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2 Timothy 2:2

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
Ferguson:
How Should the Church Respond?

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INTRODUCTION

What happened last August (2014) in Ferguson, Missouri, when a white police officer shot and killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown may never be known with any certainty. What is certain, however, is that the events on that summer evening and their aftermath have exposed a profound divide between black and white Americans. The assumption—and the hope of many after Barack Obama’s election to the office of president—that Americans were living in a “post–racial America”— has now been dashed. ¹

The long-awaited November grand jury decision not to indict Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson was further seen by most African–Americans and quite a few whites as a great injustice and a failure of the American legal system. The grand jury failure to indict in the soon–to–follow Staten Island, New York, case where another white policeman seemed to choke to death Eric Garner

¹ This article was originally written for and presented as a Faculty Form at Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, February 4, 2015.
only confirmed to many African–Americans the sad and lingering plight of black men in our “racist” nation. These events reminded many of the not–too–distant 2012 shooting of black teenager Trayvon Martin by Hispanic security officer George Zimmerman in Florida. And these events have left many in the nation feeling angry, saddened, and hopeless.

Unfortunately, these are not isolated incidents. The sad reality is that dozens of similar black deaths slip beneath the national news media radar every week in America. According to a USA Today analysis of the most recent FBI data, at least 100 African–Americans were killed by white police gunfire each year from 2005 to 2012. A good number were unarmed men slain under suspicious circumstances. The actual numbers could be much higher because law enforcement officials self–report, and there is no conclusive national database.

Even before Ferguson, a national study had revealed what many involved in intercultural ministry have sensed for years: the majority of African–Americans still believe racism is a big issue continuing in American society while the majority of whites do not think racism is a significant factor. The events of 2014 did

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not create but rather revealed this deep chasm. After the national reaction to Ferguson, over 80% of African–Americans polled said “Michael Brown’s death raised racial issues that merit discussion” while 47% of white Americans said the incident was getting more attention than it deserved.4

In the wake of Brown’s death and the subsequent rioting, looting, and national protests that erupted in many of America’s largest cities, many Americans continue to grapple with the racial undercurrent and the broader implications for their daily lives. People of good faith and conscience can look at specific incidents like these in our recent history and arrive at different conclusions. Nevertheless, these tragedies and consequent protests have pointed Americans toward the need for both national and local conversations about how to bridge the racial chasm in American society. The national reaction to Ferguson and Staten Island has certainly opened the door to further discussion and dialogue between all American citizens, whatever their color, culture, or creed.

Many Christian leaders have recognized the necessity and opportunity for people of faith to lead the way in this urgently needed conversation. Evangelicals in particular, both black and white, have seen this as a divinely–orchestrated opportunity for those concerned about the sanctity of all human lives to step up and work toward more mutually trusting and respectful relationships, especially between law enforcement and minority citizens, within our communities. Many see this as an opportune time to point people to the hope for reconciliation and healing that is found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet, following the subsequent online discussions on the evangelical blogosphere, one thing is obvious: while Christians all

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agree that the ultimate solution is found in the Gospel, no strong consensus has emerged between black and white Christian leaders as to the extent of the problem of racism in the nation and churches nor the specifics of how to address the perceived injustices. Sometimes it has felt like African–American and Anglo–Christian leaders have talked past one another and not always listened closely to the hurts and concerns of their brothers and sisters.

Many white evangelicals believed Ferguson police officer Wilson should not have been indicted. Others, uncertain over the facts of the case and the proper biblical response, were totally silent. However, when the Staten Island officer was also not charged for putting an unarmed Eric Garner in a chokehold that resulted in his death, the evangelical response from both blacks and whites was immediate and much more forceful and united that justice had not been served.5

While those of us involved in North American interethnic and intercultural ministry were delighted to hear many in the evangelical church now being willing to publicly speak out and have vital conversations about race and justice, we still sensed many leaders, both black and white, were relying at times on drive–by media reports or were being overly influenced by their personal political ideologies. This sometimes led to rushed judgments and superficial solutions being advocated.

This article thus seeks to propose a way out. As a white leader involved for over thirty years in multiethnic urban ministry, I (Ken) will share what I have learned as I have sought to listen and learn from African–American Christian friends and ministry

associates who have had to deal with these issues in ways I have not. As an African–American leader who has led and served in multiethnic urban and predominately white ministries for over forty–three years, I (Charles) will share what I have learned to accept as honest questions that many of my white evangelical friends and coworkers wrestle with as they hear and are confronted with charges of racism either personally or nationally.

While we do not propose to have all the answers, we are committed to engage in collaborative conversations that lead toward comprehensive solutions. Our goal will be to seek a deeper understanding of the divided perceptions concerning the dual problems of racism and injustice by listening more carefully to others within the family of God who can speak to these issues in ways we cannot. Based on the insights gleaned from listening, we will then share key lessons learned and propose some positive steps churches, Christian ministries, and leaders can take to biblically address these concerns.

WHAT WHITE CHRISTIANS NEED TO LEARN FROM AFRICAN–AMERICANS (KEN)

It is my firm conviction that before whites speak to this issue, we must listen more intently to our ethnic brothers. As Ed Stetzer has reminded us in his blog, we must listen for two reasons: “because there is a historical context to this [Ferguson] tragedy, we must listen to feel the pain behind the problem and finally we

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We are not claiming to be the first calling for the need to listen to our brothers. Ed Stetzer has done us all a favor by inviting nine African–American evangelical leaders during the fall of 2014 to contribute thoughtful articles to his daily blog, The Exchange, on this subject, collected under the series “It’s Time to Listen.”
listen so that we might acknowledge that injustice really exists.” To these two reasons I would add: as ambassadors of the King, we should be deeply concerned in these days of conflict about having an effective ministry of interpersonal reconciliation (Eph 2:14–17; cf. 2 Cor 5:11–21).

To better understand the present response of many within the minority community, I have learned it is necessary to remind ourselves of a painful and tragic history that many of us would prefer to relegate to the land of forgetfulness we label “the past.” We cannot deny the reality and legacy of America’s “original sin”—the shame of slavery. Sadly, many professing Christians justified the institution of slavery by a gross misuse of Scripture. Even after formal emancipation blacks were relegated to second-class citizenship in America. This societal assignment was made by a combination of law, custom, and the ever-present threat of violence, most graphically in the form of lynching, which claimed thousands of black lives.

Unfortunately Christians were mixed in their response to these evils, at times listening more to their culture than to the

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Word of God. Some, like northern abolitionist Charles Finney, publically opposed these evils, but sadly many more either defended the shameful status quo or were complicit by their silence. This complicity was most obvious when “Jim Crow” laws were enacted, enforced, and supported by people who often could be found attending church on Sunday mornings.¹⁰

To better grasp why African–Americans often respond differently than the majority culture, we must first seek to better understand this tragic 400–year history of institutionalized segregation.¹¹ We should realize that many blacks of our generation still recall the stories told by their grandparents who experienced the inequities while growing up in southern states. To many young adults of color, these current events sound eerily similar, and they certainly are interpreting them through this historical filter.

Seeking to listen to my African–American brothers, I have also learned there is no one black viewpoint—and no singular black evangelical perspective. What follows is a representative overview of how African–American evangelical leaders have bloggers after Ferguson. This brief survey is intended to not only illustrate the diversity of perspectives which exists among respected and theologically trained black evangelical Christian leaders, but also to help us as whites to better listen and learn.

Bryan Loritts, pastor of Fellowship Memphis and author of Right Color, Wrong Culture, has properly pleaded with whites to


¹¹Often the value of black life was viewed as being on par with that of animals. For a better historical understanding of this spiritual lie that black people were not fully human, see Lisa Sharon Harper, “It’s Time to Listen: ‘The Lie,’” The Exchange, August 25, 2014 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/august/its-time-to-listen-lie-guest-post-by-lisa-sharon-harper.html> (accessed 16 December 2014).
feel the pain and hurt of African–Americans. Despite how one feels about the “facts” of Ferguson (and Staten Island, etc.), we must seek, he says, to grasp the historical–cultural filter (or hermeneutic) by which blacks naturally interpret Ferguson–like incidents. Asking our black brothers and sisters to just quickly “get over” these events and move on is, in his opinion, “actually a white refusal to attempt to see things from [their] ethnically different perspective” and should be seen as “a subtle form of racism.”

Pastor Loritts exhorts us:

We will never experience true Christian unity when one ethnicity demands of another that we keep silent about our pain and travails. The way forward is not an appeal to the facts as a first resort. Rather, we should attempt to get inside each others’ skin as best we can to feel what they feel, and understand it.

Loritts is no armchair theoretician; he leads a growing multiethnic urban Memphis church of over 2000 people. He acknowledges that as committed followers of Jesus Christ, the gospel makes demands on all of us, black and white, to submit and subjugate our cultural hermeneutic to the gospel hermeneutic.

In other words, my Jesus–ness must trump my blackness. As Dr. Tony Evans says, “Black is only beautiful if it is biblical.” This is at odds with the teaching of liberation theology, where you had black theologians like Dr. James Cone who wrote the gospel is essentially for the oppressed and not the oppressor. Not true. If I understand the gospel right, Jesus died for Michael Brown and Darren Wilson


13 Ibid.
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(the shooter); slaves and slave masters, the lynched and the lynch mob. My new gospel hermeneutic, therefore leaves no place for hatred, bitterness, or unforgiveness.  

Applying this insight to himself, he writes, “I [must] never give up on my white brothers and sisters because God in Christ has never given up on me.” Loritts closes by stating that the “God we serve is both a forgiving God and a just God. These two things can cohabitate.” In other words, we can forgive and love one another while at the same time expect to see justice enforced when wrong prevails. Both, he feels, are consequences of the gospel.

Leonce Crump, a former NFL football player and now founding pastor of Renovation Church in Atlanta, asks in a two-part blog, “Will White Evangelicals Ever Acknowledge Systemic Injustice?” His observation is that too many white Christians “seem to quickly jump to the defense of [an] officer Wilson with disregard for the fact that a human life has been taken” and thus seem to ignore the long historical pattern—“the African-American narrative”—which seems to devalue black lives. Crump then cites a series of “justified” and “routine” traffic stops that he personally and undeservedly experienced at the hands of white policemen growing up in the South. This he reminds us is a common experience for many black men. He goes on to remind

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 To read another evangelical’s testimony of undeserved encounters with police, see Thabiti Anyabwile, “One Man’s Justice is Another Man’s Nightmare: It Really Could Have Been Me,” Pure Church, December 14, 2014 <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/
us that Anglo–Europeans, motivated by a fear of losing control and being tainted by the culture of incoming immigrants (people of color), historically established systems “of segregation and oppression” to protect their own cultural heritage. These sinful systems were most evident in enforced practices affecting housing, labor, education, and even the legal system—with the result that injustices were often forced upon ethnic minorities. Crump feels that for Christians to be a silent in the face of these pervasive inequities is to avoid the application of the gospel to obvious issues of injustice, “though those issues may be uneasy, unclear or politicized.” To be silent is to actually uphold “the very structures that purport and perpetuate injustice.”

Philip Fletcher is a church planter for the Church at Oakwood in Conway, Arkansas, and author of The Excellence of God. As a young African–American pastor in the South, he writes about how his family is quietly seeking to demonstrate and display the gospel in an urban setting, in an effort to build and transform families and neighborhoods. Ferguson has caused him to reflect and grieve over sin’s effects, particularly upon urban life as he sees it daily. He acknowledges that racism is not a sin specific to Caucasians. Fletcher also calls for diverse ethnic groups to seek to learn from one another: “When we pursue the hard work of knowing and hearing intently what life as an African–American or Caucasian American resembles, embrace becomes possible. It is in the work of creating this new fellowship with each other that we have the opportunity to also demonstrate God’s embrace of a

thabitianyabwile/2014/12/02/one-mans-justice-another-mans-nightmare-it-really-could-have-been-me/> (accessed 16 December 2014).

diverse humanity in Jesus Christ.” Pastor Fletcher correctly observes, “The people of God do not work for peace on behalf of their individual ethnicities.” We work for peace in our communities “in response to the rich outpouring of God’s grace through Christ on our behalf. . . . We work for peace because God our Savior brought about an eternal peace for the glory of God and our joy.”

Blogging at the Gospel Coalition, Voddie Baucham, pastor of Grace Family Baptist Church in Spring, Texas, tells us he rather reluctantly decided to speak publicly to the Ferguson tragedy. While conceding there are occasional systemic issues plaguing black men, Baucham expresses his conviction that these more visible societal issues “are [ultimately] rooted in and connected to the epidemic of fatherlessness” so prevalent in the African–American community. He goes on to decry the fact that more than 70% of all black children are born out of wedlock. A conservative evangelical, this pastor is convinced that “any truly gospel centered response to the plight of black men must address these issues [fatherlessness and immorality] first and foremost.” Furthermore, his concern, he writes, is not so much with the epidemic of violence against black men (which he again concedes is an issue) as with the violence that more commonly occurs at the hands of other black men. He then goes on to cite FBI homicide statistics from 2012 that indicate a high rate of “black–on–black” crime and murder. He wonders out loud where the black “leaders” are who are marching against these community travesties.

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Not afraid of controversy, Baucham concludes his blog essay by boldly stating his growing conviction that systemic issues are too often unduly and unfairly blamed for the sinful actions of individuals. He feels strongly that men who rob and police who stop or shoot blacks undeservedly are both nothing more than “sinners” who need to take personal responsibility for their dastardly deeds. In his view, Brown “reaped what he sowed.” While not denying the prevalence in our society of institutional and individual racism (and even prejudice in policing practices), Baucham wants to remind us all that we are each personally accountable to God and to one another for our actions and can never blame the system. Stating that there are “worse things than suffering injustice,” he pleads for all parents to teach their children to respect those in authority and to “understand what it [means] to treat others with the dignity and respect they deserve as image bearers of God.” As the father of seven black sons (some adopted), Baucham expresses gratitude for the “American privilege” [as opposed to “white privilege”] of raising his family according to the principles and precepts of the Word of God, which he believes is the ultimate solution to urban woes.²¹

Baucham’s bold pastoral call for personal responsibility went viral. Many white Christians loved it and sent it on to their friends via Facebook. It, however, soon raised a hornet’s nest of strong objections from many other African–American Christian leaders. Representative of the many countering reactions was that of Thabiti Anyabwile, assistant pastor for church planting at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. Anyabwile is a Gospel Coalition council member, respected author, and frequent blogger at The Pure Church, which is carried by the Gospel Coalition. His thoughtful response to Baucham was posted under thoughts–on–ferguson> (accessed 16 December 2014).

²¹ Ibid.
Anyabwile seeks to carefully respond to what he sees as four often repeated and well circulated themes: fatherlessness, black–on–black crime, black community apathy, “and the problem isn't racism but sin.” He begins by affirming that all four of those issues are serious concerns in the African–American community, deserving of “accurate and loving discussion” by people of all ethnicities. He laments, however, that often proponents fail to “tell the whole truth about these things in proper context.” This can lead, he fears, to a fostering of further falsehoods and stereotypes, blocking constructive action.23 He is bothered not so much with what Baucham has said as with what was omitted.

Taking up the first issue of absentee fathers and family fragmentation, Pastor Anyabwile acknowledges that the social science evidence indicates that “the single best predictor of child and family well–being is a healthy marriage between the biological parents of the child.” But he feels that, left alone, this argument “fails to recognize how systemic issues actually undermine the goal of family formation and stability.” For example, the disproportionate arrest and sentencing of black men does not leave many around to become responsible husbands and fathers. He feels appeals to marriage research can easily overstate the case. For example, the marriage benefit “decreases if one of the parents is not the child’s biological parent.” And it may even be harmful if constant abuse and conflict


23 Ibid.
are occurring in the marriage. “So marriage is no magic bullet” to many in “poor communities with long histories of distress.”

To the issue of “black–on–black crime,” Anyabwile points out that the same FBI data cited by Baucham shows that 82.5% of white murder victims are at the hands of white perpetrators—not too much less than black–on–black rates (91%). He contends the reality is people “commit crimes in their own neighborhoods against their own neighbors.” Thus urban crime is not so much a “race” thing as a “zip code thing.” Many homicides are intimate partner violence, or violence against spouses and girlfriends. Thus it cannot be said that blacks are more criminal by nature than whites. That perception, he states, needs to be corrected.

