinthians 3:21, is repeated again in 1 Corinthians 3:22. A rather literal rendering of *panta gar humōn estin* (πάντα γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστίν), without any value judgments interjected, would be “For all things are yours” (RSV/NRSV/ESV) or “All things are yours” (NIV). Why Paul has made this statement to the Corinthians in all probability is related to similar remarks appearing in ancient Stoic philosophy, where ownership of all things is attainable by those who are wise or knowledgeable. As is witnessed in the works of both Cicero and Seneca:

“Then, how dignified, how lofty, how consistent is the character of the Wise Man as they depict it! Since reason has proved that moral worth is the sole good, it follows that he must always be happy, and that all those titles which the ignorant are so fond of deriding do in very truth belong to him. For he will have a better claim to the title of King than Tarquin, who could not rule either himself or his subjects; a better right to the name of ‘Master of the People’ (for that is what a dictator is) than Sulla, who was a master of three pestilential vices, licentiousness, avarice and cruelty; a better claim to be called rich than Crassus, who had he needed nothing would never have been induced to cross the Euphrates for any military reason. Rightly will he be said to own all things, who alone knows how to use all things; rightly also will he be styled beautiful, for the beauty of the soul is fairer than that of the body; rightly the one and only free man, as subject to no man’s authority, and slave of no appetite; rightly conquerable, for though his body be thrown into fetters, no bondage can enchain his soul” (Cicero *De Finibus* 3.22.75).³⁵

“Only the wise man possesses everything without having to struggle to retain it; he alone does not need to send ambassadors across the seas, measure out camps upon hostile shores, place garrisons in commanding forts, or manoeuvre legions and squadrons of cavalry. Like the immortal gods, who govern their realm without recourse to arms, and from their serene and lofty heights protect their own, so the wise man fulfils his duties, however far-reaching they may be, without disorder, and looks down upon the whole human race, because he himself is the greatest and most powerful member thereof. You may laugh at him, but if you in your mind survey the east and the west, reaching even to the regions separated from us by vast wilderness, if you think of all the creatures of the earth, all the riches which the bounty of nature lavishes, it shows a great spirit to be able to say, as though you were a god, ‘All these are mine.’ Thus it is that he covets nothing, for there is nothing which is not contained in everything, and everything is his” (Seneca *On Benefits* 7.3).³⁶

Via the presence of this kind of a philosophy having negatively influenced many of the Corinthians, it is most probable that Paul is employing *panta gar humōn estin* or “For all things are yours” (PME), as a direct means, or at least an embedded means, of ironic rebuke. Garland describes how “The philosophers appealed to it to affirm human self-sufficiency and mastery over all circumstances,”³⁷ yet a figure like Paul would strongly disagree with the claim that “all things are yours” on the sole basis of human wisdom, knowledge, and achievement.

Perspective issues are definitely present with how to properly interpret 1 Corinthians 3:22-23. Paul offers a continuing thought to the Corinthians from 1 Corinthians 3:21: “For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the

³⁴ Fee, 153.

³⁵ Cicero: *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, trans. H. Rackham (London: William Heinemann, 1914), pp 295, 297.

³⁶ Seneca: *On Benefits*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (Hard Press, 2006), 125.

³⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 124.

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future" (1 Corinthians 3:21b-22, RSV). The whole of Creation, and most especially the world to come, is the inheritance of the redeemed (cf. Genesis 1:26; Romans 4:13). As Paul directs in Romans 8:17, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*." Paul also speaks of "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18). The inheritance of the Corinthians is hardly anything that is brought to them because of their own efforts!

It is fair enough to deduce that the statement which follows in 1 Corinthians 3:22b-23 has been made for the limited Corinthians to realize what their true relationship is to their Creator: *panta humōn, humeis de Christou, Christos de Theou* (πάντα ὑμῶν, ὑμεῖς δὲ Χριστοῦ, Χριστὸς δὲ θεοῦ), "all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (NIV). But what is intended by the latter statements, and particularly whether there is any assertion made about the relationship of the Father and Son? It is not infrequent to see various questions of Christology or the nature of the Messiah posed from 1 Corinthians 3:23. A number of interpretive options are present for examiners to consider regarding *humeis de Christou, Christos de Theou*:

1. this is a statement of a subordinationist Christology, where the Son is to some degree inferior to the Father
2. this is a statement of origination, in that the Son originates from God
3. this is a statement of salvation history, in that the Son has acted as God the Father's agent to provide redemption to human beings

a subordinationist Christology

More often than not, readers of 1 Corinthians 3:22-23 have encountered those who have interpreted Paul's statement along the lines of a subordinationist model. While Believers in the Messiah might have all things, including the future world to come, it is only because they are of the Messiah, and the Messiah is of God. Frequently, claims that a subordinationist Christology is present here, where the Son sits in an ascending order as superior to redeemed humanity but not equal to the Father, is supported with further statements appearing later in this letter (i.e., 11:3; 15:28). Problematically for this view, though, is how in the assertion of Shira Lander, in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, "This passage illustrates Paul's understanding that Christ (the messiah) is not God."³⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:23 is certainly a passage of note for those who hold to a low Christology.

