

## Chapter Four

### Paul's Themes of Generosity, Self-Determination and Respect for the Body

#### a. The Introductory Letter of Thessalonians

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is possibly his first letter. He does not necessarily have a focus on one or all of the social commandments mentioned above. However this letter does put the pursuit of virtues associated with these commandments into an "end-game" context. Observing them is required for a following of Jesus and a share in the resurrection of Jesus.

It is generally agreed that this letter of 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul.<sup>42</sup> The letter is complete in itself although some scholars believe there was an earlier letter that has been fitted into the text and it can be found in 2:13-4:2. If such was the case the section of 1:1-2:12 as we have it now, was originally followed by 4:3 to the end of the letter.<sup>43</sup> The earlier section of the letter (if it is earlier) talks about how Timothy has visited the Christian community at Thessalonica in the place of Paul. He has brought back the good news that the people there are continuing on with his teachings about faith and love (1 Thess.3:6). However it should be noted here is an omission of the word "hope". In ordinary parlance faith, hope and love are mentioned together. But it appears that Paul

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<sup>42</sup> J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14.

<sup>43</sup> Earl J. Richard *First and Second Thessalonians*. Vol 11 Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 249-267

needs to deal with the lack of hope in Thessalonica in particular and he does this in the "later" section of the letter. He crystallises his thoughts about it in 1 Thess. 4:13-18.

What was the historical background of Thessalonica and its place in the Roman Empire? It was a city that cultivated its friendship with the Romans, both in the past and into the future. They remained loyal to Octavius at the battle Philippi (42 BCE) and consequently Thessalonica became a "free" city (cf. Acts 17:5-6).<sup>44</sup> As a Hellenistic city it therefore had a wide range of religions and cults and these included worship of the Roman Emperor.<sup>45</sup>

In his letter to the Christian community there, Paul praises the people for their responsiveness to his message and their goodwill (cf 2:13). At the same time, he recognises that they have been facing pressure from their neighbours, acquaintances and possibly family members, because of the new behaviour they have now adopted as Christians.<sup>46</sup> Paul talks of himself suffering the same sort of treatment as they have suffering from their countrymen. (2:14)<sup>47</sup>

The general format of 1 Thessalonians shows that Paul treats these people as being immersed in Greek culture. Thus his writing is structured on standard Greek letter-writing with a friendly greeting (1:1) and affectionate farewell (5:28).<sup>48</sup> He

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<sup>44</sup> J. Terence Forestell, "The Letters to the Thessalonians" in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 227.

<sup>45</sup> Forestell, "The Letters to the Thessalonians, 227."

<sup>46</sup> Edward Adams "First Century Models for Paul's churches: Selected Scholarly Developments since Meeks" *After the first Urban Christians: The Social-Scientific Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-five Years Later* Edited by Todd Still and David Horrell (T. and T.Clark International 2009), 61

<sup>47</sup> *The Jerusalem Bible: New Testament*, Gen. Ed. Alexander Jones (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967).

<sup>48</sup> G. H. R. Horsley and Stephen Llewelyn, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1977*

also shows that as the leader of the community he has a relationship with these people. He is trying to retain this bond. The scholar Terence Forestell notes that Paul uses the word "brothers" as a term of Christian endearment twenty-one times in the letter.<sup>49</sup> His letter to the Thessalonians also echoes writings of the time such as that of a "protreptic" letter.<sup>50</sup> A protreptic letter shows how new members of a Philosophical school were expected to adopt the new and specific types of behaviour associated with that school. Such a letter would also help community solidarity.<sup>51</sup> Usually a caring solicitude would be shown in a protreptic letter in order to help newcomers adapt and keep to the new and adopted lifestyle.<sup>52</sup> Thessalonians, with their Greek; culture, would have been familiar with the practice of moulding people's behaviour. Also, it was a standard practice for members of an association at the time, to clarify their commonly shared values. At the practical level this would be something essential in the practice of ancient trade.<sup>53</sup>

In the letter it appears that, possibly because of feedback from Timothy (Paul's co-worker), the Thessalonian community had been having problems in particular with the Christian prohibition against fornication (4:3). Fornication was a practice that was intrinsic to some of the worship cults where there was Temple prostitution.<sup>54</sup> Apparently at least some

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(North Ryde, NSW: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre Macquarie University, 1981), 61-63.

<sup>49</sup> Forestell, "The Letters to the Thessalonians," 227.

<sup>50</sup> Neil Elliot and Mark Reasoner, eds. *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011) 68.

<sup>51</sup> Elliot *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul*, 68.

<sup>52</sup> Elliot *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul*, 69.

<sup>53</sup> Richard S. Ascough "A Question of Death: Paul's Community-building Language in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (Boston, Mass.: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis 2004), 518.