Is it true that African–Americans are not vigorously protesting the black–on–black crime and other crucial problems that exist inside the black community? Anyabwile shows this too is inaccurate. He cites a long list of those within the African–American community—both in the past and today—who are working hard to stop violence, to march against these and other urban evils, and stress the need for personal responsibility. Often the media fails to report this “unsung work.”

Another common reaction by conservative evangelicals is the statement: “It isn’t racism, it’s [just] sin.” Coming from my fundamentalist upbringing, I (Ken) admit this is one I have frequently used. In Ferguson–like scenarios, some would question whether Ferguson–like incidents are really “racially motivated” or “simply unfortunate.” Anyabwile acknowledges each public case must be weighed individually and that only an omniscient God can know the hearts and minds of both the perpetrator and the victim. Yet he rightly observes “all our

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.
systems [political, economic, legal, educational, etc.] were shaped and forged during long stretches of history where systematic bias was the stated acceptable norm and not the exception.” Thus, in a fallen world we should not be surprised when such systems are not changed “overnight or [even] in a generation.” This bequeathed “legacy of learned practice” may still be around and “carry unintended bias.” Thus, Anyabwile contends, in most Ferguson–like situations we must acknowledge there is both individual sin for which people are personally responsible and systemic issues that may need addressing. Yes, the root problem is always sin, but we must realize sin often manifests itself in “systemic and systematic bias.” Racism, seen biblically is “a sin with systemic properties.” Thus, to say, “It’s not racism, it’s sin” he feels is “to fail to understand both racism and sin.”

One of Pastor Anyabwile’s objections to Baucham’s blog is over his “timing and tone.” He feels that injecting the above four themes when Ferguson–like events are being discussed can “divert attention and stymie [needed] action.” To illustrate he points us to the abortion issue which conservative evangelicals rightly see as immoral and sinful:

But when we talk about abortion, we don’t upbraid the mother seeking the abortion when a policy conversation is in view. No. We discuss the policy with all the force we can muster on behalf of all the babies we can save. If we want to talk about personal responsibility, chances are we do that in pastoral tones in pastoral settings, or we even volunteer and find crisis pregnancy centers to create a safe productive place in which to engage the mother.

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27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.
Anyabwile’s point is that in Ferguson–like events, as with abortion, “conflating personal responsibility and public policy by insisting that only personal factors matter actually harms both personal and policy–level efforts at improvement.” In other words, both are necessary levels of reflection and action. We do not have to, nor should we, choose one over the other.

Dr. Anthony Evans, founding pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas and best–selling author, believes American culture is still reeling from the effects of historical racial injuries and injustice largely because Christian churches have yet to come together as one body under God to address and tackle these tough issues: “In order to impact our society, we need to first model unity in the church.” He reminds us that the success of the Civil Rights movement was driven by the church: “Whole communities were changed, laws were changed, the way the government functioned, all changed because the church came together in unity to call for God’s view of justice to be implemented in a segregated America, in an unjust society.” Evans calls on Christian leaders in particular to not remain silent in Ferguson–like situations. He writes, “It is important that the leaders in the body of Christ be held accountable to speak to this matter because its continuance is affecting all of us as we bear the burdens of the systemic effects of racial division throughout our land.”

\[30\] Ibid.

Evans boldly states that sin, not skin, is ultimately the cause of racism, and further describes the “evil” of racism as a “cultural cancer” that must be excised:

When you believe that racism is a skin problem, you can take three hundred years of slavery, court decisions, marches, and the federal government involvement and still not get it fixed right. But once you admit that racism is a sin problem, you are obligated as a believer to deal with it right away. As long as the issue of race is social not spiritual, it will never be dealt with in any ultimate sense.  

Derwin Gray is founding pastor of Transformation Church in Indian Land, South Carolina, an intentionally multiethnic, multi-class church that is both growing and impacting its community. He decries the reality that nearly 90% of American churches are homogenous, where one ethnic group makes up more than 80% of the congregation. While acknowledging that sometimes this is caused by “geographic demographics,” he points out most churches remain segregated by choice. Research shows most churches are ten times more segregated than their neighborhoods and twenty times more segregated than the public schools they are near. Gray asks, “What if black and white Christians, as well as other minorities, were members of multiethnic churches instead of segregated ones? ... If we worshiped side-by-side in the body of Christ, could we [not] address racism, oppression and injustice together?” It is Pastor Gray’s firm conviction that these kind of gospel-centered, reconciliation-preaching churches are the solution to the

32 Ibid.

animosities that often separate us. He calls on churches to rise to the occasion in this “pivotal time” in our nation’s history.\textsuperscript{34}

**MY PERSONAL JOURNEY:**
**LEARNING FROM ANGLO BELIEVERS (CHARLES)**

I was born in 1949 in a then-segregated Kissimmee, Florida. In 1968 I graduated from an upstate New York high school whose student body was predominately white. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Attorney General Robert Kennedy were both assassinated in 1968. Many U.S. cities were characterized by protests, violence, and racial divide. Morality and justice issues around race relations were severely testing America’s resolve to live out the lofty ideas of the Constitution. Also in 1968 two white evangelical Christians led me to saving faith through Christ in my home. I subsequently joined a predominately white church and in August of that same year enrolled in a predominately white Bible college. My wife of 41 years is white and we have six children, a son-in-law, two daughters-in-law, and two grandchildren. Over the years I have sought to understand the racial divide, especially within the fundamental/evangelical church.\textsuperscript{35}

I have spoken and written on the issue of race relations for the past 35 years.\textsuperscript{36} During my journey I have grown in and


\textsuperscript{35} Read more about my personal story and dealings with racism in the Christian world in A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God* (Indianapolis, IN: Crossroads Bible College, 1998).

\textsuperscript{36} See Ken Ham and A. Charles Ware, *One Race One Blood: A Biblical Answer to Racism* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2010); A. Charles Ware and Eugene Seals, eds., *Reuniting the Family of God* (Indianapolis,
Ferguson: How Should The Church Respond?  23

profited from my desire to understand the perceptions and motivations of many white evangelical on race. Are they just hardcore racists dedicated to unjust treatment and murder of blacks? Are they ignorant of America’s racial history or just plain unsympathetic?

I am gratified that many today acknowledge the white evangelical church was too silent during the struggle of the sixties. Furthermore, many Caucasian evangelicals now confess that theologially erroneous views about race were used to protect and promote both cultural and institutional injustice. While I sense that sharp differences remain between white and black perceptions of racial injustice, it is encouraging to hear that many white evangelicals do not desire to make the same mistakes of the sixties.

However, many white evangelicals are raising honest questions that I believe black evangelicals should listen to and seek to understand. White evangelicals desire to be understood too. Yet, the white evangelical voice today, like that in the African–American community, is also diverse. Through private conversions and observations of public discourse, I have learned that a variety of viewpoints exist among white evangelicals. What follows are typical questions and concerns I have found that are often raised by Caucasian evangelicals.

LEARNING FROM PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS

*Can I Interpret Facts Differently Without Being a Racist?*

Some whites fear that if they do not see that the recent publicized deaths of African–American young men that erupted in national protest as racial injustice, they will be tagged as a racist. Does engaging in an honest conversation demand denying my honest understanding of the facts of an incident? This is particularly true of the shooting of Michael Brown and the forensic evidence presented to the grand jury. Blacks need to be willing to let their brothers and sisters develop their own conclusions as they seek to understand the facts and the legal system without immediately dismissing other views or perceiving racism.

*Can We Discuss Issues Without Playing the Race Card?*

Some whites have shared with me that they are growing weary of discussions around race and the terms which are so quickly thrown around. “White privilege” is the idea that American society as a whole provides more benefits to whites as the majority culture and thus many blacks are treated unjustly. Whether being called a racist or the recipient of unearned privilege, it seems to some that honest conversations are discouraged by such characterizations. Whites reason that as a nation we have come a long way. Slavery has been abolished; legally enforced segregation and discrimination has largely been dismantled. Black presence is increasing throughout society, including the attorney general and the president of the United States. Can we not have a discussion on issues without playing the race card?
Isn’t the Real Threat to Black Lives 
Black–on–Black Crime and Broken Families?

Many white evangelicals see this as the root systemic problem for the tragic loss of many black lives, especially young black men. Do not statistics affirm that more black young men are killed by other black men than by police officers? Is not the real solution to lowering the alarming loss of young black lives ultimately the black community’s responsibility?

Broken families, low education, and high crime do plague black communities in America. These problems persist even though the government has invested significant funding to correct them. Numerous programs have been instituted, providing financial assistance, early education, college educational grants, affirmative actions, etc. Why don’t national black leaders arouse as much public concern in the black community to take personal responsibility for their own communities as they do to blame whites?

Doesn’t Violent Protest Hurt 
the Very Communities Needing Help?

How does self–destruction promote justice and equality? Protests that shut down schools, frighten children and parents, rob stores, and burn down businesses create insecurity within a community. (Keep in mind that many media reports focus upon violent versus legal protests.) Given the fact that many businesses within the community are black–owned, how does such action lead toward justice for blacks?

Would not Simply Obeying Authority 
Prevent Many Police Homicides?

A young white pregnant wife of a good police officer asks, “Would not these black men still be alive if they simply obeyed the officer’s commands?” We are a nation of laws, and police
officers are entrusted with responsibility to enforce these laws. Do not citizens who resist arrest or threaten officers bear responsibility, through their disrespect for authorities, for creating circumstances that often lead to more violent conclusions?

**Aren’t White Police Officers Being Profiled?**

When media and black parents warn their black sons of the danger of white police officers, are they not also practicing racial profiling? When they enter high crime areas to pursue the peace and safety of all its citizens, white police officers and their families often feel like they are being unfairly perceived as the enemy. Some officers’ family members wonder, “Where is the nation’s sympathy and concern for the wellbeing of many who serve and protect communities throughout the nation? Does the nation really understand the sacrifices being made?”

**Learning from Public Discourse**

A growing number of white believers are now engaged in the national discussion on race. Though sometimes limited to private conversations, many are entering the much-needed public dialogue through social media. According to a recent LifeWay research survey of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors, white evangelicals, more than black evangelicals, now see racial reconciliation as a gospel mandate: “African–American pastors are less likely than white pastors to believe that the gospel mandates racial reconciliation, but more likely to be actively involved in reconciliation efforts.”

It is encouraging to hear more white evangelical leaders actively seeking to provide biblical direction for believers in their constituencies. Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), responding to Ferguson and subsequent events, blogged on the official ERLC website:

African–American brothers and sisters, especially brothers, in this country are more likely to be arrested, more likely to be executed, more likely to be killed .... It’s time for us in Christian churches to not just talk about the gospel but live out the gospel by tearing down these dividing walls not only by learning and listening to one another but also by standing up and speaking out for one another.38

This kind of statement was often made in the past by black clergy and civil rights activists. Yet this call comes from none other than a respected white evangelical leader of the largest Protestant evangelical denomination, one formerly with a poor track record on race.

However, we must resist the temptation to assume that there is a uniformity of thought among white evangelicals. Like many evangelical groups, the Southern Baptist Convention, for example, is still divided within its membership on the “race” issue. Some still assert that this is not a biblical but a social or cultural issue that does not deserve significant attention. Southern Baptist Pastor Randy White, pastor of First Baptist Church in Katy, Texas, illustrates the sharp differences. On his personal blog, White chided evangelicals for promoting racial justice as “gospel demand.” He publicly took on Matthew Hall, vice president of academic services at Southern Seminary, and

other leading SBC leaders who had recently blogged on the issue and were condemning racial injustice as sin. Blogging on the ERLC site, Hall had contended:

The sin of racial injustice is far more insidious than we often realize. It is not content to restrain itself to individual prejudices, beliefs, and attitudes. Injustice infects and perverts entire societies, institutions, and cultures. And when a fundamentally unjust system is perpetuated for generation after generation, the effects and consequences of that sin become far more deep-rooted than we often can begin to see.

... We see it around us in an industrialized penal system that is overwhelmingly populated by young black men. And we see it in the recurring headlines of unarmed black teenage boys shot by police officers. Sure, we can trumpet the virtue of personal responsibility and try to sleep better at night, our uneasy consciences salved by the distance of 'out of sight and out of mind.' But look more closely and you'll see that sin is never confined merely to the orbit of individual choice or personal responsibility.

Pastor White sees all this as misguided theology and not a systemic issue. He writes:

The ERLC seems to be full-court press, all using the same talking points.... Each article basically says, "We don't understand how blacks feel, so we should be slow in our judgment" and "the Kingdom brings us all together in one big, happy family, so let's act like Kingdom people in a big, happy family...."

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This statement is fraught with difficulty. If sin is “never confined to the orbit of individual choice or personal responsibility,” is society to blame? Do the thugs looting businesses and burning police cars have a personal choice and responsibility for their actions? Are we wrong to say that the individuals of Ferguson riots have made a “personal choice” and have a “responsibility for their actions?” To blame society for a crime committed by an individual is soundly insane.

Further, is the penal system that is “overwhelmingly populated by young black men,” unjust by virtue of the lack of racial balance in the prisons? What if there are more young black men in prison because more black men commit crimes? Do we need an affirmative action mechanism in our justice system in order to bring racial balance? It seems we live in a society (and have a religious denomination) in which one cannot speak this truth without receiving the “racist” label.

I would have to wonder if God Himself gets a pass, since even a cursory reading of Scripture would prove that He began elevating one branch of the family tree in Genesis 12 (arguably in Genesis 9), and only strengthened the elevation of that branch through the pages of Scripture. Was the Old Testament God somehow racist?

In summary, Matthew Hall clearly thinks there is a problem, though he never really tells us what it is, other than, “racial injustice.” He did not give an example. I get the feeling the article was designed to elicit feelings of guilt on the part of whites for the sins of blacks. And that’s a feeling I typically get when Evangelicals talk about race.41

Pastor White’s views are no doubt representative of other white evangelicals. The subsequent Ferguson protest seems to have divided white evangelicals between advocates for more personal responsibility and those espousing a clear gospel mandate for racial reconciliation.

41 Dr. Randy White, “I Don't Understand the Evangelical Response to Ferguson.”
However, some white evangelical leaders are calling for more compassionate and careful reflection before taking sides. Pastor James McDonald, founding pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel, a multisite megachurch based in the Chicago metro, urges a nuanced analysis and measured response to media messages before aligning with either side. He posted, “None of us really knows exactly what happened in the Ferguson shooting. Sadder is that even many Christ followers don't seem to want to know.” MacDonald gives examples of the views believers prematurely line up with:

“All police are driven by racial prejudice and out to get racial minorities”—oh please! Or “All police actions are justifiable and there is no abuse of authority or pent up feelings of righteous anger in our urban centers” —oh please!

If Michael Brown was justifiably shot, do we deny that many die unjustly in these environments just because this is not a good example of police brutality? If Michael Brown was not justifiably shot, do we deny that many officers rightly fear for their lives at thankless jobs in no win environments and have to make life or death decisions in a fraction of a second?

Can you let your heart be moved with compassion and seek to be moved for the impossible predicaments of real people on both sides of this? Come on, Christians—the essence of Christ’s compassion is hearing what the person in pain is saying and feeling and walking a few feet in their shoes. We are called to compassion for everyone [on] all sides of this escalation not taking a single simplistic viewpoint and thereby “crossing by on the other side of the road.”

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All of us, whatever our ethnicity, need to be careful to gather the facts before taking sides. Proverbs 18:13 cautions, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”

LESSONS LEARNED FROM LISTENING

Today’s national tension after Ferguson and Staten Island calls for discerning ears, compassionate hearts, and wise solutions that move all of us toward a better future. The December 2014 reactionary execution–style fatal shooting of NYPD officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu while sitting in their patrol car has further disturbed the nation. Without a doubt, the 21st–century church urgently needs clear direction from the Word of God concerning racial tensions—and she needs wisdom in how to apply the gospel and biblical principles to the current crisis.

We believe everyone would agree that mutual trust and respect between law enforcement and citizens provide a better quality of life for all within a community. Police officers are safer when citizens seek their welfare and engage in helping them to apprehend criminals. Citizens are safer when law enforcement effectively restrain crime within communities.

The racial barrier still seems to be the toughest long–term barrier to surmount in our nation. While we have made much progress in the realm of race relations since the 1960s civil rights era, most would agree we yet have much work to be done. The recent national unrest and sustained protests reveal that the perceptions of progress by blacks and whites often differ

43 Space does not allow us to survey insights of other white evangelical leaders who have written or spoken passionately about Ferguson and subsequent events; notable are Ed Stetzer, John Piper, Darrin Patrick, and Matt Chandler.