Most of those who have concluded that a subordination of the Son to the Father is present in 1 Corinthians 3:23, do regard the Son as being genuinely Deity, God, but still lesser to the Father in some way.³⁹ But, rather than arguing for an ontological subordination, as though the Son were not equal to the Father (cf. Philippians 2:6), various theologians have instead argued for a functional subordination. Witherington indicates, "Christ is functionally subordinate to God, just as the leaders serve the followers and are functionally subordinate to them, though they are also ontologically equal with them."⁴⁰ Clearly supportive of a subordinationist Christology in v. 23 would be Leon Morris, who would argue subordination more on the basis of the Son's Incarnation as a human man:

"This passage reaches its climax with 'Christ is God's'. We have noticed more than once how Paul sets Christ on a level with the Father. This passage does not contradict such teaching,

³⁸ Lander, in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 293.

³⁹ Cf. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 46.

⁴⁰ Witherington, *1-2 Corinthians*, 135.

He further concludes, most notably, "This is not a discourse on the nature of Christ..."

for Paul is not speaking of Christ as he is in his essential nature, but with reference to his saving work. He does not lose sight of the deity of the Son. But he does not lose sight either of the truth that the Son became man, and took a lowly place that he might bring about our salvation. There is a strong statement of this subordination in 15:28. There, as here, the thought is that the Son did indeed take a place among men when he took upon him to deliver man. He, too, is God's."⁴¹

a statement of origination

Some have taken *humeis de Christou, Christos de Theou*, "and you are of Messiah, and Messiah is of God" as being a statement indicating that the Son originates from the Father, which may be connected with the Son serving as the Father's agent of redemption. Mare is one who states,

"Though all things belong to the Christian, they are not centered in him, for all things actually and finally belong to God. They belong to the Christian, then, as he himself belongs to God through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christ and the Father are one (John 1:1; 10:30), yet Christ was sent by the Father into the world (John 10:36; 17:18) to effect our redemption so that we may 'inherit the kingdom' (James 2:5)."⁴²

Drawing the conclusion that *kephalē* (κεφαλῆ) in 1 Corinthians 11:3 following means "source,"⁴³ Philip B. Payne finds some strong support in previous statements of 1 Corinthians, notably here in 3:21-23. He describes,

"Paul's appeals against schisms is intertwined throughout with affirmations of [the Corinthians'] relationship to Christ and God, and it concludes in 3:21-23...First Corinthians 3:23 has striking resemblance to the first and third clauses of 11:3....In 1 Cor 3:23, as in 11:3, Paul chose to anchor a truth in the widest possible theological framework by adding the corresponding affirmation to 'Christ is of God.' For Paul, a relationship to Christ is the necessary context for all spiritual life, and Christ is crucial because of his relationship to God."⁴⁴

a statement regarding salvation history

A third approach to "and you are of Messiah, and Messiah is of God," is to downplay the thought that any statement about the nature of the Father and Son is being made, and to instead consider this as a remark that is concerned with salvation history. In the view of Soards,

"At times interpreters have struggled with this verse because it seems to present a subordinationist christology that denies the equality of God and Christ...Paul was speaking in a functional fashion, so that whatever christology one encounters here is best taken soteriologically, not ontologically. God acted through Christ. Christ served God's will in doing God's work for the salvation of humanity. So Paul thought and so he spoke. Christ is cast as a mediating figure in Paul's thought, for the Christians belong to Christ who belongs to God, so that in belonging to Christ the Christians belong to God through Christ."⁴⁵

Similar to this are the conclusions of Sampley:

⁴¹ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 71.

⁴² Mare, in *EXP*, 10:209.

⁴³ The term *kephalē* is lit. "head," but with available definitions involving "head" as akin to source, per "the head or source of a river" (*LS*, 430); "source, origin" (*BibleWorks 9.0: LSJM Lexicon (Unabridged)*). MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM.).

⁴⁴ Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), pp 116-117.

⁴⁵ Soards, 83.

Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 155 sees a soteriological thrust to 1 Corinthians 3:23, but does see it in terms of a functional subordination of the Son to the Father.

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“In the most sweeping fashion, Paul sketches out the implications of belonging to God in Christ and therefore possessing all things. So to belong and so to possess neutralizes, in a paradoxical way, the importance of all things including...the world, life, death, things present, things to come (cf. Rom 8:38-39; 14:7-8; Gal 3:20; see also 1 Cor 4:7; 7:29-31). Boasting (3:21) in anything or anyone other than God or the gospel misunderstands or misrepresents where power truly resides. Only God can establish a person’s worth. Belonging to God is foundational; that is what matters. All other associations, all other belongings are at best indifferent matters and at worst idolatrous (see 4:7).”⁴⁶

It is important for readers to consider the philosophical background behind *panta gar humōn estin*, and how the Stoics emphasized that human self-will and effort were key at attaining wisdom and knowledge, and thus all things. This was a philosophy directly countered in 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, because all things are of the saints because of the God who has provided salvation in His Son. And so, *panta humōn, humeis de Christou, Christos de Theou* in 1 Corinthians 3:22b-23, **should not** be taken as a statement of subordination (functional or otherwise) within the Godhead, but instead a substantiating remark regarding *the precise reason* why all things are of the saints. That rebuke is present in 1 Corinthians 3:21-22, “So then let no one boast in human beings. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come” (PME), we can be relatively sure of, as many of the Corinthians precisely believed that all things were theirs, *but because of their human wisdom and effort*.

Hays is a commentator who sees rebuke present in vs. 22-23, and draws the conclusion that what Paul says to the Corinthians is intended precisely for them to see how they have forgotten God as a component in their lofty evaluation of themselves:

“If you are really wise, Paul suggests, why are you saying ‘I belong to Paul’ and so on? In fact, Paul and all those other leaders should belong to you! Then, after just a slight pause to let that thrust sink in, Paul expands the list of things that belong to the Corinthians: not just the leaders, but the world or life or death or things present or things to come! If you are really wise, Paul reiterates in verse 22, ‘all belong to you,’ just as the philosophers say. Now a longer pause for effect, and then the last devastating twist: ‘And you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.’

“Those at Corinth who boast in their possession of an exalted wisdom that claims to lift them above the rabble and give them possession of all things are making one fatal error: they are leaving God out of their assessment.”⁴⁷

Keener also interjects the significant thought, “In view of their quest for wisdom (1:17-3:2), the Corinthians should recognize themselves unwise (3:18-19) to follow Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (3:22); they dare follow only Christ (3:23, echoing 1:12).”⁴⁸

The Corinthians have all things not because of their human effort, *but because of the Messiah being of God*. It is appropriate to recognize some overlap between the origination and salvation history views of 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, with the latter more prominent.

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 is best taken from the perspective of it being a statement of salvation history, in a rebuke to the Corinthians that it was only by God in the Messiah who has made it possible for all things to truly be theirs. Paul agrees with the Stoic terminology of “All things

⁴⁶ Sampley, in *NIB*, 10:833.

⁴⁷ Hays, 61.

⁴⁸ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 43.

are yours,” listing off in 1 Corinthians 3:22 the inheritance of the Believers, but disagrees with the Stoic philosophy of human effort being the means by which this is possible. In 1 Corinthians 3:23 it is asserted “you are of Messiah, and Messiah is of God.” This is not a statement of subordination-ownership; “you are of Messiah, and Messiah is of God” is a statement describing how the Father has acted in His Son to provide salvation. It would have been insufficient for Paul to just say “you are of Messiah,” as Paul does want to admonish the Corinthians for their high view of themselves, and the best way to counter such arrogance is to employ as broad a Divine spectrum as possible. It is only in direct association with the Son as the Father’s agent, that anyone can truly have all things.

1 Corinthians 8

“Meat Sacrificed to Idols and the Messianic Shema”

“Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him. However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Messiah died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Messiah. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.”

Among the important topics needing to be discussed between the Apostle Paul and the Corinthians, particularly witnessed in 1 Corinthians 8 and in 10:14-33 following,⁴⁹ was the issue of meat taken from idol sacrifices.⁵⁰ What was to happen in the event that any of the Corinthians ate meat that had been sacrificed to idols? 1 Corinthians 8 is a place where there is useful scholarly discussion as to how many Corinthian slogans Paul had to actually address (1 Corinthians 8:1, 4, 8), as well as there being some less-than-subtle chiding of the attitudes and motives of the presumed “knowledgable” persons among them.

The content of 1 Corinthians ch. 8 widely concerns a sector of claiming Believers in Ancient Corinth, who thought that their knowledge in the One True God was so strong, that they could freely associate at pagan temples, and partake of the meat that had been sacrificed, without any apparent consequences. They would have appealed to various Tanach or Old Testament sentiments about idols being futile and worthless, and that the God of Israel was the only Deity that existed, thus making eating meat offered before an entity that did not exist immaterial. Paul does not disagree on some of the points they raised, but he does address the consequences

⁴⁹ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *1 Corinthians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁵⁰ “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, ‘*He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS*’ [Job 5:13]; and again, ‘*THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS OF THE WISE, THAT THEY ARE USELESS*’ [Psalm 94:11]” (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).