<sup>54</sup> Ralph F. Wilson, "The Command and Blessing of Holy Sex (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12), j 1& 2 *Thessalonians Discipleship Lessons* (Lomis, CA: JesusWalk

voices connected to the community were objecting to the prohibition against fornication and these voices were possibly coming from former friends or associates.<sup>55</sup> Paul's response to their objection was clear - "anyone who objects (to the prohibition against fornication) is not objecting to a human authority, but to God who gives you his Holy Spirit" (4:8).

In the Greek culture of the time (with its range of cults) it was not unusual for men to go outside a marriage for sexual experiences. In such a social context an interpretation of the Jewish commandment of "Thou shalt not commit adultery" could be understood as a prohibition against sexual intercourse with someone who was already married. Temple prostitutes did not appear to be married so it might be understood by some Thessalonians that these prostitutes were therefore available. Paul is "raising the bar" of observance of this commandment here, moving the bar of morality about (sex with married persons) to fornication (sex with unmarried people). .

In the first section of the letter 1:1-2:13 (as noted above) Paul has pointed out his own example in facing opposition, rough treatment and insults (2:2-3). He has avoided delusion, immorality or deception (2:3) and he has not sought flattery or money (2:5) . Thus as community leader he is not asking for standards of behaviour from the Thessalonians that he has not practiced himself. He has only sought their well-being (2:11-12).

The last Chapter of the letter, the passage of 4:18-18 begins with addressing a further concern which was apparently expressed by community members. What about their possible separation from loved ones who have already died? Such a separation undercut their sense of hope. In the Hellenistic background of Thessalonica there was respect shown to the

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Publications) ([http://www.jesuswalk.com/thessalonians/04\\_sex.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/thessalonians/04_sex.htm) [accessed 1 April 2014].

<sup>55</sup> Elliot *Documents and Images for the Study of Paul*, 73.

dead. The many social structures of a Hellenistic city included associations providing for the respectful burial of its members.<sup>56</sup> Paul had already taught the Thessalonians about the coming of Jesus Christ in the Parousia. But people wanted to know if their lost loved ones would also rise and be reunited with themselves at such a time (4:13).

It appears here that Paul needed to develop his own thinking about the Parousia event and the letter to the Thessalonians is a step towards this process.<sup>57</sup> How so? The later letter of Philippians refers to a change "in our lowly body" (Phil. 3:20). In the second letter to the Corinthians Paul gives further clarification about this when he talks of a "spiritual body" that is, the inner man that undergoes daily renewal (2 Cor. 4:16). In the letter to the Romans, possibly Paul's final letter, he talks of an inward participation in Christ's risen life as experienced in the here and now (Rom. 6:3.)<sup>58</sup>

In the section of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (as mentioned) possibly written before these other letters, Paul puts forward an understanding of hope that reaches beyond death and makes the difficulties of leading a Christian lifestyle worthwhile. He bases this hope on the belief that "Jesus died and rose again" (4:14). He teaches the Thessalonians that all the community members, including those who have already died but who have based their lives on the moral teachings of Jesus, will also share in his resurrection. Such a "fact" puts the Christian community members at an advantage over "other people who have no hope" (4:13), presumably because others can only rely on the benefits of belonging to the Roman Empire.

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<sup>56</sup> Ascough, "A Question of Death: Paul's Community-building Language in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18," 510.

<sup>57</sup> Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> F.F. Bruce, "The Epistles of Paul" *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Matthew Black (London: T. Nelson 1962), 929.

<sup>58</sup> Rosemary Canavan, *Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 82.

Paul tells the Thessalonians that "At the trumpet of God, the voice of the archangel will call out the command and the Lord himself will come down from heaven" (4:16). Actually, in terms of the social background of the city, such a statement compares this coming of Jesus with the coming of the Roman Emperor. Paul is playing on this sort of coming by the Emperor. People in a Greco-Roman city were given constant reminders of the might of the Roman Empire and Emperor.<sup>59</sup> But Paul reminds them that despite all the benefits that friendly links with Rome could confer on the Thessalonians, these benefits were far out weighed by the advantages of connection with Jesus Christ. A relationship with Jesus, developed through the observance of the commandments ensured well-being, not only in this world, but into the next life as well.

The verse of 4:18 develops the section of 4:13-18 into a climax of hope. People are assured "we (including loved ones who have died) shall stay with the Lord for ever."(v. 18).

The imagery of Paul's mention of being "taken up in the clouds" fits in with his own Jewish background.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore the use of this imagery helps him to incorporate into the text, the hope of the Jewish people as well. As the commentator Bonnie Thurston notes, "Paul had a genius for choosing language that had connotations in both the Jewish and Hellenistic ideational worlds."<sup>61</sup> The mention of being "taken up in the clouds" also recalls Elijah, a prominent figure in Jewish tradition who was taken up to the heavens in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11). Actually the gospel of Luke, written about thirty years later, continues on with such a reference to

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<sup>59</sup> Candida R. Moss, Joel S. Baden, "1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 in Rabbinic Perspective" in *New Testament Studies*, 58 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 199.

<sup>60</sup> Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon*, Vol 10, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 88.

Elijah (Luke 4:26). The inferred allusion to Elijah in 1 Thessalonians 4:18-18 is a reminder, that as far as equality is concerned, Gentile converts can enjoy the same sense of hope that Jews have enjoyed and more.

In the verse of 5:8 in the letter there is a further allusion to the Roman Empire and its benefits. Paul says "let us put on faith and love for a breastplate and the hope of salvation for a helmet" (5:8). Mention of such Roman army symbols was a further reminder to the Thessalonians that, rather than having to reject the positive aspects of Roman Empire membership, they could in fact endorse these aspects even while developing them further. (cf. "so that you are seen to be respectable by those outside the Church," 4:12).

The key point about hope in the passage of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is that participation in the resurrected life of Jesus Christ does not depend on whether or not one has died in a physical sense. Rather, it lies in the extent to which one has adhered to the moral lifestyle that was taught by Jesus Christ. Paul is urging people to act as Jesus acted and in this way they will share in his resurrected life beyond death.

This theme in 1 Thessalonians of needing to "work at" an identification with the morality of Christ was to be developed further in his letters to follow.

## **b. The Letter to the Philippians and the Theme of Generosity**

According to Paul, a key element of the identity of the Philippians in Christ, relates to their understanding of the spirit of the Commandments, especially the need for material generosity. In his letter to the Philippians, instead of taking a legalistic approach, Paul puts a focus on the rationale

behind the commandments. He also warns against people who go against the commandments, saying “Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame.” (Phil 3:19)<sup>62</sup> This echoes ‘Thou shalt not kill, steal or commit adultery’

In the letter to the Philippians Paul takes a thematic approach to the commandments. In the case of this letter there is an undergirding of the seventh commandment “Thou shalt not steal.” He expresses a special relationship of trust with these people (Phil 1:5-6). They had helped him financially at a time when other churches did not appear to recognize the need for this (Phil 4:15). He is grateful for their generosity. In contrast to this connection with the Philippians, when a church such as at Corinth was ready to help Paul financially, he would not accept their help (1 Cor. 10:14- 15). It appears his refusal in this case was not a matter of the money itself but the attitude with which the Corinthians were offering the money (1 Cor. 3:10). He saw an immaturity in them. Amongst this community as a group, and definitely amongst some of them as individuals, there was likely to be a misinterpretation that the money being given was on the basis of a client paying an employee. By contrast, the Philippians had shown Paul they supported him because they were concerned about his welfare. Thus he not only appreciated the money but the spirit in which it was given. In this sense their gift was a reversal of the law requirement of the commandments “Thou shalt not steal” (cf. Mark 10:19).

Paul not only expressed his gratitude to the Philippians for their financial contribution. He also he cited what could have been an already established “prose-hymn” used in Emperor worship. In such case he adapted this hymn to clarify the role of Christ cf.

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<sup>62</sup> *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament*. Intro. Comm. Schott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).



"but emptying himself, taking the form of a servant, .....And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."  
(Phil 2:7-8).<sup>63</sup>

The hymn about Christ in Philippians 2:6-11, is known as *kyrios*, which is a Hellenistic term.<sup>64</sup> The hymn in fact presents Christ in stark contrast to the Emperor.<sup>65</sup> Paul's use of the hymn in the letter shows he was making an effort to present his message in such a way that it would appeal to people and yet challenge them and their Hellenistic culture. In his use of the hymn he actually touches upon the whole framework of meaning that related to the Emperor. He transfers this framework of meaning about the Emperor, towards an understanding of Christ.

Throughout the letter to the Philippians Paul continues to elaborate on the meaning of this transferred meaning of the hymn. He emphasizes that the true gospel invites people to adopt the mind of Christ and thereby be prepared to sacrifice their own self interest for the benefit of others. He says "Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:4-5). It would be in such a way that the "body of Christ", that is, the community or *ekklesia*, would be strengthened.

These points made in the letter, relate to the social background of the times. In his book, *Paul: A Critical Life*, Jerome Murphy O'Connor explains how Paul had to face, in his travels, the dangers of being on the road. There was a constant fear of bandits, despite the *pax romana* imposed by

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<sup>63</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, "Psalms, Philippians 2:6-11, and the Origins of Christology," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no ¾ (Worcester: Brill, 2003), 372.

<sup>64</sup> Bonnie and Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon*, 85.