44 This NYC shooting was carried out by a disturbed individual with a long record of problems with the law and should not be seen as representative of all black protests to police shootings of black men.
significantly. The resultant outrage is only symptomatic of the distrust, disunity, and perceived inequity that continues to smolder beneath our nation’s collective conscience. After years of legislative, economic and political efforts, it is now obvious these well–intentioned man–centered efforts can never close the gap entirely.

Thus it is our growing conviction, as co–writers, that the church of Jesus Christ must now boldly yet humbly take the lead. It is especially critical during these days of uncertainty and tension that Bible–believing Christians and evangelical churches step up to bridge the gap, pointing our nation and neighbors to the gospel of reconciliation. Evangelical Christian leaders cannot afford to be silent, as many of us were in the sixties. There seems to be a growing consensus among evangelicals of all ethnicities that the time has never been better for local churches and their leaders to begin bringing gospel light on the issues of race, justice, and reconciliation.

Yet before we seek to lead the way in our communities, evangelicals will need to do a better job of modeling interpersonal reconciliation and addressing ethnic segregation and distrust that is yet found in our own churches. LifeWay Research reported in January 2014 that the majority of Protestant congregations are still composed predominately of one race.45 This sad reality has been repeatedly confirmed.46


46 See Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, Divided by Faith: Evangelical Faith and the Problem of Race in America (New York: Oxford U P, 2000). A nationwide research study by The Association of Religious Data (ARDA) found desegregation of American churches still remains an elusive dream for many. Typically most churches were either 99% white or black. Also Baylor University researchers found that when minorities do attend a majority congregation, they are less likely to have close friends or feel they really belong to the church. See David Briggs, “Racial Power vs. Divine Glory: Why Desegregation Remains an Elusive
Christianity Today’s examination of 2012 General Social Survey data found that

... church going evangelicals are not significantly different from the average American on race issues, including the likelihood of being close friends with a white or black person; thinking blacks should be able to overcome prejudice and work their way up; thinking the government should be able to offer race-based special treatment; or supporting affirmative action hiring preferences.47

Clearly, evangelicals have much to first address and correct in their local churches.

Recent research has also revealed a growing weariness and unwillingness on the part of many Americans to address the racial divide. The 2012 Portraits of American Life Study found 69% of whites felt the best way to improve race relations was to stop talking about race altogether.48 This white refusal to discuss race and acknowledge that nationally or individually we still have problems to address, may be itself a subtle form of racism. As Bryan Loritts points out, to lightly dismiss our brethren’s concerns and refuse to hear his or her historical journey and current story–narrative, is to demean and disrespect them.49

Before the evangelical church can hope to model and lead the community conversation on race, we need to begin the much–

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needed conversation within our local bodies of believers. If believers cannot have these loving but transparent conversations in the church, we cannot reasonably expect the listening and watching world to have them! Thus we must not squander the opportunity afforded us. These congregational conversations may be uncomfortable and at times polarizing for some, but we must all learn to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:25). And our conversation must begin with acknowledging that every person, regardless of ethnic background, struggles with racism because every person is a sinner with a depraved nature. Yet, because of God’s grace, believers in Christ are all recovering racists.

Ignoring the present hurt and anger in the African–American community is not an option. Biblically informed leaders would not do that in their marriages or in other interpersonal relationships and should not in this national conversation.

WHAT CHURCHES AND LEADERS CAN DO

Having listened intently to learn from our brothers, the time comes when we must act on our Bible–based convictions. It is not enough just to sympathize and empathize. We must demonstrate our faith and biblical convictions. We must move beyond rhetoric to results by getting personally and corporately involved. Christian leaders must model to their flocks how to apply the gospel and its implications to the burning issues of our day. We need to show the relevance of the word of God by clearly addressing it to the fears, concerns, and questions of our generation. In Ferguson–like times, we should be asking what churches can do to bring hope into a hopeless community. What follows are a number of actionable ways evangelicals, both conservative and “progressive,” can get involved. No church or Christian ministry will be able to implement all of these practical suggestions, but every congregation can do something, seeking God’s face for his direction in their ministry context.
(1) **Pray sensitively**—Pastors can publicly pray for all the families affected by Ferguson, Staten Island, New York, and similar tragedies. As we pray for those who have lost a beloved son, we should pray for the families of both the victims and the policemen involved. We recommend publicly praying during our weekend services and mid-week prayer meetings for peace in our own community. We should certainly not neglect to pray for those in authority, for wisdom for our elected leaders to pursue truth and justice, that they might not over or under react to community conflict (1 Tim 2:1–3). We might even ask the Lord God to help our church be more effective in bridging the racial, ethnic, cultural, and economic gaps that keep us isolated and in our own comfort zones. We should be publicly praying that our congregation might evidence a God–intended unity in diversity. This kind of corporate prayer speaks volumes to people of other ethnicities in our community and church. It says “We care.” It demonstrates concern for and sensitivity to the pain of many, recognizing it is real. It shouts out loud that we too believe black (and other minority) lives do matter.

(2) **Model repentance**—Lead your staff, lay leaders, and congregation to search their hearts, to examine past and present attitudes, practices, and policies which either intentionally or unintentionally excluded people of color from membership, leadership, or a voice in the ministry. Help your people recognize individual and institutional racism and then deal with it biblically. Ask yourselves: Are we truly reflecting the growing diversity of our community today? In what practical ways has our

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50 We suggest learning to apply the corporate prayer of Paul as modeled in his letter to the Ephesians would be a great start (see Eph 3:14–21). Contextually this prayer follows Paul’s discussion of the believers’ interethnic oneness in Christ (2:11–19). Other helpful biblical prayers are Colossians 1:9–12 and Philippians 1:9–11.
ministry been pursuing, embracing, and celebrating the biblical doctrine of congregational unity in diversity? How are we reflecting God’s heart for reconciliation and justice? If we are falling short, we should confess that sin and ask God for enabling grace to humbly change our ways.  

James challenges all believers to search their hearts for ungodly (“earthly, unspiritual, demonic”) attitudes of bitterness, selfish ambition, pride, and jealousy in their interpersonal relationships; rather believers should be characterized by a spirit that is peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated (willing to yield our “rights”), full of mercy, impartial, and without hypocrisy (Jas 3: 14–17). These attitudes are vital for “those who make peace” (3:18 ESV) and do not want to show the sin of “partiality” (2:1) within the local congregation. Paul further exhorts believers who desire to follow the humble “mind of Christ” to “count others more significant than [themselves]” and to look out for the interests of others before their own (Phil 2:2–5 ESV). Pastors should lead their people to monitor their hearts for these sins and repent of these before the watching Lord.

Those in leadership may need to model the public repentance demonstrated by the Apostle Peter when confronted by the Lord about his seclusion from Gentiles and told to take the gospel to Cornelius and his household. Realizing his error, he confessed, “Truly I [now] understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34 ESV). Though Spirit–filled at Pentecost, he was still being swayed by his Jewish racism and

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51 Repentance over racial indifference, prejudice or pride is not just a need in Caucasian churches. African–American, Hispanic, and Asian churches may also need to search out and eradicate attitudinal sins of racial exclusion or bitterness over past wrongs.
initially objected: “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” (10:14 ESV).

(3) **Give hope**—In the midst of a badly fractured and torn nation, many have given up all hope of ever seeing real change. We must boldly declare there is hope in the gospel of Christ and his finished cross work that first reconciles us to God, and then, to one another (2 Cor 5:16–20). That hope lies in our embracing the message that the Apostle Paul wrote to the multicultural church in the city of Ephesus: Jesus “himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility…. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:14, 19 ESV). To give real hope, we must both proclaim and demonstrate the good news of Christ’s unconditional love, dying for his enemies and bringing former enemies and aliens together around the cross. While the civil rights movement of the last century changed laws, it could not change hearts. Only the gospel can do that. But we must be faithful to show, by word and deed, the hope–giving reconciliation dimensions of the good news message we proclaim. We must walk worthy of our divine calling (Eph 4:1–7).

Minorities who have given up hope of every seeing the American dream of *E pluribus unum* (“One out of many”) fulfilled in our nation need to see more evidence of Christians across all ethnicities loving one another in practical ways in order to be convinced of the truth of the gospel and its unifying implications in these Ferguson–like times (John 13:34–5; 17:20–3).

[52 Later Peter fell back into sinful racist practices, refusing to eat with Gentiles, and had to be confronted again, this time by the Apostle Paul (Gal 2:11–14). This incident demonstrates that even well–taught Christian leaders may at times foster latent or overt racists and may need public rebuke because of their influence on other believers! Paul recognized this was essentially a gospel issue (Gal 2:14—“their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel….”].
Significantly, our Lord’s specified hope–giving gospel before a fractured world is Christians from diverse backgrounds truly loving one another. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the Scriptures are written to give us encouragement and hope, so that we might through endurance “live in harmony with one another” and together within the body of Christ “may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:4–6 ESV). Scripture–inspired hope will also enable us to “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed [us], for the glory of God” (15:7). This kind of earthly hope comes from catching a glimpse of and looking forward to our heavenly home where believers of every ethnicity, culture, and language will one day be gathered around the throne of the Lamb of God who has purchased us with his own blood (Rev 5:8–12).

(4) **Preach the Word**—We may need to go back and restudy key biblical texts that address the relevant themes of interpersonal and racial reconciliation, racism, and justice (cf. Eph 2:11–18). Our objective should be to seek to understand them afresh, preparing to preach, teach, and apply them to our people and present–day culture. Possibly meeting with an ethnic or minority pastor or Christian friend to study these passages together might give you a fresh perspective on both the meaning and application of long–familiar and pertinent sections of Scripture. For example, how about restudying the doctrine of the image of God (the *imago dei*) and how all men therefore have inherent worth and dignity, deserving of respect? This doctrine has tremendous implications to the issue of racism and how we treat one another. How about preaching an entire message showing why racism is sin? Or focusing one message on the sin

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53 Growing up in fundamental Baptist circles and schools, I (Ken) never once heard a biblical message on racism, which is clearly a biblical sin issue. Messages were preached on outward behavioral sins ("the
of showing partiality (respect of persons) in the church from James 2:1–10? Why not use biblical personalities like Jonah and Peter to show how believers can easily carry racist attitudes from their pre-conversion days into their Christian lives? Or show from Acts that the early church also had to wrestle with ethnic rivalry (Acts 6 and 15). Consider developing a series of messages on Great Commission outreach with a particular focus on reaching your own Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

We urge pastors not to be afraid to courageously teach the whole counsel of God and move beyond their comfort zones. John Piper, whose church in Minneapolis has sought to reach their diverse neighborhood, urges pastors not to be cowards in the pulpit on social issues like abortion and race, which are actually biblical–moral issues. Speaking at the recent “A Time to Speak” forum in Memphis, organized after Ferguson, Piper exhorted pastors to “pre-empt [these] issues biblically” by preaching on them long before they hit the news media: “Biblically, go there first. Capture the vocabulary, otherwise you’ll inherit the Fox News vocabulary, [or] whatever vocabulary, instead of biblical vocabulary.”

Piper reminds pastors not to think of racism as a temporary crisis that will eventually fade away, but as a sinful reality which will remain until Jesus returns.


prevails, we should not be surprised to discover both blatant and subtle forms of racism, both in human hearts and in culture. Thus, pastors should be willing to confront the evil of racism and point people to biblical reconciliation regularly. They must move beyond the fear of men and preach the whole counsel of God even if some of their people may be discomforted.

(5) **Care for the Poor and Disadvantaged**—Biblical churches should teach their people to develop a special regard for the fatherless and the poor. The theme of justice for the poor and oppressed is of particular importance in Scripture. Over 400 verses indicate God’s concern for the poor.\(^{56}\) The Hebrew people were expected to treat fairly and provide for the foreigner and alien who had immigrated to their land.\(^{57}\) Scripture is clear that God cares deeply for the disadvantaged and marginalized and he expects his people to demonstrate intelligent concern as well.\(^{58}\) Our Lord, when he walked on earth, was moved with compassion for those in the cities and towns who were harassed, helpless, and beaten down. His concern drove him to get involved—to enter the cities of his day, to teach, proclaim good news, and heal the afflicted (Matt 9:35–36). While Christ stated that the poor will be

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\(^{56}\) See, for example, Psalm 41:1; Proverbs 14:31; 21:13; 28:27: 29:7; Luke 6:33–36; 1 John 3:17–18, etc.

\(^{57}\) See Exodus 22:21–22; Leviticus 19:9, 33–34; Deuteronomy 10:18–20; 24: 17–21; Jeremiah 7:5–8; Malachi 3:5–6. The Hebrew word for stranger, *ger*, is often mentioned alongside the widow and orphan as people who were particularly vulnerable because they often did not have family members to take care of them, or property in order to become self-sufficient. Thus, the assistance of the community to which they migrated was critical.

\(^{58}\) See Deuteronomy 24:16–18; Psalms 82:3; Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27, etc.
with us always, his example indicated provisions should be made to care for them.

This kind of ministry of mercy is sadly lacking in many of our conservative evangelical churches today. White congregations may want to learn from the rich heritage of the African–American church that has a long history of caring for those in need and providing for the suffering. The black church has often helped hurting people through ministries of sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding.

(6) Practice Inclusive All-Nations Ministry—Hold your leaders—and yourself—accountable to seek to reach and disciple all the cultures and ethnicities in your city and geographical region so that your church is not solely composed of people who are all alike. Your church needs to be fully committed to fulfill the Great Commission to make and multiply disciples among all the “nations” or “people groups” (=ethnē) represented in your region.

59 The Deuteronomy 15 passage to which Jesus was referring in Mark 14:7 mandates the Jewish nation to provide for the poor (Deut 15:7–11): “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land’” (15:11).

60 For help in implementing a mercy ministry, see Tim Keller, Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997); also Steve Corbett and Brain Fikkert, When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself (Chicago, IL: Moody P, 2009). For why Christians should not over-rely upon the government to solve the problem of poverty with more money handouts, see Marvin Olasky, The Tragedy of American Compassion (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992).

community (Matt 28:19–20). A sovereign God has internationalized our North America cities, bringing to our shores numerous unreached and under-reached people groups. The Global Research Department of the International Mission Board (SBC) estimates there are 541 unreached people groups in North America (361 in the U.S. and 180 in Canada). Many of these recently arrived immigrants are dispersed into cities across our nation and could be now resident in your community. Seek to have a biblically balanced Acts 1:8 missional thrust, where your church is sharing the gospel in your own Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, as well as internationally. If your church or ministry is unable to reach the large number of “diaspora” peoples in your community on your own, consider partnering with other evangelical ministries or mission agencies that are already present and ministering. Discover what the Lord of harvest is already doing in your diverse community and join him!

To present a credible witness of God’s love for all people in an increasingly diverse and cynical society, established congregations must begin to both go with the gospel and open their doors to warmly welcome and embrace all ethnicities. For the sake of gospel advance, churches must move beyond homogeneity to become more heterogeneous, intentionally reflecting the diversity of their communities and following the

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63 To discover what immigrant, language, ethnic, and people groups are found in your city or region—and to learn how to better minister to them—check out <https://www.peoplegroups.info>; also see the North American people group data and resources compiled by the Joshua Project at <www.joshuaproject.net/regions/12>; and by the International Mission Board at <www.peoplegroups.org>. 

clear pattern of New Testament churches like those at Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome. Failure to become more intentionally diverse will likely render segregated congregations irrelevant in the years ahead. In a culture that values diversity, they also may run the risk of being viewed by many as cultic.

(7) **Build Ethnic Relationships**—Work diligently in your church and ministry to challenge, inform, and train your people, particularly those in the majority community, to be sensitive to the pain, hurts, and needs among minority peoples living all around you. Then move beyond building empathy to actually equipping your people to build bridges and close relationships with nearby people of color. Use John 4 and other related passages to teach your people to follow the example of Christ in reaching out to your local “Samaria.”


his disciples specifically identifies our “Samaria” as one of the places to which we must faithfully witness (Acts 1:8). Your church’s Samaria would be those who are *geographically close but culturally distant*. And the starting point for effective evangelism and discipleship should be friendship–building with those of other ethnicities and nearby cultures. Pastors should be modeling to their people this kind of intercultural outreach and ministry by intentionally developing friendships with those beyond their own ethnic group.

Sadly, recent research shows most Caucasian Christians have only a few if any black and ethnic close friendships.\(^66\) Yet, as Bryan Loritts reminds, if believers lack proximity with those of other ethnicities, they will also lack understanding of and empathy for them.\(^67\) Many relationships between blacks and minorities are unequal; we often do not talk to each other unless we need something. Sometimes we come with our fixed agenda or solutions to our brother’s needs. This can distort the relationship. Most whites need relationships with minorities who do not need them. Serving together as peers is one step forward. But the ultimate test may be when majority people are willing to sit under the leadership of an ethnic ministry leader—or even join his church and recognize him as their pastor.

(8) **Pursue Justice**—Conservative Caucasian evangelicals may need to rethink what it means for individual Christians and churches to corporately be pursuing justice locally and nationally. Sitting down and engaging Christians of color in meaningful conversation to hear their perspectives on local and national social justice issues might be a helpful start. The Old

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\(^{66}\) David Briggs, “Racial Power vs. Divine Glory.”

\(^{67}\) Bryan Loritts, “A Time to Speak,” Kainos Panel Discussion at the Lorraine Hotel, Memphis, TN, 16 December 2014; webcast found at <http://live.kainos.is/>. 
Testament prophet tells us that the Lord requires “good” of his people and then goes on to describe that as doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God (Mic 6:8). Significantly, godliness and pursuing justice are linked. Jesus announced that his own ministry of preaching and healing would be to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18). A careful reading of both testaments leads us to conclude that those on the outside of society owing to prejudice, ethnic origin, or lifestyle—as well as women, children, and orphans—are special objects of the Father’s concern.

Acts of justice performed by Christians not only put the gospel on display, but they also can help non–Christians deconstruct their own distorted views of Christians fed to them by the media. They may also open up doors of conversation with nonbelievers.

Social justice is not just the most recent ministry buzz word. Over eighty biblical texts underscore divine concern for justice to the disadvantaged.68 In the Old Testament, God often warned his people that judgment would come if they refused to show justice to the poor, the oppressed, and the powerless.69 These passages speak not just of individual sins but systemic, institutional evils. God calls for his people to uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute, to rescue the poor and helpless, and to deliver them from the grasp of evil people (Ps 82:2–4).

Some individual believers and evangelical pastors have taken these kinds of passages as a biblical warrant to use every available means of peaceful protest to stand with the poor or those suffering injustice, and to push for legal and legislative

68 See, for examples, Psalm 37:28; 106:3; Proverbs 28:5; 31:8–9; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:16; Micah 6:8; and Luke 14:12–14.

changes in our society. Openly resisting injustice in this way is seen as simply being salt and light in our society. The biblical understanding of respect for authorities needs to be balanced by a recognition that American citizens have the constitutional right to peaceful protest to bring about needed change.

White evangelicals are often slow to recognize the need for and value of pursuing racial justice through the civil courts or by seeking appropriate legislative change, perhaps fearing “big government.” Yet we must acknowledge that many of the major historical changes toward racial equality have come through legal and governmental actions. African–Americans watch white evangelicals seek legal and legislative action on current issues like abortion, same–sex marriage, euthanasia, government–mandated contraception, and IRS unjust treatment of conservatives. Yet they are bewildered when they see white believers argue against peaceful protests demanding change in perceived racial injustice. This is rightly seen as highly inconsistent.

(9) Explore Urban Partnerships—Your church, particularly if you are in a suburban or rural setting, may want to prayerfully consider partnering with one or two center city or inner city need–meeting Christian ministries. In addition to financial support, this should involve urging your people to personally get involved as volunteers on a regular basis. Doing so would sharpen the sensitivities of your people to social issues and needs, help them begin building redemptive relationships

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with the disadvantaged, and provide them with practical ways to share the good news in both word and deed. Ministries that might be considered for involvement include a local rescue mission, crisis pregnancy center, school tutoring program, job training program, community service projects, a ministry to inmates and their families, an outreach to single moms, and a local food pantry or clothing closet.

Some concerned evangelical pastors have also begun gathering regularly with local African–American and Hispanic leaders to explore ways their churches can partner together in addressing urban need, racial tension, justice, or racial reconciliation issues in their community. The goal is to build urban and interchurch coalitions to address pressing community issues biblically. In urban partnerships leaders begin to hear one another’s stories and to exorcise the ghosts of the past together. These partnerships must be based upon mutual respect and teamwork. They should also include scenarios that involve minority leadership being the primary driver of strategy and execution. Evangelical minority leaders who understand and minister within their communities are often best suited to guide and connect outside groups who desire to engage the community. In addition, more established churches need to see the benefit of partnering with young, growing immigrant churches so that they can offer as well as receive from the new churches God is raising up in our cities.

Other concerned evangelical congregations, rather than reinvent the wheel or duplicate what others are already doing, have found ways to love their community by working directly with civic leaders to support local social service providers. Faith Church in Lafayette, Indiana, well–known for its community

71 A good example of an effective Christ–centered partnership of urban and suburban churches, often led by minority leaders, is City Mosaic in Indianapolis. See <http://citymosaic.org/>.
biblical counseling center, has worked with their city in neighborhood revitalization, with the Red Cross to provide emergency service, and with their local Big Brothers Big Sisters programs. They have partnered with public school officials to provide tutoring, lunch buddies, and playground cleanup. Faith has also collaborated with their city’s Family Promise program to help the homeless with relief for the poor. In recent years they have even developed a neighborhood community center that provides community fitness and athletic programs to their neighbors but is also used for weekend worship services as a multi-site campus across town.  

Faith’s senior pastor, Steve Viars, states four biblical reasons why their church has chosen to serve and partner with their community in this way:

- To give those around us a better understanding of the character of God (Matt 5:16).
- To follow Christ’s example of incarnational ministry to those who are hurting (Luke 4:18).
- To faithfully obey the second great commandment (Matt 22:39).
- To better function as an effective, biblical church.

This kind of partnership with civic organizations should be seen as good citizenship and certainly gives added credibility to the gospel. It helps earn the right to be heard and may give us a

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73 Ibid, 23. Viars also cites Ephesians 2:8–10, James 2:14–26, and Titus 3:14 for the importance of God’s people seeking to meet urgent need as a vital part of the believers’ practice of good works.
place at the civic table where Christians can give voice to the application of biblical principles to urban issues.

(10) **Cultivate Gentleness and Respect**—In the midst of public conflict, Christian leaders should be modeling how to handle disagreement in Christ-like ways. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2 Tim 2:24, 25a, ESV). As we reach out to dialogue with ethnic and civic leaders about pressing community needs and issues, we need to be doubly careful to exhibit grace and humility, coming with a learner’s spirit. Recognize that good and godly men and women may at times disagree on perceived inequities and proposed solutions, and yet need not be disagreeable and mean-spirited. In a day when nationwide civic and political discourse is often harsh and full of personal attacks, Christian leaders on the front lines of reconciliation ministry must exhibit courtesy, grace, and forbearance. It is significant that Paul, in a context of being submissive to rulers and authorities, instructs church leaders “to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:2 ESV). Leaders must learn how to be righteously angry but never vindictive.

From our perspective, many urban young people and millennial adults today seem to lack a proper respect for and appreciation of the role of those who are in authority. They fail to understand that governing rulers (that would include the police) and civic leaders are divinely ordained and so deserve basic

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74 This is contrary to what many conservative radio talk show hosts publicly exhibit and what some foolish Christians sometimes mimic in their public (Facebook, etc.) demeanor. Christians seeking to engage with ethnic and community leaders will at times need to learn to hold back their own personal political and social viewpoints lest they limit their audience and potential impact in the marketplace of ideas.
respect and honor. Significantly, the Apostle Paul instructs Christians in the first century to submit to their God-established authorities, all of whom were probably pagans at the time of his writing (Rom 13:1–7; cf. 1 Pet 2:13–17). Paul teaches that rulers are God’s agents who exist for the benefit of society, to protect the general public by maintaining law and order. Thus to disobey a human ruler is ultimately to disobey God. Peter teaches that good citizenship counters false charges made against Christians and thus commends the gospel to unbelievers (1 Pet 2:15). Christians are to “show proper respect to everyone” (1 Pet 2:17 NIV). This is because every human bears the image of God and some have been granted special authority from God. Peter also shows that at times, submitting to duly constituted authority “for the Lord’s sake” (2:13; cf. Eph 6:7–8) may mean submitting to the point of suffering unjustly, if it is God’s will (2:19–21).

These clear principles need to be taught and modeled to this generation. Those who are tempted to take the law into their own hands—or to use the abuse of authority as a rationale for lawlessness—need to be instructed to distinguish between the ruler’s (policeman’s) position and personality. One can disagree with an authority’s personal decisions and public mandates yet respect that authority for his or her providential position in civic affairs.75 Well-taught Christian young adults should be dialoguing with and modeling these timeless principles before their peers, whether believing or unbelieving. This would help to reshape the tone and culture of our communities.

On the other hand, citizens, especially in America, have been given legal rights and procedures to challenge abuse of power or injustice even among authorities. The respectful and peaceful exercise of these rights should not be denied. The American

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75 When Peter wrote to submit to the king, the emperor was the godless, brutal Nero (who ruled from AD 54 to 68). Yet obedience to the emperor, though extensive, was never to be in violation of the clear commands of God (see Acts 4:19, etc.).
governmental system allows for appeals, change of laws, peaceful protests, etc. Given the depravity and flaws of humanity, we must be eternally diligent to respectfully assess and improve our legal and governmental systems as needed. All of us should seek to gather accurate, factual information, and we must allow our legal system to work prior to making premature judgments.

(11) **Support Urban Church Planting** — The tragedy of the latter decades of the last century was that many white conservative churches fled the city for the suburbs. Often this left a spiritual and moral vacuum in the city with little or no clear gospel witness. Today we are seeing a resurgence of interest in reaching our cities, recognizing this is where most of the nation’s unreached and unchurched reside. Research and experience confirm the best way to reach those far from God is through renewed church planting. And in diverse urban settings, the great need is often for new Christ-centered, gospel-preaching, and Great Commission–focused churches that are intentionally multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-class. If your church would like to really make a difference in a nearby city, you might identify and support a church planter and his urban launch team. Some of the most exciting and fast-growing churches in North America today are multiethnic and economically diverse communities. They are a foretaste of and embody what heaven will look like one day (Rev 5:8–10; 7:9–10). These mosaic churches are a response of the Holy Spirit to today’s cultures wars and prepare Christians for the reality of eternity. Urban churches that model well the gospel are the ultimate answer to the racial and ethnic division and discord in our land, needing our support and encouragement.

We are convinced many North Americans are longing to see solutions to our racial divide and discord. Our experience and observation is that particularly the younger generations will be attracted to faith communities that both proclaim and
demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the only one who can reconcile humans both to God and to one another. Genuinely diverse congregations where people of differing ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds worship together and lovingly minister to one another as equal members of the local body of Christ can have a powerful witness. In these faith communities, people hear and know each other’s stories, and they walk in each other’s shoes, thus enabling believers to put faces they know on racial and economic injustice. Such churches can truly transform our culture and bring healing to our hurting cities.

These were the kind of churches the Apostle Paul planted in the first century where they had their own version of ethnic strife with Jews and Gentiles normally separated and distant. In Christ, former enemies became co-worshipers in the same urban multicultural local churches. The Apostle Paul boldly proclaimed to these diverse city churches that Christ was the Great Barrier-Breaker who through his cross work broke down “the dividing wall of hostility” that separates people, bringing people together and making us “one” (Eph 2:14–16). This was a revolutionary and radical message in his day—and can have similar impact in our day. But local churches need to be strategically planted and positioned in North America’s diverse cities where they can broadcast this message.

(12) **Use Social Media**—Churches that are engaging the issues of race, justice, and reconciliation today are finding ways to publicly and sensitively address these concerns on Facebook and pastoral blogs and with Twitter and other social media tools. They are showing their local community and the wider watching world that Scripture is relevant and speaks to both the individual and institutional sins of this generation. 

For two fine examples of white evangelical Baptist pastors blogging on the Ferguson issue, see Stephen Stallard of Mosaic Baptist, Brooklyn, NY <http://www.stallards4brooklyn.com/ferguson–race–a–
goes public in this way, we need to exhibit grace and discretion. It is disheartening to see some believers who use Facebook and other public media in Ferguson–like scenarios to express harsh tones and make quick judgments. It is far too easy to push one’s political persuasions and to talk past one another.

Some involved churches are publicizing recommended resources on race, racial reconciliation, and justice on their church websites and blogs. This not only helps to biblically educate their own people but makes a strong statement to the general public that their church cares enough to get involved. We also recommend that churches include in their public statement of faith and constitution a clear declaration that their congregation welcomes all ethnicities and views racism and its various manifestations as sinful (and thus a matter for church discipline). This reality should be prominently displayed in some simplified form on the church’s website. This kind of publicized open door policy makes a strong statement to the often skeptical watching world.

(13) **Develop Ethnic Leadership**—Concerned majority Christian leaders need to insure that qualified people of color have access to take places of leadership and influence at the highest levels in our churches, Christian schools and colleges, agencies, and ministry boards. We need to be aggressively recruiting, training, and empowering minority leaders (and


77 For a great example, see the website of Providence Bible Church, Denver, CO, at <www.Providencedenver.org>.
potential leaders) to assume key positions and places at the
table. IDENTIFYING ETHNIC LEADERS WHO SHARE OUR THEOLOGICAL
convictions or philosophy of ministry may at times be a
challenge. But white organizations need to remember that for
decades, blacks and other minorities were excluded from some of
our finest theologically conservative educational institutions. To
remedy the shortage, majority community churches should
seriously consider providing tuition scholarship funding for
young men and women of color who have a sincere desire to
serve Christ and his church.

It is also true that sometimes capable and competent men and
women of color are available, but Christian ministries have just
not looked in the right places or been aggressive in recruitment
efforts. Here making inquiries to respected and well–known
evangelical leaders in the minority community could help locate
potential candidates. Churches serious about becoming more
diverse at the leadership level may also want to practice a
modified form of “affirmative action.”

(14) Provide Inclusive Platforms—Pastors, Christian
college presidents, and denominational and agency leaders need
to be sensitive to whom they invite to speak in their churches,
chapel platforms, retreats, and conferences. Our local, regional,

78 Crossroads Bible College in Indianapolis models this well. At
various times they have had faculty and staff representative of
numerous ethnicities.

79 Baptist Bible Seminary has, for example, an Ethnic and Minority
Student Scholarship Fund for aiding men who desire to be urban church
planters.

80 For an example of a well–worded statement of how one church is
seeking deliberate ethnic diversity in the hiring of pastoral staff and
selection of elders, see “How and Why Bethlehem Baptist Church
Pursues Ethnic Diversity,” in John Piper, Bloodlines: Race, Cross and the
and national Christian gatherings ought to reflect the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of our local communities and nation. If we sincerely desire to see more people of color attending our events and churches, we will need to be more deliberate to invite African–American, Hispanic, Asian–American, and other ethnic leaders to address our people. Sadly, far too many Christian events have only white speakers and a white audience. When our churches and conferences fail to hear men of God from other ethnicities, our people are rarely challenged to re-examine their racial and cultural stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. Then, too, lost people who show up at our Sunday services may be dissuaded, thinking that Christianity is just “the white man’s religion.” African–American, Hispanic, and Asian American churches also need to work diligently to diversify their platforms.

(15) **Change Our Language** — A major step forward in our churches and communities would be to drop the language of “race” and begin to use more biblical terminology. The modern concepts of “race” and racial distinctions are rather recent social constructs which arose out of eighteenth–century anthropology and Darwinian evolution.\(^\text{81}\) Christian sociologists Michael

Emerson and Christian Smith remind us, “[Race] continues to exist only insofar as it is recreated. That is, races exist because a society is racialized.”

“Race” is not a biblical category or way of understanding the human family. Scripturally there is only one race and that is the human race. Challenging the Athenian philosophers of his day, the Apostle Paul declared, “And he [the Creator God] made from one man [Adam] every nation [ethnos] of mankind to live on the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26a). This clear text teaches the unity and dignity of the human race, that humans are all biologically related to one another and descended from one common ancestor.

A more accurate way to understand and describe the differences in the human family would be to recognize that God created and designed “people groups” or “ethnic groups.”

Ethnicity is a concept that is bigger than race. It stresses “the cultural rather than physical aspects of group identity. Ethnic groups share language, dress, food, customs, values, and


82 Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 8.

83 This is why any talk of “inter-racial marriage” is ludicrous; there is no such thing! Unfortunately, some fundamentalists foolishly sought to make such marriages wrong and even sinful, caving in to the cultural traditions of their day. For a good discussion and refutation of the “proof texts” used by some preachers, see Craig S. Keener, “The Bible and Interracial Marriage,” in *Just Don’t Marry One: Interracial Dating, Marriage and Parenting* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson P, 2002).

sometimes religion.”  

We agree with John Piper that ethnicity is not only biblical but a more helpful concept, better than race in helping humans relate to one another with respect and understanding.

### CONCLUSION

We offer these specific steps for evangelical leaders to consider in these Ferguson–like times so that our churches might better model gospel–centered reconciliation and biblical justice. These fifteen recommendations are certainly not an exhaustive list of action steps. Each one needs further explanation and discussion of how it could be best implemented.

We believe the evangelical church must be committed to building a biblical worldview in all things, including race relations and injustices. To do so, we will need to work on multiple levels—personal, moral, and institutional—to truly offer a holistic answer to the complexities of a racialized culture. Ironically, the discipline of interethnic studies and ministry is just emerging in our conservative evangelical circles. Resources are still being developed and tested. We yet have much to learn from each other and to live out in our churches and communities.

We are convinced that Christ and the biblical gospel are sufficient to resolve the pressing issues of our day. A truly Christ–exalting, Gospel–centered, approach to ethnic relations will stress God’s grace more than man’s proposed remedies, pointing people to the cross. We firmly believe it is critical that the Church pursue grace relations rather than “race” relations. Grace offers a healthy foundation for dealing with the sins of the past as well

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85 Eloise Herbert Meneses, “Science and the Myth of Biological Race,” in *This Side of Heaven*, 34.

as the alienation of the present. Grace relations are built upon forgiveness and the intentional pursuit of peace, trust, unity, and loving relationships because of Christ. The Church must move beyond society’s blame and shame game. The anger, distrust, and polarization of such a philosophy are very apparent today—but it need not remain so.

Within this article we have sought to encourage, especially within the evangelical community, honest and respectful conversations about the continuing racial divide in our nation and churches. We have sought to model listening so that we can all learn and profit from the concerns of our brothers and sisters within the one body of Christ. We pray that the generations that follow us will discover that the evangelical church of the 21st century was the church of reconciliation! What will you do to make this a reality?
Post–Christian Culture as an Aid to Christian Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

The ancient prophet Habakkuk opened his small oracle, a text inspired by God, with an angry questioning of both the sin of the people and the silence of God:

How long, O LORD, will I call for help,  
And Thou wilt not hear?  
I cry out to Thee, “Violence!”  
Yet Thou dost not save.  
Why dost Thou make me see iniquity,  
And cause me to look on wickedness?  
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;  
Strife exists and contention arises.  
Therefore, the law is ignored  
And justice is never upheld.  
For the wicked surround the righteous;  
Therefore, justice comes out perverted. (Hab 1:2–4; NASB)

His questioning is aimed mostly at God. But the prophet's spiritual analysis of the Judean culture in the late seventh century BC is analogous to many declensions of faith down through the centuries, including the present time in North American culture.

1 This article was originally written for and delivered as a paper at the Bible Faculty Leadership Summit at Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, on August 6, 2014.
A century ago, Arno Gaebelein complained about the decline of true Christian faith with these words: “What an awful sin to criticize the Bible, to deny its verbal inspiration, to put the Word of God which He has exalted above all His Name down to the level of profane literature. Yet this is the common drift of our times.”

If at that time it was a “common drift,” then today it could be considered the fastest moving water since Noah! At least, that is how Christians who believe the fundamental doctrines of the Bible often feel as belligerency toward Christian faith rises to the point that a book of forewarning has been written on the criminalization of Christianity. From the fundamentalist perspective, this may take on an ominous spirit. Mohler, commenting on Bauder’s statements on fundamentalism, noted, “He and his colleagues are trying to rescue fundamentalism from cultural obscurity and institutional fratricide.”

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3 Janet L. Folger, *The Criminalization of Christianity: Read This Book Before It Becomes Illegal!* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005).

4 The word *fundamentalism* in this article is being used in a historical sense, identifying with the movement in the early twentieth century among Bible-believing Christians to respond to the rise of modernism in American culture. It does not deal with other uses of the term including modern criticism of Islamic fundamentalism which has made the word a more negative cultural expression. Fundamentalism as a concept is helpful here for the sake of historical comparison presented in this article.

several decades, the evangelical critique “industry” has thoroughly vetted the sins of evangelicals in order to warn and document what has allowed the precipitous and rapid downhill spiral to occur.\(^6\) Some form of decline continues to develop, most recently sensed in the rather fast rise of the acceptance of gay marriage in the United States. Christians can righteously mourn such negative developments within culture.

On the other hand, fundamental Christians should also adopt a complementary attitude that allows them to notice the opportunity offered to the church which such hostility grants. Church leaders can think through a more positive posture in light of developments in the current post–Christian culture. The focal points given below are also intertwined as might be expected.

**THE CHURCH HAS ALREADY BEEN HERE BEFORE**

First, the post–Christian culture of the current time places the church in a position where it has already been and in which it has thrived in the past. History can be a good teacher. This fact can give some measure of hope going forward.

**The Early Church**

“Nor does your cruelty, however exquisite, avail you; it is rather a temptation to us. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”\(^7\)

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Tertullian’s famous statement about the blood of martyrs as the seed of the church is given in a context of belief that martyrdom guarantees eternal life. Modern Bible-believing Christians do not agree. Nonetheless, the spirit of the statement manifests a more general belief that the early Church moved forward even though oppressed. Cairns refers to Christianity as “a despised sect with small numbers” which “became the official religion of the mighty Roman Empire.”

The venerable Schaff gave an interpretive understanding when he noted,

“For the first three centuries Christianity was placed in the most unfavorable circumstances, that it might display its moral power, and gain its victory over the world...But in spite of these extraordinary difficulties Christianity made a progress which furnished striking evidence of its divine origin and adaptation to the wants of man....”

The paganism of the Roman Empire surrounded Christians, but by the end of the fourth century Christendom was lodged as a strong or perhaps the strongest force in Western culture. The testimony of the earliest centuries of the church leads to the conclusion that negative hostility in culture does not necessarily lead to long term, harmful results for the church. Thus, in our

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9 Philip Schaff, History of the Church (n.p.: AP & A, n.d.), 1:7–8. The volume cited here is from the reprint edition combining the original eight volumes into three volumes. The quotation is from the original second volume.

10 It is possible (and generally believed by fundamentalists) that the rise of Christendom in the early Church in the form it took actually hurt
present circumstances—part of what Paul referred to as “the present evil age”\textsuperscript{11}—Christians do not have to accept decline as the inevitable next step relative to Christian work. Christians at least have the opportunity to consider a repeat of what Tertullian saw in his own day as he spoke to his pagan adversaries, “We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market—places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum,—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods.”\textsuperscript{12}

THE FUNDAMENTALIST—MODERNIST CONTROVERSY

Closer to home, the conflict between fundamentalism and modernism a century ago still guides much fundamentalist thinking. What is important for the discussion here is that there was a real loss by fundamentalism. Denominations were lost as fundamentalists were forced to withdraw and start their own fellowships. The buildings and libraries once possessed and in service to the Lord were lost. Fundamentalists were required to create their own schools and mission agencies. Much financial support once aimed at cherished and godly purposes now belonged to moderates and even to despised liberalism. Concerning the outcome of the Scopes Trial (1925), Marsden accurately described the state of affairs in this fashion:

Although the outcome of the trial was indecisive and the law stood, the rural setting and the press’s caricatures of fundamentalists as rubes and hicks discredited fundamentalism and made it difficult to pursue further the serious aspects of the movement. After 1925 fundamentalists had difficulty gaining national attention except

\textsuperscript{11} Galatians 1:4.

\textsuperscript{12} Tertullian, \textit{The Apology}, XXXVII.
when some of their movement were involved in extreme or bizarre efforts.\textsuperscript{13}

Marsden goes on to note that by the end of the 1920s “it looked to be the last hurrah for fundamentalism altogether. Fundamentalism seemed to be in disarray, and most observers assumed that it had burned itself out and would soon disappear forever.”\textsuperscript{14} In other words, the rejection of fundamentalism by the “Roaring Twenties” culture of America produced a climate facilitating the end of the movement according to contemporary analysts.\textsuperscript{15}

The summary above is common knowledge. Its inclusion here is to help current fundamentalists draw a comparison to the present time. There is hermeneutical and theological disorder now in Christendom that may even surpass the problems of the early twentieth century: Open theism, the New Perspective on Paul, the abandonment of inductive Bible study, ongoing sophisticated fights over inspiration and inerrancy, the continuation of the Bible–Science controversy with the added problem of the interpretation of DNA discoveries, and defections

\textsuperscript{13} George M. Marsden, \textit{Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 60. If one examines the periodical documents of \textit{The Fundamentals}, one is hard–pressed to find rural and totally uneducated men representing the movement. Even Arno C. Gaebelein, who only took a semester or two of college education at Johns Hopkins, was self–taught to the degree that his scholarship exceeded that of other men who had completed formal education. Marsden is correct in his assessment of media caricature. On Gaebelein’s scholarship, see Stallard, \textit{Early Twentieth–Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein}, 13–15. Detractors among the historians as well as supporters of Gaebelein agree about his erudition.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 61.

from the faith all around. It seems that every Bible verse is up for grabs.

To be sure, the culprit of the current time has its differences from one hundred years ago. Today it is the Evangelical and Postmodernist Controversy rather than the Fundamentalist and Modernist Controversy. The mysticism has increased, although the seeds of postmodernism lie deeply in the soil of modernism. Classical liberals with their experiential framework were dedicated to an outworking of some form of mysticism. Today, that mysticism governs most of the religious landscape in North America.

In addition, one factor that makes fundamentalists worried today is the extent and speed to which Christian morality has dived into an empty pool. A century ago, a Judeo–Christian worldview still held sway to some measure in morality and ethics.\textsuperscript{16} Now this perspective is ridiculed. Living together unmarried is a cultural given. To doubt that homosexuality should be promoted is homophobic. No one is talking about Christophobia as Christian views are mocked and scorned. That gay marriage has been approved in so many states so quickly and that pastors have spent time in jail throughout the world over preaching against homosexuality has increased the tension perhaps more than was possible in the time of Machen.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} For example, a century ago, no divorced man had ever been elected to be President of the United States. Ronald Reagan was the first and only man to this point to be elected while divorced and remarried. This, of course, does not mean that immorality was absent from the White House through the years as we all know. But there is a public perception here in the past that more closely approximates biblical understanding.

\textsuperscript{17} See <http://www.akegreen.org/> for the autobiographical story of Ake Green, a Pentecostal pastor in Sweden who had to fight jail time due to his preaching against homosexual behavior. Hate crime ordinances are, wherever they occur, a problem for a Christian pastor who wants to assert his religious freedom to preach the whole counsel of God given in the Bible. For a balanced comparison of the current climate in America to the Nazi Germany of the 1930s, see Erwin W.
Schaeffer remarked over thirty years ago that one of three things was about to happen: (1) a revival of Christian thinking akin to the Reformation; (2) severe persecution of Christians; (3) the second coming of Christ. Logically, all three could happen in short order. It appears, however, that Schaeffer’s hopes relative to #1 have been dashed by the developments of the last thirty years. Most fundamentalists would vote for #3 if God gave us a voice in the matter. The second option, however, is what has come to light with increasing clarity.

In light of such dim days for the fundamentalist faith in America, one is filled with consternation looking ahead. Can anything be learned from the Fundamentalist and Modernist Controversy from the past that can help now as fundamentalists move forward into the darkness? The answer is yes. First, in the period from 1930 to 1950, fundamentalists focused much on organizational issues. This was a necessity due to the loss of the mainline denominations. Mouw notes,

> While the secularizing elites took it for granted that ‘the old-time religion’ was a thing of the past, the fundamentalists were building a complex system of independent organizations: youth ministries, evangelistic teams, Bible institutes, seminaries, missionary agencies, summer Bible conferences, Bible distribution societies, and so on.

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18 This writer was in the audience during a chapel service at Liberty University on January 23, 1981, when Francis Schaeffer made these remarks. A video of this sermon is available online at <http://joshuabreland.com/video-francis-schaeffer-changing-course-history-address-students-liberty-university-1981/>.

19 Richard J. Mouw, “What Evangelicals Can Learn from Fundamentalists” in *Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail: Evangelical Ecumenism and the Quest for Christian Identity*, ed. by Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 51. Mouw’s intended audience is different than the one for this article. Here we are attempting to describe “What Contemporary Fundamentalists Can Learn from Past Fundamentalists.”
Fundamentalists organized such ministries in a kind of grass-roots mode without the fanfare of well-developed denominational structures. The success of the fundamentalists in developing such a successful infrastructure for their movement coincided with an unexpected decline in the mainline denominations. This led to some serious self-evaluation culminating in the well-known 1972 study by Dean M. Kelly entitled *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*. One summary of Kelly’s work was given in this way:

The growth of sectarian and theologically conservative religious groups is moving at an amazing clip while there is an equally dramatic decline in membership in mainline churches. Here a National Council of Churches executive charts these surprising trends which indicate that the decline in the more liberal and established churches is not merely a drop-off, but a sign that these respected religious institutions are dying.\(^\text{20}\)

Carpenter summarized the same conclusion intimating that the seeds of reversal were already in the works by 1930: “Not only was mainline Protestantism being confronted with its final ‘disestablishment’ in an irreversibly pluralistic nation, but by the 1930s it had reached its apogee as the dominant expression of Protestantism.”\(^\text{21}\) What is being suggested is that this remarkable reversal of fortunes was partly aided by attention to organizational issues. The fundamentalists created and organized ministries across the board to meet the needs of carrying out Great Commission ministry. For application to the current situation, fundamentalists must reevaluate current ministries and ask hard questions about what needs to be abandoned and what needs to be started. Such visions are largely


personal. Within the movement there needs to be a spirit that fosters new organizations or ministries and allows individuals to do so without castigating them for abandoning current structures. Reliance upon the older institutions, however positive their contributions continue to be, may not be enough.

Beyond the organizational prowess of the twentieth–century fundamentalists, a second thing Bible–believing Christians can learn from them is the need for aggressive ministry. Carpenter has characterized the fundamentalists of the 1930s and 1940s with words such as activism, enterprise, and aggressive evangelization.\(^{22}\) In short, these fundamentalists brought energy, hard work, and intentionality to the ministry. Vision was written large. The radio became a communication tool to exploit for the cause of the gospel of eternal life. Not only were they trying intentionally to grow existing churches, they were aggressively planting new churches and expanding foreign missionary efforts. Evangelization was at the heart of the movement. Creativity blossomed in ministries such as the bus ministry phenomenon. Later on, the successes were documented in such works as Elmer Towns’s *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*.\(^{23}\)

The current fundamentalist configuration could use a little of that earlier zeal when it comes to evangelism. Too few churches and ministries of the movement today appear to focus on intentionality when it comes to reaching people for Christ. Evangelism has become sporadic, accidental, and incidental. Malphurs notes,

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{23}\) Elmer Towns, *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools: And What Makes Them Grow* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969). Of the ten churches, five were in the Baptist Bible Fellowship; three others declared themselves to be independent Baptist; one was Southern Baptist; one was interdenominational. Later Towns published *An Inside Look at 10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990). No independent Baptist churches are listed. Two are SBC churches. The tenor of the book is slightly different, so a full comparison may be unwarranted. However, the contrast may show that earlier fundamentalist successes were beginning to wane.
An unstated mission in some churches is to win people to faith in Christ. This used to be the predominant mission of many churches in the first half of the twentieth century, especially Baptist churches. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, I have detected a move away from this mission. Few churches seem to value evangelism, and not much of it is taking place as it was earlier. In fact, evangelism seems to be a dying value in far too many churches in the twenty-first century. While evangelism isn’t the church’s sole mission, it is a part of its mission.\footnote{Aubrey Malphurs, \textit{Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 15.}

It would no doubt be true that not all churches and ministries ignore this vital mission of the church. Why it is the case so often would make an interesting study. Perhaps fundamentalism is in some kind of scholastic period as it hones its deeper theological commitments. The Academy must continue to teach students that evangelism is not optional. It is essential. Regardless of the reasons for some lack of evangelism in many fundamental churches, the future of the movement is at stake. A diminished evangelistic spirit will erode fundamentalism.

A corollary of this sad state of affairs is the reticence on the part of many groups of churches to pursue actively the project of planting other new local churches. At this current time in history, church planting may be the number one avenue by which people come to faith in Christ.\footnote{C. Peter Wagner, \textit{Church Planting for a Greater Harvest} (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 11.} Davis notes, “Every new church increases the cutting edge of evangelism. Younger and smaller churches tend to be more efficient evangelistically than older, larger churches. New churches generally win more people and baptize more converts per hundred members than older churches do.”\footnote{Ken Davis and Roger McNamara, \textit{The YBH Handbook of Church Planting} (n.p.: Xulon, 2005), 53.} If this is so, then why is it so? Like Abraham Lincoln’s evaluation of General McClellan, we have a case of the
“slows.” Do we really believe the Acts 29 network has taken care of church planting? Is it really desirable for the Emerging Church proponents to plant more churches than us? Is it sufficient to know that the Southern Baptists have an aggressive strategy to reach the urban areas of the United States? Fundamentalists must not waiver at this moment. We must all learn from our fundamentalist forefathers and become committed to intentional and aggressive church planting and evangelism. Without these, there is no going forward.

A final observation points to one similarity between the two cultural contexts of the 1930s and today. The fundamentalist turnaround that began in the 1930s was in fact initiated during the difficult days of the Great Depression. Current fundamentalists are living through a Great Recession which is causing problems in the funding of our institutions. The post-Christian culture today offers little solace economically or religiously. The current moment provides a monumental challenge, but there should be no wringing of hands or surrender. The early church surpassed expectations as it overcame a thoroughly pagan culture. The early fundamentalists likewise overcame the apostasy of their own day even after losing their denominations. The fundamentalists of today have the wonderful opportunity to demonstrate the power of God like the great cloud of witnesses who came before. To flinch now would be to show the world something it does not need to see—a fearful Christianity.  

27 Although it is theological nature, there is the sure pre-written history of the tribulation period predicted in many places in Scripture and covered in detail in Revelation 6–19. During this awful time there is great opposition and persecution of Christ-followers, yet there is also a large influx of converts to the true and living God. Once again, the presence of negative circumstances does not prevent the work of God in outreach.
Christians Can Easily Be Counter–Cultural

Second, Christians can easily be counter-cultural in the present situation. The relativistic pluralism of postmodern society leaves little or no room, at least theoretically, for those who believe in absolute truth. Such people appear to be marginalized in the media and other forums. At this point, the fundamentalist and Christian option must borrow to some extent Niebuhr’s category “Christ against culture.” One must quickly add, however, that in some cases more than one of Niebuhr’s categories may apply at the same time and that various people and movements travel in and out of the territories and meanings of the categories in real life. That is why it is imperative to ask if being counter-cultural is a good thing.

For the analysis at hand, this writer accepts that it is a good thing for fundamental Christians to demonstrate to a point how different we are from others in our culture at the present time. The teaching of Jesus is that Christians are not of this world (John 17:16). The current declension of faith under the postmodern impulse, the absolute dissolution of moral standards, and the political and economic uncertainty actually help fundamentalists to present themselves in a way that attractively contrasts with the often clueless culture. To be sure, we will always share salient contact points with culture since we all, lost and saved,


29 For a brief analysis of these points in this light, see Carson, Gagging of God, 405–6.

30 The “otherworldliness” expressed in fundamental doctrines of personal separation from the world and ecclesiastical separation from apostasy is one of those areas which has been a major point of contention for new evangelicals and for fundamentalists who feel abused by overstatements and hyper-praxis in this area. For a brief discussion of this, see Mouw, What Evangelicals Can Learn from Fundamentalists, 46–47.
experience the fallen world around us. We all cry when we lose a loved one. We all have high hopes when a child or grandchild comes into our families. But on the solution side, where people are longing for certain hope to overcome the dilemmas of life, fundamental Christianity’s differences can point the way by highlighting the truth that is needed. There are two particular illustrations that underscore this point: (1) lifestyle differences especially relative to sexual and marriage choices; (2) doctrinal differences especially relative to perceived harshness in the character of God.

Relative to lifestyle differences, Schaff spoke to the impact of the morality of the early Christians: “The moral earnestness of the Christians contrasted powerfully with the prevailing corruption of the age, and while it repelled the frivolous and voluptuous, it could not fail to impress most strongly the deepest and noblest minds.”31 The opinion expressed here is that the counter-cultural stance of Christians in the early centuries ultimately became attractive to the population. The corruption existing in the Empire at that time, through its hedonistic paganism, helped to set off the Christian lifestyle as a superior option among many thinking people.

The Christian lifestyle in the full biblical sense, not in a hyper-legalistic sense, has the same power today. Although there are never any short-term guarantees, the fundamentalist can be hopeful in the midst of present negative circumstances. The gay marriage agenda seems to be on a fast track with even some professing Christians sadly coming out in support of the recognition of gay rights. However, such a fast moving agenda carries with it a great deal of instability. For example, there are many states that affirm gay marriage while, at this time, a majority of states have not yet made formal laws in that direction. Legally there is a measure of disarray. In addition, there is a cultural uneasiness that exists as lifestyle choices of Christianity

31 Schaff, History of the Church, 1:8. In the original volumes, this citation would be found in 2:13ff. Schaff suggested that the progress of the Christian faith due to such factors was generally spread throughout the Empire rather than being localized to some individual region.
conflict with the prevailing pagan society. The legalism of the gay rights movement is growing as it tries to stifle dissent. The ugly picture that may eventually emerge can actually prove to be in the favor of fundamentalists. Ironically, the legalistic spirit that fundamentalists are often accused of having may be demonstrated to a greater degree in the pagan culture around us. This has the potential to highlight the gracious lifestyle of Bible-believing Christians.

Relative to doctrinal differences, the case may be more difficult. Of specific interest is the difference between Christian teachings that are perceived to be harsh and pluralistic teachings that are supposed to be generous and gracious. One example is the doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus. When Jesus comes back, the Bible is fairly clear on this point—He will kill people (Rev. 19:11ff). Beyond that, the end-time scenario raises the specter of the Bible’s teaching on the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10–15). The Bible truth here is referred to as hatemongering by some pluralists.  

A second example is related. The harsh facts that come with the end times in the Bible reflect on the nature of God. One pop culture example can be seen in the Star Trek television series and movies that tend to support a pluralistic framework for looking at the universe. The pinnacle of this brand’s view of God comes in the fifth movie, Star Trek: The Final Frontier (1989). Confronting a being the movie’s main characters initially think is the Creator God in a classical theistic sense, they discover that the alien is not God primarily because he is too harsh. The alien sends fire bolts out of his eyes to knock down the characters Kirk and Spock. If

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32 For example, see Nicholas Kristof, “Apocalypse (Almost) Now,” New York Times, 24 November 2004. See this writer’s analysis of the perceived harsh side of Christian doctrine in Mike Stallard, “The Tendency to Softness in Postmodern Attitudes about God, War, and Man,” JMAT 10 (Spring 2006): 92–114. This article was first presented at the Conservative Theological Society in August 2005 under the title “Is the Doctrine of the Second Coming Too Negative?” The three example doctrines of this published article on postmodern softness are borrowed for the outlining of this section.
there is a God, he would not be a harsh God, according to the script writers. Consequently, the God of classical theism is rejected out of hand. A version of a gentler god within the human heart is accepted.

A third doctrinal example continues the theme of harshness. While the rejection of the concept of propitiation has been present for a long time, there is a growing agitation from some quarters of Christendom to deny the biblical teaching that Christ on the cross satisfies the wrath of God against sin. According to this line of thinking, a nonviolent atonement is to be preferred.33 Propitiation is to be relegated to the heap of unwanted, cruel doctrines. Weaver represents a vocal proponent of this view while refining the Christus Victor model of the atonement.34 He essentially produces a fine-tuning of a refinement—the makeover of the old ransom-to-Satan view which goes back far into the early church and of which even Luther was accused.35 The focus of this doctrinal view is the victory of Christ over Satan in his work, especially his cross-work. Unique additions to this modern expression of Christus Victor come from interaction with pacifistic teaching as well as feminist and womanist theologies to ensure a more feminine or softer understanding that undercuts some of the harshness of male qualities.36 Even proponents, however, note that it is hard to reconcile such an approach to the actual teaching of the New Testament.37


Three strong teachings within fundamentalism have been declared above to be harsh: the second coming of Christ, the nature of God, and propitiation. The first two were declared to be harsh in the court of pop culture. The last one was rejected as harsh within a theologically liberal framework. Bauder is correct that fundamentalism possesses a doctrinal matrix and that this matrix cannot be simply pushed aside. Even the gospel has doctrinal components and is not just the historical events. This means that fundamentalists are stuck with the negative, harsh doctrines that have been asserted. They must believe that Jesus kills people when he returns, God can get angry and inflict pain, and that God’s wrath was a centerpiece of the atonement.

A response can certainly be made to each one of the complaints of harshness. God has prerogatives to control life and death that humans do not possess. Humans cannot simply view God as a superhuman and analyze him as if he were one of us. In the end, Jesus gave of himself graciously and freely and is not the

Atonement," The Mennonite Quarterly Review 77 (January 2003). This article may now be accessed at <https://www.goshen.edu/mqr/pastissues/jan03marshall.html>.

It is important to remember that not all professing Christians who reject propitiation are nonevangelical or liberal. Some are conservatives who hold to the governmental view of the atonement.

subject of some random torture that the Father chose to inflict. On and on the rejoinders could be made. Bible–believing Christians take some comfort in knowing that they are in harmony with Jesus’ teaching about the narrow way being preferred to the broad way. No doubt current culture would view that as a bit harsh as well.

In the case of these beliefs and perhaps many more, however, the fundamentalist clearly stands in a counter-cultural place. The benefit of such a counter-cultural position at this point is not intuitively obvious. Is the softness of the present time so locked in that fundamentalism with its negative teachings can never make a kind of comeback? To infer such a conclusion is premature. To shun everything harsh in a worldview is unrealistic. The real world we live in cannot live forever with the conclusion. It may take North American culture a long time to figure this out, but the reality of the need for harsh force in punishment occurs every day. Perhaps one day America will look more like the Middle East—Israel and Gaza. God forbid. At some point cultures are forced open to the thought that there is no love without justice. The balance that fundamentalism brings with its doctrines, even its harsh ones, gives reasonable answers on these points that a mystical culture may soon want to examine. The current culture’s certainty about uncertainty will eventually break down. Fundamentalists must be ready if God gives the moment. Right now fundamentalists are among the few representing the rational and certain side of the Christian faith.

Postmodern Culture Ironically Hands Christians Ammunition

Third, postmodernism in the current post-Christian context provides ammunition for its own demise which allows footholds for Bible Christians. There are a couple of directions this thought can travel. The first one is the openness to the metaphysical or supernatural. Has anyone noticed that miracles are on the table as a possibility in the current pagan culture? True modernists fought fundamentalism on this. To be sure, modernists and fundamentalists both believed in absolute truth for the most part,
although they could never agree where it was to be found. The miraculous, even among religious liberals, was downplayed at best. The mysticism of postmodernism, on the other hand, allows for a subjective acceptance of the supernatural. Modernists, who are still numerous in our culture, often play on a different chessboard than do fundamentalists. Many, not all, postmodernists may at least be on the same playing field in this regard. While it is not the same advantage as talking to an unbelieving Jewish person who may accept the Old Testament, it may allow more conversations to develop since the culture today is still extremely religious in nature.

Of more consequence, however, is the greatest weakness of the current culture, namely, its philosophical pluralism. Using Carson’s categories, no fundamentalist would deny that empirical pluralism is the state of affairs of North American culture today. Beyond that, this pluralistic condition at that level could be a cherished pluralism for fundamentalists if opportunities to evangelize are the focal point. Philosophical pluralism is something else altogether. In this kind of thinking and living, there is a great desire and push for all institutions in our society to be internally pluralistic in practice. This would stem from a belief that pluralism and relativism constitute the nature of reality.

Why is philosophical pluralism the current culture’s greatest weakness? It is self-defeating. This writer believes because of this the postmodern era will be shorter lived than the modernistic one, although predicting the future is a tricky business. Philosophical pluralism gives a platform to fundamental Christians to engage in dialog in the deepest, most meaningful ways with pluralists of our day. This gives an advantage to the Bible-believing worldview as it leaves pluralists with an unsettled mindset and wondering about their view.

An illustration of how this works is in order. Tom Krattenmaker, an editorialist for *USA Today*, regularly criticizes

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evangelical Christians in his columns. Recently he authored a book entitled *Onward Christians Athletes*. That work is a detailed analysis of evangelical ministries in the public sports world. Although Krattenmaker has an irenic spirit, his critique is largely negative, actually mourning the evangelical dominance in sports outreach in America. One example is that he asserts that the Fellowship of Christian Athletes should be the Fellowship of Religious Athletes instead to allow Jews, Hindus, and others to be a part. Krattenmaker asserts, “The challenge ... is to create a pluralistic environment in professional sports, where no one form of belief or nonbelief takes over, but where all are welcome, and all are free to act and speak in accordance with their creeds and beliefs, so long as they do not blatantly infringe on the rights of others.” Immediately, the thoughtful Christian wonders if all are not already free to voice their opinions and beliefs in the sports world. Where is the gag order? Suspicion is raised that the real issue is to silence evangelicals and not to promote the liberties of others.

Unfortunately, the conclusion to Krattenmaker’s book reinforces the worries of evangelicals, although he declares that he does not want to silence them in sports ministries and wants them to have a place at the table. Nevertheless, what he gives with the right hand he takes with the left:

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41 His most recent column in this vein is Tom Krattenmaker, “’Rock Star’ Pastors Lose Luster,” *USA Today*, August 3, 2014. The date here is when the article was posted on the newspaper’s website. This editorial is a critique of Mark Driscoll and scandals surrounding him and his ministry.


43 Ibid., 19.

44 Ibid., 207.
A word to you Christians in sports: The vision sketched above is not intended to silence you. If anything, your message will come through louder, and resonate more clearly and with far more listeners, when it is expressed through your ethical witness in addition to your get-Jesus evangelism. The non-evangelical rest of us will be more likely to relax our defenses and engage with you in an open, hospitable manner if you consistently lead with your hearts rather than a rigid theological proposition about Jesus, heaven, and hell that will inevitably exclude and alienate large numbers of us.45

Notice the aversion to harshness in his words, harshness he perceives in evangelicals. However, the real shocker to his statement is that, although he wants to give evangelicals a place at the table of sports ministries, he wants evangelicals to leave three things behind when they come to the table: Jesus, heaven, and hell. That is, he wants evangelicals not to bring Jesus and salvation issues to sports ministries. In short, he wants them to quit being evangelicals as they do their ministry!

This writer wrote a review article of Krattenmaker’s book and dialogued with him by email several times on the various issues he raised, an email exchange that Krattenmaker himself initiated to his credit.46 The critique challenged him relative to what was discussed above using Carson’s categories of pluralism. He noted that he embraced cherished pluralism, not philosophical pluralism. In this, he is mistaken. His comments about what evangelicals should leave behind in sports ministries betray his true sentiments. For his pluralism to include those who believe in absolute truth, he must change the expressions given by those who hold the absolutes. But this stance is exclusivism. It is not the stated inclusivism of a pluralist worldview. Such is the greatest weakness of our postmodern, post-Christian, pluralistic culture. It cannot and never will be able to make peace and place


for those who are not pluralistic. This means that in the real world it is impossible to live as a philosophical pluralist.\textsuperscript{47}

Can the fundamentalist take advantage of this situation? The answer is yes, once again. The greatest weakness of current culture as described above provides a platform for Christians in general and fundamentalists in particular to push back in a meaningful and reasoned way without being harsh in tone. Many pluralists are actually thoughtful people. Krattenmaker is one of those. He stated that he has some thinking to do. Some pluralists may eventually change their minds.\textsuperscript{48}

**CONCLUSION**

If the analysis above has any value, potential opportunity and encouragement for fundamentalists in the current post–Christian culture can be found in the historical lessons learned from the past, the counter–cultural attractiveness of the Christian lifestyle and teaching at certain points, and the self-defeating nature of postmodern pluralism. These ideas are not given as authoritative and sacrosanct. They must be critically evaluated and applied in reasonable ways as we engage unbelievers from within North American culture.

One more point is worth telling. In spite of the abuse of the meaning of the word *gospel* that surrounds Christendom, the opportunity exists that the gospel of eternal life is once again looking like good news instead of old news. This writer has been saying this for thirty years but is unsure whether he really believed it. What is different at this moment is the massive


\textsuperscript{48} Such a statement is not to dismiss the spiritual dimension of the work of the Spirit in speaking to men through the Word of God.
cultural change that is underway. There is little in it that reflects the Judeo–Christian worldview. One implication is that the depravity of man is somewhat or largely ignored, either at the individual or societal level. But any honest person must reflect on the fact that the optimism from the fall of the Soviet Union is gone along with any so–called peace dividends. The Middle East is stuck on a page that no one has ever been able to turn. The war on terror never goes away in spite of the efforts of politicians to minimize it. Americans wonder if one day we will encounter suicide bombers at malls and other public places. The world continues to be in disarray. Cultural changes in a direction against Christianity show no sign of living up to the challenge. The ugliness of the human race runs deeper than most know, since it is masked by the technological advances of the day. Some analysts are even predicting another Holocaust. When evil expresses itself, as it must, in major ways in culture, people in America have responded by going to church. This does not help when the church has a message without Christ and his gospel. However, it is an opportunity for fundamentalists. The only answer to the evil of the world, to the depravity of humans, is the pure gospel: the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for the sins of the world which must be received by personal faith. In a day of growing evil and a biblical illiteracy that is startling, it may finally take shape that the gospel is once again good news to those who need it. May we take as many with us into God’s coming kingdom as possible.

INTRODUCTION

Biblical theology is an exegetical, inductive, historical, and theological study of a book of the Bible or the biblical writings of a particular author of the Bible that analyzes the key words, themes, and motifs of a Bible book or author and arranges them in an outline that reflects the biblical author’s views of doctrine. Pauline theology would include a study of Paul’s epistles to determine his views on various doctrines (Pauline Christology, Pauline pneumatology). Pauline theology can also include a study of a particular book written by Paul to determine his doctrines. This article will focus on Paul’s ecclesiology of Ephesians. This article will explain how the word church is used in Ephesians. Then it will examine the Pauline metaphors and descriptions of the church in Ephesians: saints, the body of Christ, the fullness, one new man, citizens, the household of God, a holy temple, the whole family in heaven and earth, children, and the “bride of Christ.”

CHURCH

The apostle Paul used the word church (ἐκκλησία) in several different ways in his epistles. He used the word ἐκκλησία to refer to the local church (cf. 1 Cor 11:18; 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 28,
35) and Christians meeting in a house for worship (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2). Paul used the word *church* to describe Christians that met for worship in a particular city or geographical region. (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Rom 16:1; Col 4:16). Paul used the plural word *churches* to refer to a group of churches in a particular region (Gal 1:2, 22; 1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:4; 1 Cor 7:17; 11:16; 14:33,34; 16:1; 2 Cor 8:1, 18, 19, 23, 24; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Rom 16:4, 16). Paul used the expression “church of God” (Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Tim 3:5, 15). Paul also used the word *church* to refer to the visible, universal church: all Christians on the earth (1 Cor 12:28; Phil 3:6; Col 1:18, 24).

The universal church is made up of all Christians from Pentecost (Acts 2) until the Rapture (1 Thess 4:13–18). The word ἐκκλησία is used in Ephesians to refer to the universal church.

2 Paul uses the word church (ἐκκλησία) nine times in Ephesians. In each case Paul uses the word church to refer to the universal or catholic church.

Geisler writes, “Other than the early post–Pentecost church in Jerusalem, there never has been and never will be a truly catholic (universal) church on earth. Neither the Roman nor the Greek branch of Christendom is truly catholic; the only truly catholic church today is the spiritual body of Christ, which is all true believers in whatever local church or denomination. Never does the Bible use the word church to denote one visible ecclesiastical union that is the sole organization representing Christ on earth; the repeated use of the word churches reveals that only in a general, collective sense can we speak of the many self–governing, independent churches that are based on New Testament teaching as the ‘church’ on earth” (Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4 [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005], 55).

3 The term catholic means universal and should be distinguished from the Roman Catholic Church of today. In the New Testament adjectives are not placed before the word church. There are no references specifically to the universal church or local church. A study of the context where the word church is used indicates whether the
(1) Jesus has been given as head over all things to the church: “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22). God the Father placed all things under the authority of Jesus’ feet and gave Jesus to be the head (sovereign leader) over all things for the benefit of the church.⁴

(2) The manifold wisdom of God is made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places: “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10). God has revealed his wisdom by means of the very existence of His church to angels (cf. 1 Cor 2:6-8). The principalities and powers in the heavenly places refer to angels (elect and evil).

| word refers to the universal church (all Christians) or the local church (Christians in a particular locality). Early Christians used the term catholic to describe the worldwide nature of the church. The oldest document containing the term is a letter by Ignatius from the early second century which reads, “Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church” (Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrneans 8.2). The Roman Catholic Church of today rarely refers to itself as the Roman Catholic Church. It prefers to call itself the Catholic Church so as not to limit its claim to universal jurisdiction as the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church.

⁴ Clinton Arnold writes, “The fourth and final way that God has manifested his unsurpassed power in Christ is by making him the ruling authority over heaven and earth for the benefit of the church. This benefit to the church is what led Paul to set forth these four descriptions of the awesome power of God: they are illustrations of God’s incredible power for us who believe. Paul is praying that these believers will be able to apprehend the vastness of this power that is for their benefit” (Clinton Arnold, Ephesians: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 115).
(3) Glory should be given to God in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever: “To him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Eph 3:21). The New King James Version fails to see the two Greek prepositional phrases joined by “and” (αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). The translation should read “To Him (God the Father) be glory by the church and by Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.” Paul emphasized that glory is brought to God the Father by the church and also by Christ Jesus (cf. Rom 16:27; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11). God the Father elected and predestined some to be saved “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph 1:5). “Those who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:12). Christians have been sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption “to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:14).

(4) Christ is the head of the church: “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Eph 5:23). Christ has authority over the church as its head.5

(5) The church is subject to Christ: “Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph 5:24). The Greek verb ὑποτάσσεται translated “is subject” is a present indicative verb emphasizing that the church is to continually be under the authority of Jesus Christ.

(6) Christ loved the church by dying on the cross for the church: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the

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5 Wayne Grudem did a careful study of the word head (κεφαλὴ) in Greek literature and determined that the word implies a ruler or one who has authority over another and does not refer to source or origin. See Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of Kephale (“Head”): A Response to Recent Studies” in Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 425-68.
church and gave Himself for her” (Eph 5:25). Paul challenges Christian husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved his church. Christ demonstrated his agape love for his church by his sacrificial substitutional death for her on the cross (He gave himself for her).

(7) Christ sanctifies and cleanses his church by the washing of water by the word so he can present the church to himself as a glorious church: “That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). The presentation of the church will happen at the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:7). Christ will make his church holy (final sanctification) and clothe his church in fine linen, clean and bright (Rev 19:8).

(8) The Lord nourishes and cherishes the church as a person does his own body: “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church” (Eph 5:29). The word “nourish” (ἐκτρέφει) means to “provide food for.” The word “cherish” (θάλπει) means to “cherish, comfort.” Paul used the word to describe a mother’s tender love for her children (1 Thess 2:7).

(9) The relationship of a husband and a wife is to reflect the mystery relationship of Christ and his church: “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32). A mystery is a truth once hidden, but now revealed. The sacred secret that is now revealed in the NT is that Christian marriage between a husband and wife should reflect the union that exists spiritually between Christ and his bride—the church. This truth was not known in OT times since the church was not in existence.

6 BDAG, 311.

7 BDAG, 442.
SAINTS

Paul addressed his book of Ephesians “to the saints who are in Ephesus” (1:1; τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ]). The word saints in Ephesians refers to Christians who have been set apart from the world to Christ. The word saints refers to their position in Christ. The fact that Paul challenged the saints in Ephesus to live holy lives and rebukes them for various sins shows that they were not perfect in their practice (Eph 5:8–14). Saints are not super spiritual Christians who have been recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. All Christians are saints in that they have been positionally sanctified in Jesus.

Paul praised the Ephesians for their love for “all the saints” (1:15). The Ephesians did not just love the Christians in Ephesus, but they loved all Christians everywhere. Paul wanted the Ephesians to know the riches of the glory of Christ’s inheritance in the saints (1:18). God’s inheritance is located in the saints. All saints have been chosen by God (1:4), predestined (1:5), adopted (1:5), redeemed (1:7), forgiven of their sins (1:7), and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13). Paul wanted the Gentile Christians to know especially that they were fellow citizens with the saints (2:19). Paul wanted the Ephesians to comprehend “with all the saints” the dimensions of God’s love (3:18–19). It is

8 The Greek word ἁγίοι is defined as “holy ones” (BDAG, 11). The word is used by Paul to refer to angels (1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; Col 1:12) and to Christians (1 Cor 1:2; 6:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25; Phil 4:22; Col 1:4, 26; 1 Tim 5:10). “Qumran displays transition from association of the term for ‘saints’ with celestial beings to human beings, s. 1QS 5:6f; 8:5 and 8” (BDAG, 11).

9 Lincoln presents four possible interpretations for “saints” in Ephesians 2:19: (1) Israel, (2) Jewish Christians, (3) angels, and (4) all Christians. He concludes that “saints” refers to all Christians because it is used to refer to all Christians in all the other references in Ephesians. Lincoln believes that the σύν compounds refer to unity with the rest of the church (Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Church and Israel in Ephesians 2,” CBQ 49 (October 1987): 613–14). But the σύν compounds help to identify the saints as Jewish Christians.
inappropriate for fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness to be named among the Ephesian Christians “as is fitting for saints” (5:3). Saints should live a holy life by abstaining from sexual immorality.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Pauline Theology of the Body

Paul uses the term “body” (σῶμα) in several different ways in his epistles. He uses the word to refer to the physical human body. Paul uses the word “body” (σῶμα) to refer to the physical body of Christ that was nailed to the cross (Rom 7:4). The word body is also used as a metaphor in the Lord’s Supper to picture the physical body of Christ that was crucified (1 Cor 10:16; 11:24, 27, 29). Paul uses the word bodies to refer to heavenly and earthly bodies (1 Cor 15:40). Paul uses the word body (σῶμα) to refer to a seed structure of a plant (1 Cor 15:38).

Paul uses the word σῶμα to refer to the body of Christ, the church in 1 Corinthians: “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). The first verse where Paul uses the expression “body of Christ” is 1 Corinthians 12:27: “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” Likewise, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Rom 12:5).

Paul used the word body to refer to the universal church: “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may

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10 Galatians 6:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 5:3; 6:13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20; 7:4, 34; 9:27; 12:12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 13:3; 15:35, 37, 38, 44; 2 Corinthians 4:10; 5:6, 8, 10; 10:10; 12:2, 3; Romans 1:24; 4:19; 6:6, 12; 8:10, 11, 13, 23; 12:1, 4; Philippians 1:20; 3:21; Colossians 1:22; 2:11, 23.
have the preeminence” (Col 1:18). “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Col 1:24). “And not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God” (Col 2:19). “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body; and be thankful” (Col 3:15).

**The Body of Christ in Ephesians**

Paul uses the term σῶμα several times in Ephesians to refer to the body of Christ, the universal church. The universal church is described by Paul in Ephesians as “His body” (τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ; 1:23), “one body” (ἓν σῶμα; 4:4), “the body of Christ” (τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; 4:12), “the whole body” (πᾶν τὸ σῶμα; 4:16), “the body” (τοῦ σώματος; 4:16; 5:23), and “his body” (σώματος αὐτοῦ; 5:30).

The association of the universal church with his body is seen clearly in Ephesians 1:22–23; “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” The Greek feminine relative pronoun ἥτις translated “which” in Ephesians 1:23 refers back to the feminine word ἐκκλησία translated as “church” in Ephesians 1:22. The universal church belongs to Jesus as his body.

Paul emphasizes the importance of maintaining unity in the church in Ephesians 4:1–6. He lists seven major doctrines using the word “one.” Ephesians 4:4 says, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” The one body is a reference to the universal church that is associated with the Holy Spirit. The word “one” shows that Paul is not discussing local bodies of believers but the one universal church.

The only reference where the expression “the body of Christ” is found in Ephesians is Ephesians 4:12: “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying
of the body of Christ.” The ascended Christ gave the church gifted leaders to equip the saints for the work of ministry so that the body of Christ could be edified.

“The whole body” (the church) is joined to the head (Christ) and is held together by individual members who are described as “every joint” and “every part” in Ephesians 4:16:

From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul uses the words “joint” (ἀφης) and “part” (μέρους) to describe each Christian in the body of Christ.

Jesus Christ is the head of the church and the Savior of the body (Eph 5:23). The intimate connection between Christ and the church is seen as Paul describes Christians as being “members of His body” (μέλη ἐσμέν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ; Eph 5:30).

The Lord Jesus nourishes and cherishes believers because they are members of his body (Eph 5:29–30). Paul uses the word “members” (μέλη) to emphasize that the body of Christ is made up of different people. Paul tells Christians to put away lying and speak the truth “because we are members of one another” (ὅτι ἐσμὲν ἀλλήλων μέλη; Eph 4:25).

Best gives this analysis of how the phrase “the body of Christ” is used in Ephesians as compared to the other references in the New Testament:

There are however differences between how it is used in Ephesians and its earlier usage in 1 Corinthians and Romans; most of these differences Ephesians shares with Colossians. Before discussing them it should be noted that the differences do not of

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11 The Greek word ἁφή is defined as “ligament, lit. joint, connection” (BDAG, 155). The same word is used by Paul in Colossians 2:19; “and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God,” (emphasis added).
themselves prove non–Pauline authorship; authors regularly adapt their imagery to suit new situations and contexts. The main differences are: (a) A special position in the body is given to the head and it is equated with Christ. (b) The body is envisaged as growing (4.15f). (c) The body has cosmic connections (3:9f; 1.22f). (d) Stress on diversity among members is missing, though Christians are still regarded as related to one another in the body (4.25; 5.30). (e) Jewish and Gentile Christians are united in the body (2.16); this aspect is absent from Colossians and only vaguely present in 1 Cor 12.13 where the Jew/Gentile contrast is only one among a number of contrasting alternatives. (f) The relation between the church as body and the eucharist which is found in 1 Cor 10.16f does not appear in Ephesians.\(^{12}\)

**THE PERFECT MAN**

Jesus Christ gives gifted leaders to the church until it becomes doctrinally and functionally mature (4:13). The Greek word μέχρι translated “until” is grammatically related to the verb ἔδωκεν in verse 11 and sets a time limit for the giving of the gifted leaders to the church. The church will arrive unto the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. Unity of the faith is one goal. Unity in the knowledge of the Son of God is another goal. The term *knowledge* (ἐπιγνώσεως) refers to a full and experiential knowledge (Eph 1:17).

Today the church is divided over doctrine and lacks experiential knowledge of Christ. When Christ returns for his church at the Rapture, these goals will be accomplished and the church will experience true unity.

The church will also reach corporate spiritual maturity. The second preposition εἰς indicates this next goal. The “perfect man” (ἄνδρα τέλειον) is a description of the corporate church. The “perfect man” is analogous to the “one new man” of Ephesians 2:15.

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A third goal (the third preposition εἰς) is that the church “attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The church has not yet reached this level of spiritual maturity.

The purpose of Christ giving spiritually gifted men to the church is so that the church would no longer be children. The conjunction ἵνα (Eph 4:14) grammatically relates back to ἔδωκεν in Ephesians 4:11 and gives the purpose for Christ giving gifted leaders to the church. Gifted Christian leaders should equip Christians to do the work of ministry so that Christians will “no longer be children” (μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι).

The Greek word for “children” (νήπιοι) refers to spiritually immature children. As children, they were spiritually unstable and imbalanced. The Christians at Ephesus were like a ship at sea that was being tossed back and forth with no spiritual anchor (Eph 4:14). They were being carried about with every wind of doctrine. False teachers deceived and took advantage of them. The word for “trickery” (κυβείᾳ) refers to “dice playing” and to intentional fraud. Paul had warned the Ephesians elders of false teachers who would seek to deceive them (Acts 20:29–30). Apparently the Ephesians were in danger of being spiritually deceived.

The church will grow into Christ when Christians speak the truth to one another in love (Eph 4:15). The Greek word for

13 Paul rebukes the Corinthian Christians for being carnal babies in Christ. He wrote, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal” (1 Cor 3:1–3a). The Corinthian Christians were spiritually immature and living a life controlled by the sinful flesh. The writer to the Hebrews rebukes his readers for being spiritually immature. He wrote, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe” (Heb 5:12–13).

14 BDAG, 573.
“speaking the truth” (ἀληθεύοντες)\textsuperscript{15} emphasizes the importance of honesty and integrity in the lives of Christians. By speaking the truth in love Christians “grow up in all things into Him who is the head–Christ” (Eph 4:15). The word “grow” (αὐξήσωμεν) means “to become greater, grow increase.”\textsuperscript{16} Just as children need to grow up to become adults, so immature Christians also need to grow up spiritually to become mature Christians.

The church is the “whole body” that is joined to its head: Christ. The church grows as each individual member works together for the edification of the body (Eph 4:16). The whole body is joined (συναρμολογούμενον) and knit together (συμβιβαζόμενον) by what every joint supplies (διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας). Just as the physical body is held together by joints, sinews and ligaments, so the body of Christ is held together by Christians who minister to one another. The word “supplies” (ἐπιχορηγίας) refers to “assistance; support.”\textsuperscript{17} As the body works together the body grows and edifies itself in love. The middle voice of ποιεῖται is used to show the body promotes its own growth. The means (διὰ) of growth is by each joint supplying. The basis (κατ’) of growth is according to the working of each individual part. The goal (εἰς) of growth is that the church will edify itself in love. The means (ἐν) by which the church edifies itself is by demonstrating love.

**THE FULLNESS**

Paul describes the church as “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (1:23; τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου). Paul uses the word “fullness” four times in Ephesians (1:10, 23; 3:16; 4:10; 5:27). The word means “to be truthful; to tell the truth” (BDAG, 43). The only other use of the word in the New Testament is in Galatians 4:16: “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell the truth?”

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\textsuperscript{16} BDAG, 151.

\textsuperscript{17} BDAG, 387.
3:19; 4:13), twice in Colossians (1:19; 2:9), and six times in his other epistles (Rom 11:12, 25; 13:10; 15:29; 1 Cor 10:26; Gal 4:4). Does “fullness” in Ephesians 1:23 describe Christ, referred to by the pronoun “Him” (αὐτὸν) in Ephesians 1:22 or does it describe the church, called “his body” (τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ) in Ephesians 1:23?

Snodgrass believes that Christ is the fullness of God who fills all things. He writes,

The Old Testament provides the proper background for understanding “fullness.” God’s presence, his glory later referred to as his Shekinah, filled the tabernacle and temple, and the Spirit of God and the wisdom of God filled individuals. Fullness in other words, refers to God’s making his presence and power felt. Whereas in the Old Testament He filled the temple, now He fills Christ, and Christ in turn fills his own so that the church partakes of the divine fullness ... Given this Old Testament background and the other uses of fullness in Ephesians and Colossians, it seems unlikely that fullness refers to the church. Understanding the term in that way would give the church an elevated status that it has in no other letter (even though Ephesians does have an exalted view of the church; cf. 3:21). Fullness instead refers to Christ ... 1:23b is a further description of Christ and his relation to God. He is the fullness of God who fills all things. Christ is the place where God’s presence, power, salvation are known, and the church draws from this fullness (see also 4:15–16).18

One major problem with Christ being the fullness is the grammatical distance of “fullness” in Ephesians 1:23 to “Him” (Christ) found Ephesians 1:22. Second, “fullness” (τὸ πλήρωμα) is neuter and “Him” (αὐτὸν) is masculine. The grammar and syntax of Ephesians 1:22-23 are strong arguments against identifying “fullness” as Christ.

Arnold, Hoehner, and this author believe that the church is the fullness of Christ who fills all things. Arnold writes, “The fullness” (πλήρωμα) is in apposition to “the body” (σῶμα) and thus functions as a second description of the church.”\(^1\) Both words have the neuter definite article τὸ before them. Ephesians 4:10 supports this view as it refers to Christ who “ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” Hoehner views the “fullness” as a reference to the church:

In Col 1:19 and 2:9 it indicates God’s deity and in Eph 4:10 it refers to God’s gifts to the church. In Eph 3:19 Paul prays that all believers might be filled with God’s fullness. In these contexts, fullness seems to point to God’s moral excellence, perfection, and power. Particularly in 3:19 being filled with God’s fullness is to know the love of Christ. On the other hand, in the present context power is the center of the discussion, for God was demonstrating his power in that he gave Christ to the church as head over everything. The church, his body, is being filled with moral excellence and power of God by Christ who in turn is being filled with the moral excellence and power of God. The fullness is not the Gnostic concept of the complex spiritual world of the Godhead where there are emanations of aeons to enlighten humans about their reconciliation. Rather, it is the character, essence, and power of God that is filling the church.\(^2\)

In what sense is the church the fullness of Christ? Robinson takes πλήρωμα as active, πληρομένου as passive, and τὰ πᾶντα ἐν πᾶσιν as adverbial, giving the sense that the church is the completion of Christ in all respects.\(^3\) Ephesians 4:13 says that


\(^{21}\) J. Armitage Robinson, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 45.
the church is growing into the measure of the stature of the fullness (πληρώματος) of Christ.

Hoehner holds to the view that πλήρωμα is passive, πληρουμένου is passive and τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν is used adverbially giving the sense that the church is filled by Christ who is being filled by God entirely or in every way.\(^{22}\) This view makes it possible for Christ to be filled by God’s πλήρωμα as Paul taught in Colossians. Colossians 1:19 says, “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.” Colossians 2:9 says, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” God’s fullness which is filling Christ is filling the church. That’s why Paul could pray that Christ will settle down and be at home in their hearts and pray that the Ephesians would “be filled with all the fullness of God” (ἵνα πληρωθῇ eis πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ) (Eph 3:19).

Paul emphasized that Christ is the one who ascended in order to “fill all things” (Eph 4:10). Hoehner writes, “Christ’s filling of the church is alive and fresh. His power is new for every challenge and opportunity, for every hardship and triumph of believers, individually and collectively. This power is especially needed in struggles against evil powers known to the Ephesian believers.”\(^{23}\)

ONE NEW MAN

Jesus created “one new man” (ἕνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον) out of saved Jews and saved Gentiles through his death on the cross. The “one new man” of Ephesians 2:15 is a corporate concept.\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\) Hoehner, Ephesians, 298–99.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) The “new man” in Ephesians 2:15 should be distinguished from the “new man” in Ephesians 4:24. The “new man” in Ephesians 2:15 refers to the church, the corporate new man which is made up of saved Jews and saved Gentiles. The “new man” of Ephesians 4:24 refers to the individual Christian who is a new man in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Paul
The Greek word for “new” (καινὸν) refers to something “which is recent in contrast to something old; new.” The church came into existence on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Rader suggests some possible options for the meaning of the “one new man”: (1) Christ, (2) the church, (3) the Christian, and (4) all humanity. The new man cannot be Christ since Christ is the one who creates the new man (Eph 2:14–15). The new man cannot be the Christian because Paul is discussing in the context of Ephesians 2:11–22 the reconciliation of two groups of people: Jews and Gentiles in Christ. The new man cannot be all humanity since all humanity is not reconciled to God in the sense that all are saved. This leaves the only other option. The “one new man” refers to the universal church. Hoch gives this summary:

Gentiles in Christ now share with a remnant of Israel that now exists in “the new man,” the church (Rom 11:5). Christ and this remnant carry redemptive history forward and form the bridge between the old and new covenants. The remnant of Israel together with Gentiles forms the ecclesiological one new man. This new man is a new creation in Christ because the death of Christ was absolutely necessary before the transfer from “in Adam” to “in Christ” could be made, before the cancellation of the enmity maintained by the Mosaic law could be accomplished, and before the Holy Spirit became the new standard for the ethical new man,


25 BDAG, 497.

who walks “according to the Spirit” and “not according to the flesh.” The ecclesiological, anthropological and ethical structures of the new man are so intertwined for Paul that no separation of the three is possible. The three are interrelated and imply one another .... If one asks whether “the one new man” connotes continuity or discontinuity between Israel and the church or between the Testaments, the answer is that both are found in this text. There is a strong emphasis on newness, and consequently discontinuity. The new creation, new man, and new temple are discontinuous with Israel. But in terms of redemptive history there is continuity. The church is no accident or substitute for a failed kingdom program. Ephesians makes absolutely clear that God’s plan and purpose have always been centered in Christ. The past alienation of Gentiles was only a phase of redemptive history before “the fullness of time” arrived (Gal 4:4). The believing remnant of Israel within the church share in promises that have Old Testament roots. Through the covenants, Messiah, and promises of Israel, they experience promised blessings in which Gentiles also participate. Their new relationship resides in the new man, “the new temple” where God resides in a community of Jew–Gentile renewed by the Spirit and reconciled by Christ.27

The one new man is made up of saved Jews and saved Gentiles in this present dispensation of grace. This does not mean that God is finished with Israel as a nation. God still has a future program for Israel. But today Christ is building his one new man, the church. The church shares in the spiritual blessings associated with the new covenant and will reign with Christ in the future millennial kingdom.

CITIZENS

Paul told the Gentile Ephesians that before they knew Christ they were “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel” (2:12; ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραήλ). Gentiles were outside the theocratic kingdom of Israel. Because of Christ’s work on the cross saved Gentiles “are no longer strangers and foreigners” (2:19; οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι). Before the church was created, Israel was God’s chosen nation and Gentiles were foreigners. Now in Christ, Gentile Christians are “fellow citizens with the saints,” (συμπολῖται τῶν ἁγίων). The “saints” in this verse refer specifically to Jewish saints who are also citizens and members of the church. Christians have their citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20).

Replacement theology teaches that the church has replaced Israel as God’s chosen people and that God no longer has a future plan for the nation of Israel. Abbott argues for a replacement theology: “The clear reference to the πολιτεία of Israel shows decisively that the ἁγίοι are those who constitute the people of God. Such formerly had been the Jews, but now are all Christians. These are now the Israel of God .... The ἁγίοι then

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28 Paul, however, cannot be arguing for a Gentile incorporation into Israel similar to Jewish proselytizing. Paul never writes of Gentiles as “in Israel” in any of his letters. The key to the sense in which Gentiles are made near to Israel is the preposition συν. Paul uses six συν compounds to express the relationship of Gentiles to Jews/Israel in these two chapters: συμπολῖται, ‘fellow citizens’ (2:19); συναρμολογουμένη, ‘joined together’ (2:21); συνοικοδομεῖσθε, ‘built together’ (2:22); σύγκληρονόμα, ‘heirs together’ (3:6); σύσσωμα, ‘members together of one body’ (3:6); and συμμέτοχα, ‘sharers together’ (3:6). The Gentiles are brought near to Israel in Christ to share with Israel in its covenants, promise, hope and God. They do not become Israel; they share with Israel (Hoch, “New Man in Ephesians 2,” in Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church, 113). Paul is not saying that saved Gentiles share with Israel as a nation, but with saved Jews who are now members of the church.
are not the Jews, nor specially the patriarchs or Old Testament saints.”

A variation of this idea is that true Israel has always been the church. Justin Martyr described the church as “the true Israelitic race.” Clowney writes, “In the history of revelation, the Old Testament people of God become the church of the Messiah.” Clowney believes that the church was renewed at Pentecost and is the “new and true Israel in Christ”

Grudem writes, “The church has become the true Israel of God and will receive all the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament.”

Paul gives the plan of God for the salvation of Jews and the nation of Israel in the book of Romans. God is not finished with Israel as a nation. Paul wishes that he could be accursed for his countrymen, the Israelites (Rom 9:4). Paul writes that “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (Rom 9:6). The nation of Israel is a chosen nation by God, but that does not mean that every Jew is elect. Paul prayed for the nation of Israel to be saved (Rom 10:1). Paul asks, “Has God cast away His people?” He answered “Certainly not. For I also am an Israelite” (Rom 11:1).

Even when Paul became a Christian, he did not cease to be a Jew. A person does not lose his nationality (ethnic group status) as a result of becoming a Christian. There are Gentile Christians and there are Jewish Christians. Paul writes, “Israel has not

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30 Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 135.6.788.


32 Ibid., 163.

obtained what it seeks, but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Rom 11:7). Within the nation of Israel there are elect (saved Jews) and the rest (unsaved Jews). The elect Jews have obtained the righteousness of God through faith. After the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, then “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). These verses from Paul’s other epistles are consistent with his teaching in Ephesians. Gentile Christians are fellow citizens with the Jewish saints (Eph 2:19). Gentile Christians are “fellow heirs” with the Jewish Christians (Eph 3:6). Nowhere in Ephesians does Paul say that God no longer has a future plan for the nation of Israel.

Dispensationalists distinguish between Israel and the church. Israel is a nation of saved and unsaved Jews and a political entity. The church is made up of saved Jews and saved Gentiles from many nations. Israel existed for hundreds of years prior to the coming of Christ. The church came into existence after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and on the day of Pentecost (Eph 1:20–23; Acts 2).

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

Paul told the Ephesians that they were “no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household” (2:19; οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ).

34 “As we mentioned in our study, the Gentiles are designated as the ‘members of the household of God.’ To be sure, the designation was employed first and foremost to forge a new identity for the Gentiles who were excluded by the Jews. The designation thus lays bare first and foremost the idea of an inclusive household. We may also note that the author of Ephesians has used other οἰκος words to reinforce the identity of the Gentiles and the community–body to which they belong. Given the frequency and pervasiveness of the household language in Ephesians, it is not altogether surprising to ask whether he also intends his ‘household code,’ in which various roles were given according to one’s place in the οἰκος to be read primarily within the framework of God’s household, which is marked by its inclusiveness and oneness. Since the language of God’s household is brought into the picture when the author addresses issues related to an alienated
The contrast between strangers and aliens and God’s household shows that Paul is emphasizing a real sense of belonging in the church. The possessive genitive το ῦ θεοῦ shows that the church belongs to God. Christians are brothers and sisters in the family of God. Paul used the word “household” to refer to members of a physical family in 1 Timothy 5:8: “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Paul used the expression “household of faith” to refer to the universal church in Galatians 6:10: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

Hoehner believes that the “household of God” refers to believers of all ages and is not specifically a reference to the church. He writes, “Believing Gentiles together with believing Jews have become fellow citizens with the saints of all ages, even those before the formation of Israel. Thus, the concept of God’s household includes the redeemed who had lived before God singled out Israel as a nation.”

Humanity and in particular when he reinforces the oneness of the people of God (vv.19–22), it will not be out of step to ask whether the ‘code’ of household duties in 5.21–6:9 may well be a stretched out discussion about the reintegration of peoples of different social pedigrees, roles and responsibilities in the community of God, and whether the oneness of God’s household on earth is part of God’s wider ‘economics.’” (Tet–Lim Yee, Jews, Gentiles and Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul’s Jewish Identity and Ephesians [Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2005], 224–26). See chapter seven of this dissertation for a detailed study of the household code in Ephesians.

A HOLY TEMPLE

In Israel’s past the glory of God was revealed in the tabernacle and temple. Paul compares the church to a holy temple in Ephesians 2:20–22: “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” The Ephesians were familiar with the temple of Artemis in Ephesus. But Paul told the Ephesian Christians that they were part of a greater temple: a holy temple, the universal church. Paul uses the metaphor of a building to describe the church in Ephesians 2:20–22. This is no ordinary building. It is described as “the whole building” (Eph 2:21a), “a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:21b), and “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).

36 The Shekinah glory cloud (a symbol of God’s presence) appeared in the tabernacle in the days of Moses (Exod 40:34-38). The Shekinah glory cloud appeared again in the temple of Solomon (1 Kgs 8:10-11). But Israel and her kings sinned against God. Ezekiel recorded how the Glory left Israel (1 Kgs 8:11; Ezek 10:18–19). Jesus came to the second temple (Mal 3:1; John 1:14). Jesus made it clear during his ministry on earth that Israel and the temple in Jerusalem had not functioned according to its God intended design. Twice Jesus cleansed the temple by overturning the tables of those who exchanged money: once at the beginning of his ministry (John 2:13–22) and once at the end of his ministry during the final Passion week (Matt 21:12–16; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48). