

Chapter Five

Paul's Challenge to the "Spirit People" of Corinth

Paul's reinterpretation of key social commandments of 'Thou shalt not steal, kill or commit adultery' are threaded through his letters, for instance, as discussed above, in the letters of Philippians, Galatians and 1 Corinthians. But in the case of 1 Corinthians Paul goes further. He attempts to deal with a basic position of Greek Philosophy as expressed in the Greek Stoic idea that people are born with a "divine spark" which is identified with them. Such an idea was affecting the attitude of Corinthians towards their own body. As it was, Stoic belief in a "divine spark" was identified with the human mind. It would have been considered by a Jew to be a form a self-worship. It would conflict with the first of the Ten Commandments "Thou shalt not have strange gods before me."¹⁰⁶

Given the influence of Greek Stoics amongst the community at Corinth which Paul had founded, he uses the letter of 1 Corinthians to come to grips with the difference between the Christian and Stoic approaches. The "Spirit People" of Corinth had been influenced by the Stoics. Paul was attempting to educate them into the mindset of the Christian.

¹⁰⁶ Plenary Council, *Catechism: Issued with Episcopal Authority for General Use in Australia*, 28.

a. Paul's Eschatological Approach to Marriage and Celibacy

For the *pneumatikoi* or 'spirit people' in the Corinthian community it was the 'divine spark' as they saw it, that really counted in a meaningful life. They considered the body to be of lesser importance. This idea tipped some of them into an attitude of despising the body and with it the institution of marriage. And/or they considered that the use of one's body with prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:16) or the practice of someone living with their father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1-2) was of little importance.

The reflections to follow are an exegesis of 1 Corinthians Chapter Seven, especially 1 Cor. 7:2 and 1 Cor. 7:33-34. These verses show how Paul was developing a "set" of key values for the Corinthian church in relation to marriage cf. "Thou shalt not commit adultery". He was not only selecting out a key value for this commandment. He was also developing a particular type of approach to this and other commandments.

In the case of 1 Corinthians Chapter Seven he was dealing with a community that divided on the issue of marriage and celibacy.

The verses of 1 Corinthians 7:29 and 7:33-34 show that Paul was answering a question that had been included in a lost letter from the Corinthians to himself (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1).¹⁰⁷ He begins his answer in Chapter Seven with the statement "it is better for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor. 7:1). In this way he seems to agree with a proposal, apparently put by some of the Corinthians, that suggests it would be better for

¹⁰⁷ A. A. Ruprecht, "Marriage and Divorce, Adultery and Incest," *Dictionary of Paul and his letters: a Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press).

the members of the Corinthian community that is, the *ekklesia*, to remain celibate (7:1b).¹⁰⁸ The verses of 7:29 and 7:33-34 appear to continue on with this agreement.

However, on the other hand, much of Chapter Seven deals with modifications to his opening statements on the subject (cf. 1 Cor. 7:2).¹⁰⁹ Paul talks about the rights of the husband and the rights of the wife (7:4). He says and implies several times, that married people should remain as they are (7:10).¹¹⁰ Then even if, by agreement, they have times of celibacy, he puts limitations upon this (7:5). Overall, the general consensus amongst his conflicting statements appears to be that people should remain as they are. In terms of community-building, staying as they are would actually make for more stability.¹¹¹ And, in fact for Paul, a major focus of the letter and the discussion about celibacy is about unity and stability. It is on this same subject of unity that he begins the main part of the letter (1 Cor. 1:10).

Paul's modifications about celibacy show that he is aware of a likely intent on the part of some Corinthians (e.g. spirit people') to not only recommend celibacy for others but also try to impose this on the whole community. This sort of pressure would make the Corinthians church even more divided.¹¹²

It could be pointed out that this apparent 'plan' on the part of some such Corinthians to make such an imposition on others would not necessarily be the outcome of a Gnostic influence (a later, major problem in the church). Rather, it could have

¹⁰⁸ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 102.

¹⁰⁹ Ruprecht, "Marriage and Divorce, Adultery and Incest,"

¹¹⁰ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 179.

¹¹¹ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 179.

¹¹² Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 179.

stemmed from an eschatological error.¹¹³ Paul had already taught the Corinthians about an eschatological future. (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7- 8). Such an approach in Paul's teaching fitted in with his whole life and preaching. From the time of the appearance of the resurrected Christ to himself on the way to Damascus he had focused and continued to focus upon Christ crucified and resurrected (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18).¹¹⁴ For Paul, the fact that Christ had risen from the dead meant that all those people who believe in the resurrected Christ could and eventually would, share in the same sort of existence that Christ has (1 Thess. 5:10, 1 Cor. 1:14)).¹¹⁵ But he was also acutely aware that bodily existence and present awareness of one's body in the here and now would be key to such a resurrected future (1 Cor. 6:15).¹¹⁶ In the wider context of his teaching and therefore in this letter in particular, he was putting a stress on the body and the need for its ordered treatment (cf. 1 Cor. 1:15-16). His discussion about celibacy was therefore in the context of restraining those people who thought they were free from concern about it (1 Cor. 6:13).

On the one hand Paul wanted the Corinthians to be oriented towards the coming of the resurrected Christ. But he also wanted them to be aware of the bodily necessities of the present. In this sense therefore 1 Cor. 7:29 and 7:33-34 could be interpreted as emphasizing a spiritual attitude towards marriage rather than the imposition of a universal celibacy.

¹¹³ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians. A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 30.

¹¹⁴ Paula Gooder, "Reading Paul for the First Time with Paul Gooder. Mpg (Nottingham, England: St Johns),

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBm-92NNKuga&feature=youtu.be> (accessed March 2016).

¹¹⁵ Ehrman "Paul as pastor"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMVatCd_1xM.

¹¹⁶ Jerome Neyrey, "Order and Purity in Paul's Symbolic Universe," *Paul in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of his Letters* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox 1990), 35.

The ambiguity of Paul's attitude towards marriage and celibacy as reflected in 1 Corinthians Chapter 7 is better understood not only in the context of his teaching as a whole but also against the background of Corinth's history and geographical situation. Such a look at background also provides the context in which he grappled with the basic position of the "spirit people". As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Corinth of Paul's time was a relatively new city which had been rebuilt by the Julius Caesar in 44 CE¹¹⁷ Because of its position situated on an isthmus in Achaia in Greece it enjoyed the benefits of trade between two ports and its people- largely consisted of "freed men". These "freed men" were affluent and upwardly mobile. As a city, Corinth had a Greek cultural background but it was also multicultural with many many deities worshipped there. Amongst the general population the Christian Community would have appeared relatively insignificant. The scholar Murphy O'Connor has suggested a figure of about fifty persons in the community.¹¹⁸ This "church" existed as one of a number Paul had established in key urban centres around the Roman Empire.¹¹⁹ But it appears Corinth had more problems than some of these other communities (e.g. at Philippi). Moreover church members were probably meeting in a number of house churches and the plurality of meeting places would have added to the likelihood of divisions amongst them. Moreover the arrival of foreign preachers going around such places would in itself have added to problems in Corinth and resulted in an undercutting of Paul's authority. Paul, with his Pharisaic background had focus upon an ordered "map" of morality. He would have seen this as an intrusion as a form of "pollution" in the community.¹²⁰ It seems he was particularly aware and sensitive to the

¹¹⁷ Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, xvi.

¹¹⁸ J. Murphy O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, c.2002) 156-7.

¹¹⁹ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 10.

¹²⁰ Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words*: 52.

popularity of Apollo who was apparently a more eloquent preacher than himself (1 Cor. 2:1). The Corinthians were largely Greek, and they were particularly impressed with the eloquence and “wisdom” displayed by Apollo. But we find that Paul has a satirical “dig” about their esteem for wisdom. He notes their inability to find someone amongst themselves who was “wise” enough to sort out their disputes (1 Cor. 6:5).¹²¹

The letter to the Corinthians is a rhetorical document with parallels to the many schools of rhetoric that existed at the time around the Empire.¹²² But something distinctive about Paul’s letters was that they were much longer than other letters of the time.¹²³ A reason for this and in the case of 1 Corinthians he was trying to move the the community towards unity and towards his own understanding of an eschatological future. At a cursory reading, of 1 Corinthians for instance, one could wonder why it took him so long (six chapters) to reach his answer to the question that the Corinthians had sent him about celibacy. Also in the lead up to Chapter 7 it may appear that he jumps from one subject to another.

But in fact the text of 1 Corinthians. is tightly argued both towards his response to the question of celibacy and to his overall response to Greek Stoicism. One of the distractions for a reader here with regard to tightness of the text could be

¹²¹ H. W. Attridge “The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: Chapters 3-4,” “Sex and Courts,” *Yale Bible Studies Series* (USA, New Haven: Yale University, c. 2016).<http://ark.divinity.edu.au/mod/url/view.php?id=3973/> [accessed March 2016].

¹²² Ben Witherington, “Paul the Letter Writer,” *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introductory Guide to the art and persuasion in and of the New Testament* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, c. 2009), 118.

¹²³ Witherington, “Paul the Letter Writer,” 115.

Paul's chiasmic argumentation that consists of statements set out in a circular structure, that is, ABCDCBA¹²⁴ Also, at times, the one chiasm can lead into another chiasmic statement and there are instances of this at the start of 1 Cor. 7:2-5 as Talbert points out.¹²⁵ But this sort of circuitous approach to the question at hand could also reflect one of Paul's attempts to avoid further alienation from these people.

In the closely structured text leading into 1 Cor. 7:27, and 1 Cor. 7:33-34 Paul, with his Pharisaic background, was setting out a cosmological "map." (as well as a moral one) which he hoped would replace that of Judaism and rather centre around the crucified and resurrected Christ.¹²⁶ This has already been discussed. In terms of morality he needed to tread a fine line between either over emphasizing idealism (such as amongst the *pneumatikoi* or "spirit people") or, on the other hand, ignoring it.

In setting out his material to "move" the Corinthians towards the acceptance of his own belief system and moral "map" Paul was aware of the spiritual immaturity of these people to whom he was writing (3:1-2). He realized the structure of his letter had to go through a step by step process before reaching a discussion of eschatological celibacy. Thus the letter began in a standard way.¹²⁷ But then focus is soon put on deficiencies in the community that showed up in their divisions (1:10)

In steps towards the delicate subject of celibacy, as raised in Chapter 7, Paul reminded the Corinthians it was the crucified and resurrected Christ that united them (1:17)

¹²⁴ Neyrey, *Paul in Other Words*, 27.

¹²⁵ Talbert,, *Reading Corinthians*: xv.

¹²⁶ Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words*., 16

¹²⁷ Witherington, "Paul the Letter Writer," 113

Then as well as pointing to their immaturity (3:2) he addressed their lack of recognition of his own authority (1:1, 4:8-13). He reminded them that it was he himself who had begun the community and in this sense he was its “father” (4:15). In fact Chapter 7 as a whole, shows a fatherly concern for the Corinthians. This can be seen in the detail with which Paul considers the range of marriage situations and he shows an individualized approach towards the subject.

The tone of the letter in relation to the subject of celibacy was important as well. People were being invited in Ch 7 towards sharing in an eschatological attitude towards marriage. Thus in a sense on the one hand, this consisted of a hierarchical approach to marriage. But Paul said such a ‘hierarchy’ could be expressed in a range of ways. He proposed that not getting married at all would be better (1 Cor.7:1). But he also said this lifestyle was not meant for all (1 Cor. 7:7). He also insisted that if a person did undertake a celibate life in preference to marriage there should be a free choice on behalf of such a person (1 Cor. 7:17). It would be only through the action of God (rather than “a divine spark”) that such a choice would be possible (1 Cor.7:25). Chapter 7 in 1 Corinthians is not only about the observance of commandments as such. It also explores how “the bar” of the commandments can be raised

It is in Chapter 15 that Paul goes on to deal with the priority of the First of the Ten Commandments. This is “Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.”¹²⁸ The reliance of the *pneumatakoï* on their Stoic belief in a “divine spark” as being part of their own being, tipped them into an infringement of this commandment. Paul needed to

¹²⁸ Plenary Council, *Catechism: Issued with Episcopal Authority for General Use in Australia*, 28.

confront this head on.

b. 1 Corinthians 15 and the Need to Rely on the Action of God - the difference between Paul and the Greek Stoics

Paul the “first” Christian theologian, had been a Pharisee and he was imbued with the mindset and learning of a Pharisaic Jew. He realised that the book of Genesis, particularly its first chapters, had set out “a map” of belief for the Jews. Genesis, as with all Jewish teaching, underlined the “Otherness” of God and it stressed monotheism. Paul saw his own role as basing his prime position on Genesis yet at the same time outlining a “Christian” map of morality.¹²⁹ This included paramount respect for the opening Commandment “Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3).

In his attempts to re-set a “map” of morality for the emerging Christian communities, he needed to clarify the differences between a “Christian” understanding of one’s relationship with the divinity and the understanding that was accepted by the Greeks and in particular the Greek Stoics.¹³⁰ When he was writing his two letters to the church in Corinth therefore he would have realised this was an opportunity to clarify these differences.

We recall that at the time the letters were written church members in Corinth were being influenced by Cynics who were itinerant preachers. In some ways these itinerant preachers were like Paul but they were also Stoics.¹³¹ This parallel has been referred to above. Some in the Corinthian church were adopting the same mindset of the Cynic (rather

¹²⁹ Neyrey, *Paul in Other Words*, 53.

¹³⁰ Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words*., 50.

¹³¹ Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 85-6.

than that of Christ). In particular some of them thought baptism that had imbued them with something similar to the “divine spark” that the Stoics were preaching about. Thus they were overemphasising their “spirit” at the expense of respect for their body.(1 Cor. 3:16). Such people were called *pneumatikoi* or “spirit people”

In many ways the topics in the first Corinthian letter lead into its Chapter 15 which is the second last chapter. In this sense Chapter 15 is a culmination of the whole letter. And, it acts as a summing up of Paul’s dispute with the “spirit people”.

In the chapter Paul points out that God, as Creator, has the freedom to change people’s bodies into an incorporeal body which has some of its present physical attributes. But this is still quite different from one’s present bodily existence in the world. (cf. 15:51).¹³² In terms of his use of literary devices here Paul’s line of reasoning in the chapter can be described as ‘deliberative rhetoric’.¹³³ As rhetorical statement the chapter is best understood in terms of its opposition to the *pneumatikoi* or ‘spirit people’. Then, in the final summary point in Chapter 15:58 about ‘working,’ Paul’s rhetoric can also be understood in the light of his underlying theme about the importance of moral behaviour. This priority is threaded through all of Paul’s correspondence. Morality has to be worked at. It is not just a “given”.

Chapter 15 begins by reminding “the brothers” about the gospel that Paul had preached to them. He knew the Christian idea of the resurrection of the body had emotional appeal to pagans.¹³⁴ Here, he insists that such a “saving” can only be

¹³² A Katherine Grieb, “Last Things First: Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead” *Scottish Journal of Theological Ltd*, 56(1):49+64 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).49.

¹³³ Witherington, “Paul the Lette Writer,” 121.

¹³⁴ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 181.

realized through the gospel that he has preached (15:2). Paul's gospel is about the self-giving of Christ crucified.

In the earlier chapters of 1 Cor., when Paul referred to the itinerant, philosopher preachers (1:17), he expressed his dismay that the Corinthians were putting himself, Apollos and Cephas on the same level as Christ. (1:12) Later in the letter, in 1 Cor. 15:2 he could pick up on this earlier observation about being compared with travelling philosophers and sophists.¹³⁵ He could again recall that he did not have the same showing of oratorical skill as did these preachers. But, as he had pointed out earlier in the letter, it is the crucifixion of the Christ that he preaches and this cannot be expressed in philosophy anyway (cf. 1:17). In the opening verses of chapter 15 people were again reminded of these points.

Paul also points out in 15:3 that the gospel he teaches is based upon the Jewish Scriptures. These Scriptures insist that when a human being is born they are of themselves nothing (in contrast to the Stoic idea).¹³⁶ A person's existence and development therefore is entirely reliant on the active power of God.¹³⁷ He goes on to remind his auditor/readers that the resurrection of Christ was in accordance with the Jewish Scriptures (15:4). His own preaching in turn has been in accord with the teaching of the first apostles who had personally witnessed Christ's resurrection (15:5-7). He also makes the point that he shares in this authority of the first apostles because he also has been an eye witness to the resurrected Christ (v.8). In making this point he harks back to the vision he had of the resurrected Christ on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:5) He also reminds his audience that they

¹³⁵ Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 85-6.

¹³⁶ Michael Gorman, "Paul's Theology: A Dozen Fundamental Convictions," *Apostle of the Crucified Lord* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004) 144.

¹³⁷ Peter Jones, "Paul Confronts Paganism in the Church: A Case Study of First Corinthians 15," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Louisville, Ky: Evangelical Theological Society, Dec. 2006), 731.

themselves have already acknowledged their belief in this resurrection of Christ (v.11),

Thus in the first eleven verses of Chapter Fifteen Paul has recalled key points already developed in the early chapters of the letter. He then goes on to point out that if, as some people are claiming (cf. v.12), there is no resurrection of the dead, then such a position cancels out the fact that Christ rose from the dead. As the scholar Katherine Grieb has pointed out, “they were sawing off the branch on which they were sitting.”¹³⁸

In the verses to follow here, Paul claims that it is through the resurrection of Christ that other people can be raised, including those Corinthians who are identified with Christ. Death itself is subjected to Christ who in turn is subject to God. Just as it has been through the power of God that Christ has been raised so also it is through the power of God that “members’ of Christ (cf. members of his “cosmic” body) will be also raised (15:20-28). Contrary to the Stoic idea, people cannot assume that their soul will live on without such a saving power of God.

It is at this point in the argumentation of Chapter 15 that Paul sharply rebukes those who say ‘Let us eat and drink today; tomorrow we shall be dead’ (1 Cor. 15:32) The writer William Walker points out that this quote fits in with pagan Epicureans. The quote is also found in *Ecclesiastes* 8:15 and in *Isaiah* 22:13 where the mentality behind it is strongly criticized.¹³⁹ Walker suggests that this reference in Chapter 15 is actually an annotation . However while the quote may appear to break into the logic of the text, it does fit into the wider context of Paul’s attack on pagan philosophy. Paul is also making the

¹³⁸ Grieb, “Last Things First: Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead” 62.

¹³⁹ William O Walker Jr., “1 Corinthians 15:29-34 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Quarterly Association of America, Jan. 2007), 100.

graphic point here, that it is not just outsiders but actually some members of the community that have such a disrespectful attitude towards their own body. And, their attitude is affecting the whole group from within. The quotation therefore acts as an indirect accusation that such a position is a pagan position. It does not belong in a Jewish or Christian attitude. The quotation in this part of the letter also recalls the warning in 1 Cor. 5:6 about the damaging effect of yeast in dough and Paul is urging that such “yeast” should be expunged. Thus on the one hand he does not say directly in Chapter 15 that the people with this attitude should be expelled from the community, partly because he is explicitly addressing these people rather than the whole community. But the yeast image is implied here and he further recalls it with the words “Bad friends ruin the noblest people.” (15:33). He then states “you should be ashamed” (15:34).

Paul’s reprimands, focused around the quotation “Let us eat, drink and make merry,” demonstrate that the attitude criticized here, is more than just a mistaken or “over-realised eschatology” as described by writers such as Charles Talbert.¹⁴⁰ Historically, an attitude of disinterest in the body and even contempt for it, eventually led to Gnosticism and this almost destroyed the Church in the first few centuries of its existence.¹⁴¹

The attitude being dissected here in the letter is the idea that one’s body is in itself an impediment to the release of one’s spirit. Paul saw that such a disinterest in the body within the Corinthian church, had the potential to lead to a rejection of the body altogether. As Leander Keck says:

¹⁴⁰ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians. A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987), 9.

¹⁴¹ Robert C. Broderick, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1975), 241-2.

Paul shares the early Christian understanding of Spirit as eschatological gift of power; the divine presence is a gift received, not an essence released. (Rom 8:151 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:2).¹⁴²

It is here at this point in Chapter 15 Paul again draws on points already made in the earlier part of the letter. In Chapter 2 he had developed at length his understanding of the *pneuma* or “spirit” at length. It was in this chapter that he attempted to confront, as well as build on, the idea of the Stoic “divine spark.”¹⁴³ His reprimand about “eat drink and make merry” in 15:33 was in that sense already preceded by his earlier clarification about spirit. In chapter 2 he explained that the *pneuma* with which people are born, is the spirit by which they know themselves (2:11). On the other hand people can only know God by the Spirit or *pneuma* of God. This Spirit of God has been given to them but it is also independent of them (2:13). The writer Clint Tibbs points out that the grammatical shifts in the meaning of the root word *pneuma* in this text of chapter 2 is better understood against the background of a Jewish understanding of “Spirit”. He says this gives a clearer understanding than the Greek understanding at the time of the letter or even in the later Trinitarian doctrine of the church.¹⁴⁴ The Qumran texts also have parallels here.¹⁴⁵

It is demonstrated in such texts that the idea that one is free from moral restraint because the body of itself has no meaning, as expressed in 15:33, has no place in Christian thinking.

¹⁴² Leander E. Keck, *Paul and His Letters*, Proclamation Commentaries, 2nd ed., ed. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 103.

¹⁴³ cf. Jerome Murphy_O’Connor, *Pneumatikoi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), I:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592104.003.0010, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592104.01.0001/acprof-9780199592104-chapter-10> [accessed 20 May 2016].

¹⁴⁴ Clint Tibbs, “The Spirit (World) and the (Holy) Spirits amongst the Earliest,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 70 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Quarterly Association of America, April 2008), 313.

¹⁴⁵ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 177.

Paul needed to demonstrate further that it is moral living that identifies people with Christ and enables them to live on in Christ after death. He therefore needed to clarify what such a “living on after death” actually meant. He challenges his critics. In the text of Chapter 15, there is evidence that he knows the very wording of erosive statements on this subject that were being made by misled members of the community. In verse 35 he says “Someone may ask, “How are dead people raised?” Apparently the people asking this question were more comfortable with the idea that their soul would live on beyond death anyway because of their possession of a “divine spark.” This idea of the “divine spark” also meant that one’s body could be easily discarded and there would not be a need for it to be raised. Also, underneath the question of “How are dead people raised?” (v. 35) lies an uneasy truth about the present, historical situation. Even though five hundred people may have seen the resurrected Christ and even though some of these people had now died, as Paul recalled in 15:6, there was as yet little evidence that any of these deceased people had actually been “raised.”¹⁴⁶ Paul needed to counter the lack of evidence on this matter.

In dealing with the question “How are dead people raised?” (15:35) he uses the analogy of a seed which has one appearance when planted but which then changes. He says “to each kind of seed its own body.” (15:36-38) The auditors/readers of the letter could not deny changes in the appearance of a seed. Moreover this fitted in with Plato’s theory of forms. It was likely they were familiar with this theory as they had a Greek philosophic background.¹⁴⁷ A well

¹⁴⁶ Grieb, “Last Things First: Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead,” 62.

¹⁴⁷ cf. Michael Vlach, “Plato’s Theory of Forms” *Theological Studies* (<http://www.theologicalstudies.org/resource-library/philosophy-dictionary/158-platos-theory-of-forms> [accessed 28th May 2016].

known example of an ideal form for instance is the triangle which can be expressed in different ways.

In Paul's imagery of the seed he again takes the opportunity to remind people that it is only through the power of God that any change takes place at all (v.38) Thus he again insists that any transformative change comes about because of the "outside" action of God. This contrasts with the more "static" understanding of paganism and Greek thinking.¹⁴⁸

Paul prepared for his metaphor of a seed being transformed in Ch 15 37-8 by a metaphor used in Chapters 3 and 4 of the letter. In Chapter Three he had introduced the metaphor of a building (3:10). On the one hand this was a reminder to the *pneumatikoi* that their physical body has similarities to a building which in turn has had a beginning. He then went on to compare the body with God's Temple (3:16) which is sacred because of God's presence in it. Such a presence is reliant on the will and action of God and it is independent of those who may have built the bricks and mortar there.¹⁴⁹ Later on, in Chapter 15, the earlier teaching about the sacred Temple is implied in his teaching about the transformation of the body by God. People of the time, even in Corinth, would understand the significance of this building/Temple metaphor. Pagan converts at Corinth may not have seen the Jerusalem Temple. But this was known and esteemed throughout the Empire.¹⁵⁰ It was also likely that Corinthians knew of Jewish belief in the sacredness of the Temple. For instance Jews were prepared to face death when the Emperor Gaius Caligula was threatening

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Guido Catogero, Lawrence H. Starkey, "Eleaticism Philosophy" *Encyclopedia Britannica* (USA: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eleaticism> [accessed 24 Oct 2018].

¹⁴⁹ Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words*: 50.

¹⁵⁰ Lee I. Levine *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, Massachusetts: University, 1988), 5.

to put his image in the Temple around 40 CE.¹⁵¹ The Corinthian letters were likely to be written fairly soon after this event in the early 50's CE.¹⁵² Thus Paul's allusion to the Jerusalem Temple would have been understood.

Some scholars such as William O Walker may consider that parts of Ch 15 such as vv. 29-34 to be an interpolation.¹⁵³ This includes a reference to facing "the wild animals at Ephesus" v. 33. But for Paul, as with many Jews, there is a readiness to face death when the stakes are high. In Galatians 6:13 for instance he contemptuously talked of people wanting to force circumcision on converts apparently in order to avoid being persecuted themselves. It was apparently thought at that time (before the destruction of Jerusalem) that being a Jew would be safer for them. His reference to Ephesus in 15:32 "What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised.." is a contrast between his own disposition which is 'to the death' as contrasted with that of the self-satisfied disposition of the *pneumatikoi* whom he is addressing here.

In Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, Paul is dealing with the "big picture". He draws on a wide range of practices and rhetorical writing skills. As already discussed, as a Jew and especially as a Pharisee, he would be strongly influenced by the "map" of creation as set out in Genesis in which it is claimed everything has its own time and place. His own teaching on the resurrection was not rejecting this Jewish/Pharisaic urge to map the cosmos and a world view. Rather he was making a

¹⁵¹ Global Non-violent Action Database, "Gaius Caligula," (Swathmore, PA: Swathmore College) <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/jewish-peasants-block-construction-statue-gaius-caligula-galilee-40-ce> [accessed 28th May 2016].

¹⁵² B.Ehrman "Paul as pastor," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMVatCd_1xM .

¹⁵³ William O Walker Jr., "1 Corinthians 15:29-34 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation," 69.

new map, one that could incorporate people with a Hellenistic background.¹⁵⁴ At the same time this map would be based on the Commandments.

Ultimately Paul finally points out, it is God in his otherness, that determines how resurrection of the body will take place. It could be “in the twinkling of an eye” (15:52).

At the end of Chapter 15 Paul talks about “working” towards resurrection (v.58). He uses the Greek word *ἔργω* meaning “work” in the broad sense. But he also uses the word *κόπος* which includes the meaning of ‘trouble and weariness.’ Thus the word “work” includes both everyday toil for one’s living and also struggles at an ethical level including the task of resisting the ideas of people such as the *pneumatikoi*.

In the overall picture of his life’s work, Paul is setting out a way in which the morality of Judaism and and the philosophy of Hellenism can be incorporated into the one community. In 1 Corinthians, especially Chapter 15, he deals with a tendency amongst those of a Hellenistic-background to tip back into the Stoic idea of the “divine spark” being an inherent part of humanity irrespective of a person’s morality.

This was an important topic for Paul to deal with. The later gospel writers, especially Luke, would point out the-going tendency of some Christians to tip over (or back) into an over-stress on idealism. In such a situation “Ideas” and the mind/spirit would be given priority over morality, whether this be in relation to the human body or creation itself.

Looking back over the centuries, this has been an on-going problem in Christianity and in those societies that Christianity has influenced. The tendency towards excessive ideals has re-

¹⁵⁴ Neyrey, “ Paul in Other Words, 53.

emerged in different guises. At present it is often labelled with the suffix of “...ism.”

Part 2 of this research project presents an extended précis of *Truth and Method*, a book written by the philosopher Gadamer. In the précis a parallel emerges to some extent between the “divine spark” of the Stoics and the spark of “genius” that was applauded by leaders of the European Enlightenment from around C18th. One is reminded that within Christianity, elements of Greek philosophy and the need to name this live on.