<sup>65</sup> Fitzmyer *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle* (New York: Paulist Press, c. 1993), 104.

the Roman Empire. For instance Murphy O'Connor describes the difficulty of sleeping in taverns. Here there was apparently some protection. But there was also the fear that those people beside you would take what little money you may have. Murphy O'Connor says that Paul would have realized that such people would steal, not necessarily out of malevolence, but for their own survival. He knew that values in the wider society were such that it meant people had to inflict theft and even violence on others for their own welfare. He realized there was a need to build up communities where the self-giving of members was so embedded into the tenets of the membership that there was no longer a need to exercise this sort of violence in order to survive.<sup>66</sup> Paul's 'map of morality' was geared towards this. Thus giving towards the material security of others was being encouraged.

Paul's interpretation of the prose-hymn in Phil 2:6-11, as with all his teaching, was strongly influenced by the vision and voice of the risen Christ that he had seen and heard on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:3- 5). This incident occurred when Paul was going to Damascus to imprison Christians. Suddenly a light appeared and a voice said "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). After this vision he spent the rest of his life trying to understand and explain how it was that the Christians that he was pursuing were so intimately identified with Christ. The vision showed that Christ saw them as an extension of his own being. In the vision Christ was telling Saul that it was he Himself that<sup>67</sup> Saul (renamed Paul) was persecuting.

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<sup>66</sup> Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 101.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle*, 8.

Paul's letters, as in the case of the letter to the Philippians, were addressed to a smaller group of people rather than to a large number. The letters themselves were a deliberate literary composition.<sup>68</sup> Basically Paul was trying to influence the behavior of the people that the letters addressed.<sup>69</sup> In the case of the letter to the Philippians, this could be viewed as a type of family letter with strong parallels to other family letters written in the Greco-Roman culture at the time.<sup>70</sup> Thus, as with his letter to the Thessalonians, there is the standard, Greek format which included a greeting, thanksgiving, the body of the letter and a greetings/farewell.<sup>71</sup> On the one hand Paul had been raised as a Jew. But the very framework of the letters he wrote shows how he was trying to communicate with readers/auditors in the Greco-Roman culture and he was using ideas that were familiar to them.

Paul's letters, as described by Richard Earl in *The first and Second Thessalonians*, were written to influence and guide the behavior of members in a way similar to that of a Philosophical school.<sup>72</sup> At the time, members of such a school, were not only expected to agree with the thinking of the letter but also to adapt their behavior to it. In this context behaviour distinguished the identity of people. A protreptic letter such as this would also be encouraging newer members to stand fast in the new lifestyle they were adopting. In the case of Philippians and the concern they had shown for Paul's material welfare, they were also being encouraged and shown

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<sup>68</sup> J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in their Roman Context*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> Earl J. Richard, *The First and Second Thessalonians*, Vol 11, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 68.

<sup>70</sup> Angela Standhartinger, "Join in Imitating me" (Philippians 3:17: Towards an Interpretation of Philippians 3" *New Testament Studies* 54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 425.

<sup>71</sup> Raymond Collins "The First Letter to the Thessalonians" *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, c.1990), 772.

<sup>72</sup> Richard, *The First and Second Thessalonians*, 69.

how this generosity would help them to imitate as he himself did, the self-giving of Christ.<sup>73</sup>

The theme of a “reversal” of the commandment “Thou shalt not steal” is focused upon in this letter but is also dealt with in the context of other issues facing this community. Therefore the themes of “Thou shalt not kill and Thou shalt not commit adultery” are also raised. In the letter to the Philippians Paul and his co-workers including Timothy who is co-writing the letter, realize that in Philippi church members form only one group of people. There are also a number of other groups in the area and some of these have also been going around preaching the gospel and/or philosophy (cf. Gal 1:6-10).<sup>74</sup> Paul is conscious that their interpretations of the gospel differ from his own. For instance some “preachers” to which the church at Philippi would offer hospitality, would not necessarily be preaching the gospel of Christ crucified.<sup>75</sup> He therefore says, “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh” (Phil 3:2) One wonders if he was referring to anyone in particular here. At the time, in Corinth for example, there were itinerant Hellenistic Cynics who travelled around in a way that had similarities with what Paul was doing.<sup>76</sup> But some of these people were over-permissive, and even decadent in their behavior. They could have been included in this warning of Paul. A warning against people who practiced witch craft could also have been included here. There were others again who wanted to impose circumcision on Gentile believers so that the external

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<sup>73</sup> Margaret M. Mitchell, “1 and 2 Thessalonians,” *The Cambridge Companion to Paul*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 52.

<sup>74</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 366.

<sup>75</sup> Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 370.

<sup>76</sup> F. Gerald Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 90.

law, rather than the mind of Christ, would determine their behavior (cf. Gal 6:12-13). Thus there is the reference to those who want to “mutilate the flesh”. Warnings against such a range of people and the ‘gospels’ they preached was a theme that not only occurs in the letter to the Philippians. It also occurs in Corinthians, Galatians, Romans and other letters of Paul as well.

In his letters Paul is trying to nurture church members into the "mind of Christ" that is, the attitude of Christ towards the commandments. In this sense he “side steps” talking about the commandments directly. Rather he wants to emphasize it is in the “mind of Christ” attitude and behavior as expressed in the hymn to the Philippians (1 Phil 2:6-11) that the identity of the Christian is to be found.<sup>77</sup> This hymn links in a Christ-like identity with creation itself. “every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth” ( Phil 2:10).<sup>78</sup> Christians also need to believe that by the adoption of such a "mind of Christ" they will be able to "break through" into a new life as a "body of Christ", and into a new type of society. As Murphy O'Connor outlines “What Paul wanted to get across was that the society of the time was oppressive in its most basic elements, and in its very structure.”<sup>79</sup> Paul wanted his readers/auditors to form a new type of society.

The letter to the Philippians appears to deal in particular with a reversal of the commandment “Thou shalt not steal.” What about Paul’s particular focus on a “reversal” of the commandments of “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery” ?

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<sup>77</sup> Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle*, 105.

<sup>78</sup> Fitzmyer, *According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle*, 13.

<sup>79</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 208.

**c. Galatians and Paul's insistence on  
Self-determination**

Paul's letter to the people of Galatia, differs markedly from his letter to the Philippians. On the one hand, he is elaborating further on his initial presentation of Christ in the *Kyrios* hymn of Philippians (Phil. 2:6-11). Also, he is addressing an explicit group of people. But in the case of the letter to the Galatians he is confronting them. There are people there who not only have views different from his own. They have also been involved in "back-biting." Paul. In Galatia, people were slipping back into the Judaic practice of circumcision and they were also trying to practice the complexities of the Judaic law. Paul confronted these people and stressed the need for self-determination. His challenge to the Galatians relates to a reversal of "Thou shalt not kill."

When this letter was written, Paul's opponents had taken explicit action to undercut not only his good standing in the community but also his leadership influence there. The church at Antioch, which was in Galatia, was included in this shift of loyalty.<sup>80</sup>

According to Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas had been sent as delegates from Antioch to a Jerusalem Council. This Council was largely about the need or not, for Gentile converts to be circumcised. After the Council the two were sent back to Antioch. to give a report to the Church there about the decisions taken. According to Acts 15:31 the Antiochene church welcomed both Paul and Barnabas and the outcome of the Council. But the letter to Galatians, shows that Paul's relationship with the church was quite

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<sup>80</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 158.

different from the description given in Acts.

A historical question is raised by scholars trying to work out the time the Jerusalem Council was held and the time the Galatian letter was written. Did this come before or after the Jerusalem Council? On the one hand it shows Paul's attack on people from Jerusalem including Peter the Apostle, who like others, was no longer eating with the Gentile converts (Gal. 2:11-13). This may suggest the Jerusalem Council came after the public confrontation with Peter rather than before it. If the Council did come after the confrontation and it did succeed in resolving the issue of a separation between Jewish and Gentile converts, then the letter could fit in with Luke's positive description of the Council's outcome (Acts 15:32). For instance if the Greek word *de* in Gal 2:11 were translated as "on the other hand" rather than with the word "but," this could suggest that the confrontation with Peter was before the Council took place.

However, the letter appears to actually mention the Council in Galatians 2:2 (cf. "I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas"). This verse suggests that the Council was before the confrontation with Peter and others rather than after it. Also, the abrupt statement of Paul "Oh foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you" (Gal. 3:1) also suggests the confrontation with Peter (Gal 2:11) came after the Council because they had reversed their previous behavior.

If such is the case further questions arise. For example how long after the Council did the confrontation take place and what led to the change in approach on the part of those in Galatia. Murphy O'Connor says that the Jerusalem Council was in 51CE.<sup>81</sup> Carl Holladay says the letters of Philippians, 1 Corinthians and Galatians were written around 54-55 and from

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<sup>81</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 349.

an Ephesian prison.<sup>82</sup> Fitzmyer agrees with this date.<sup>83</sup> But Ellis says Galatians was written late in Paul's life.<sup>84</sup> A discussion about the time of writing has relevance to the key point Paul was trying to make in the letter because it puts this into its historical context.

The historical context raises the question as to why were people wanting Jewish converts to eat apart from Gentile converts and why did either they, or others, want Gentile converts to be circumcised? There is mention of "certain men came from James" (Gal.2:12). These influenced Peter and even Barnabas against eating with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-13). Joseph Fitzmyer points out that it was not necessarily the same group of people who were agitating about eating with Gentile converts who were also insisting on the circumcision of Gentile converts. Fitzmyer also notes that Lightfoot had suggested people insisting on circumcision may have been connected to the Essenes. He notes that Lightfoot's suggestion about this group of people was made before the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts in the 1940's. These manuscripts are associated with Essenes.<sup>85</sup> The manuscripts (found after Lightfoot's suggestion) endorse the possibility of an Essene influence in Galatia.<sup>86</sup>

Murphy O'Connor provides a reason why James and his friends thought that Jewish converts eating apart from Gentile converts was not as important as obviously Paul

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<sup>82</sup> Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ*, 382-3.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), 237.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters*, (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 174.

<sup>85</sup> Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 194-5.

<sup>86</sup> Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," 237.



thought it was. This was because of the political background of the time. On the one hand the Temple at Jerusalem in the 50's CE may have appeared very established and busy. It was the centre of the significantly large Jewish diaspora<sup>87</sup> from four to eight million people. This was arguably about 10% of the Roman Empire's population.<sup>88</sup> But in reality there were real insecurities for Jewish people at that time in Jerusalem in the 50's CE. For instance in 39-41 CE the Emperor Gaius ordered the legate of Syria to erect a giant statue of the Emperor as Jupiter in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. As it turned out, the Jewish King Agrippa persuaded Gaius to change his mind.<sup>89</sup> But there was a realization amongst Jews in general that their political position could be precarious. There could also have been a general consensus amongst Jews that a protection against such vulnerability would have been for them to "stick together." James therefore could have wanted to strengthen the identity of Christians of Jewish origin by insisting on a more exacting observance of Jewish practices and fellowship identity amongst them.<sup>90</sup> In any case, in the churches of Galatia and elsewhere, people would have been attending house-churches. They would have naturally gravitated towards those places where there were people with a similar background.

But Paul thought differently about this.

At the end of the letter to the Galatians he dwells on reasons why some people had been trying to impose circumcision on Gentile converts. He says it was "that they may not be

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<sup>87</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 142.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Arguably West Hunter "Jews in the Roman Empire"

<https://westhunt.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/jews-in-the-roman-empire/>  
[accessed 12 Dec 2018]

<sup>89</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 139.

<sup>90</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 141.

persecuted for the cross of Christ” (Gal 6:12). This implies that such people thought it was “safer” to have a Jewish identity rather than a Christian one. Why so? A threat of persecution by the Emperor Gaius was not the only political issue that could have been behind the Galatian confrontation. When Rome burned at the time of Emperor Nero in 64 CE., the blame was put on Christians. This resultant savage persecution of Christians was not to take place until 64 CE. But by 54-55 CE Nero was already in power. People were aware of his increasing savagery. Christians were becoming more aware themselves that they were only a tiny and therefore vulnerable minority. Even Gentile converts, including those in Galatia, may have thought it was safer to identify themselves as circumcised Jews. Thus they readily accepted the influence of the “Judaizers.” In his own life Paul had personal experience of their fear of persecution. He had been imprisoned himself and would have been keenly aware of the possibility of having to face “the wild animals at Ephesus” as he put it to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:33).

Despite possible arguments in favour of Gentile converts being circumcised, Paul insists that by undertaking circumcision Gentile converts were side-stepping the challenge of “living in Christ.” They were allowing themselves to be manipulated. In the letter he talks of his own past experience in saying “to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.” (Gal 2:5). This same truth of the gospel meant that Galatians would need to be prepared to face death for the gospel. As set out in the hymn to the Philippians, just as Christ was ready to accept death, so these people were challenged to die if necessary, in imitation of Christ. Such a challenge would apply to all converts within the Galatian church,, whether they be of Jewish background eating apart from Gentiles or Gentiles who were preparing for circumcision..

In both cases, Paul was opposed to what was happening in Galatia. He viewed the Eucharistic unity of eating together as being essential to the on-going self-giving that is integral to community membership in Christ. This sort of stress on the importance of self-giving within a freedom framework showed he wanted a covenant based on that of Abraham rather than the regulations of Moses.<sup>91</sup>

Paul challenges Gentile converts for failing to realize that if they think of themselves as being justified through circumcision and their adherence to the Jewish law, then the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has been in vain (Gal 2:21). The very act of undergoing circumcision would mean they were making a statement that it is the external Jewish law that justifies them rather than their own living in the self-giving spirit of Christ (Gal 2:16). Paul recalls the faith of Abraham who was justified because of his faith in the promises of God rather than because of adherence to the law. As it was, the Mosaic "law" as Jews knew it, came about four hundred and thirty years after Abraham (Gal 3:17)..<sup>92</sup> Paul says this law was introduced so people would know what was wrong (cf. in particular 'thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal') But now that Christ had come, they no longer needed the detailed stipulations that had been added to the commandments over the years. In fact by the time of Paul, these stipulations had developed into a whole network of laws that Peter himself had said he could not observe (Acts 15:10).

Paul also observes that if Gentile converts adopt circumcision and what this implies, then they would also need to adopt the Jewish law in all the complexity. Paul reminds them that the

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<sup>91</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 209.

<sup>92</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 209.

law itself, according to Scripture, is under a curse when people fail to keep the whole it (Gal 3:10).

In this situation what annoys Paul most of all is the interference and manipulation by “Judaizers” of the self-determination of the Gentile converts. The coming of Christ had given his followers a freedom and self-determination that some people were now trying to take away from them. We are reminded here of one of the three key social commandments, that is, “Thou shalt not kill.” “Killing” in the wider, metaphorical sense, includes the manipulation of people to the extent that their self-determination and their “freedom” is denied to them. In the letter Paul writes of “false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus that they might bring us into bondage.” (Gal 2:4). He claims that such people were trying to take away the freedom and self-determination in Christ that community members in Galatia had enjoyed.

The communal context of what was going on here was important. As Murphy O’Connor says, “freedom is a property of the community, not a possession of the individual.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, taking away such a freedom would destroy the authenticity and identity of the community as a whole. In his criticisms about such a denial of freedom Paul avoids explicit mention of the commandment which was at issue here, that is, “Thou shalt not kill.” But again, as in the letters to the Philippians, the theme of such a commandment undergirds the content and tone of the letter.

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<sup>93</sup> Murphy O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 209.

#### **d. 1 Corinthians and Respect for the Body**

If one could argue that Paul was dealing with a theme about poverty and a reversal of “Thou shalt not steal” in his letter to the Philippians, and a reversal of “Thou shalt not kill” in his letter to the Galatians, then one can pick up similarities along the same lines in his first letter to the Corinthians. Here, he deals with a theme of “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

On the other hand Paul’s “family” letter-style in his letter to the Philippians” stands in contrast to the writing style he uses in the first letter to the Corinthians. He chastises the Corinthians cf. “And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn?” (1 Cor.: 5:2). But at the same time, he continues in his efforts to train people into keeping the spirit of the commandments and the mindset of Christ..

In the case of the Corinthians, Paul develops a theology about the body and the implications of this for the community as a whole. He shows that respect for one’s body exists behind the commandment of “Thou shalt not commit adultery”. This commandment is dealing with relationship as such.

Paul had warned the Philippians against visiting preachers, and it is soon apparent in the letter to the Corinthians that some of these preachers, especially Cynics with their Greek Stoic background, had already been influencing the community in Corinth.<sup>94</sup> In Paul’s reprimand about a man living with his father’s wife he points out that even by pagan standards this behavior was unacceptable (1 Cor. 5:1). He says such a man should be expelled from the community (1 Cor. 5:13). Given that Cynics were prepared to “chuck out” social conventions and one wonders about their influence in

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<sup>94</sup> Murphy O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 303.

this matter.<sup>95</sup>

Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians, as in his other letters, is primarily related to the behavior of a group of people. In the case mentioned above misbehavior had been reported back to him by others. Paul used this system of "reporting back" in order to keep in touch with the communities he founded. Timothy for instance had given a more favourable report about what was going on with the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:6). But with regard to the Corinthians situation reports had not been good. In the wider context and as Ronald Fung points out, the sexual morality of the society of the time was "sheer chaos." This was not only noted by Christians but even by the pagans themselves.<sup>96</sup> To Paul it appeared that the community in Corinth was slipping into the behavior of those who lived around them. It was therefore not surprising that sexual misconduct was being reported.

As noted above, Paul's letters as a whole are mainly about behavior rather than preaching. However in 1 Corinthians he not only deals with individual behavioral issues relating to "Thou shalt not commit adultery". He also puts this in the wider context of his own theological understanding of the "body of Christ". Two understandings of both the body of the individual and the corporate body of the group are being linked together. Again this theology about the body is ultimately based on Paul's experience of Christ's revelation to himself when he was on his way to arrest Christians at Damascus. In this experience a voice called out

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he

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<sup>95</sup>Cf. David Padfield, "Corinth, Greece in the New Testament," (Zion, Illinois: Church of Christ) <http://www.padfield.com/2005/corinth.html> [accessed 29th May 2016].

<sup>96</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 253.

said, "Who are you, Lord? And he said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. (Acts 9:4)

Both the individual follower of Christ and the corporate body of his followers were identified with the person of Jesus himself.

In the outlining of his ideas about "the body of Christ" in 1 Corinthians Paul especially warns against the use of prostitutes. He points out that the Christian is part of the body of Christ, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Cor. 6:15). Then he uses the image of the sacred Temple to describe the body of a Christian as a temple of the Holy Spirit. He points out that by being joined to a prostitute this sacred Temple of the body is being defiled "For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are." (1 Cor. 3:17).

He also reprimands the community because of their behavior at the community meal of the Eucharist. He says "It is not the Lord's supper that you eat." (1 Cor. 11:20). For him, this community meal should be a time when the corporate body of Christ finds expression and it is strengthened by the "self-giving" of its members. But in Corinth there was not a genuine sharing of love here.<sup>97</sup> The Eucharist, as Paul recalls, is the re-enactment of the crucifixion of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26). It is therefore a time when members of the body of Christ should express and re-affirm their readiness to give of themselves for the benefit of others - even to death on a cross, cf. "you proclaim the Lord's death." (1 Cor. 11:26). Paul notes that in Corinth that there are some people who are bringing food to the Eucharistic service and then eating it amongst themselves rather than sharing this with all of those present. In a practical way he accosts them "What!

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<sup>97</sup> Jerome Murphy O'Connor *Keys to First Corinthians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 226.

Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:22).

Elsewhere in the letter he again chides the wealthier members of the Corinthian community who apparently consider themselves to be superior to others, including himself, "You are held in honor but we in disrepute." (1 Cor. 4:10). . Apparently, their attitude towards himself was related to the fact that Paul had been earning a living as an artisan rather than relying on payments from the Community. Thus some of the wealthier members of the community, who were more likely to have been educated, were looking down on him (1 Cor. 4:10). Their attitude fitted in with the ideas of some philosophers of the time who despised manual labor.<sup>98</sup> Thus some such people were wanting to leave Christianity and its teaching in the realm of ideas only.<sup>99</sup> However, Paul insists that they should apply themselves to developing a mindset and a lifestyle that is based upon the giving of oneself to others. He puts himself forward as an example to imitate here (1 Cor. 4:17) – even if he is viewed by these people as a lowly artisan.<sup>100</sup>

Paul insists that unity in a community of Christ needs to be based on mutual respect, regardless of one's background. It appears some people would have preferred to align their thinking with that of the preacher Apollo (1Cor. 1:12) rather than Paul. Apollo in turn was strongly influenced by the Jewish philosopher Philo.<sup>101</sup> On the other hand, as regards Apollo, it appears that with all his brilliance as an orator, he himself supported Paul's mission. His position on this appears to be reflected later in the letter to the Corinthians

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<sup>98</sup> Murphy O'Connor *Keys to First Corinthians*, 227.

<sup>99</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 303.

<sup>100</sup> Richard S. Ascough, "A Question of Death: Paul's Community – Building Language in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18," *Journal of Biblical Literature* no 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 517.

<sup>101</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 173.



when Paul says that Apollo was not prepared at that stage to return to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:12). Perhaps, one could speculate, Apollo knew of the divisions within the community and he did not want people ‘lining up’ behind him in opposition to Paul.

In any case, in the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul insists that he has taken on the position of being poor and vulnerable deliberately because he knows that being poor and vulnerable is what is required of him. He is not asking the Corinthians to readily go without food and drink and clothes, or be beaten and not have a home. But he asks them to have the same mindset as himself. Murphy O’Connor describes this mindset as follows: “It was up to each believer to discern how in any given set of circumstances the creative, self-sacrificing love (that had been demonstrated by) Christ should be given reality.”<sup>102</sup> In his teaching about the corporate body of Christ or *ecclesia*, Paul points out that some people have one gift and other people may have the opposite gift (1 Cor. 7:7). He reminds the Corinthians that it is all these varied gifts that are needed by the one body or community. Gifts should be directed to the benefit of all. For instance it may be one thing to have the gift of tongues. But if such a gift cannot be interpreted for the benefit of all there is little point in displaying it (1 Cor. 14:26).

Towards the end of 1 Corinthians Paul talks about the "spiritual body" Again he reiterates the need for faith in Christ, that is, the belief that by adopting a Christ-like lifestyle and mindset, one will win out in the end and share in the resurrected life of Christ “but we shall all be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51. Such a resurrected life in Christ will continue on, even beyond death.

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<sup>102</sup> Murphy O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 205.

In conclusion, as regards a commandment theme undergirding the letters to the Philippians, Galatians and Corinthians and at a general level, Paul was dealing with critics who were saying that his preaching was an invitation to licence.<sup>103</sup> But in fact, because of his Jewish background his approach indeed focused upon the commandments. These were his ‘starting point’.<sup>104</sup> At the same time he was involved with a re-interpretation of these. And, he was also trying to present his focus in such a way that the Gentiles with a Greek philosophic background would understand.

Paul’s “re-interpretation” of the commandments relates to a comment made by the scholar Brendan Byrne. Byrne has said “Paul’s problem with the law lies in its incapacity to address<sup>105</sup> human sinfulness at sufficiently radical depth.” Thus his treatment of the law, whether it be in earlier letters or finally in Romans was an attempt to overcome this. His teaching develops and stresses a mindset of self-giving to others in order to build up a society in which people can be secure without having to steal, commit violence or betray relationships.




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<sup>103</sup> Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters*, 201.

<sup>104</sup> Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters*, 4.

<sup>105</sup> Brendan Byrne, *Galatians and Romans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2012), 181.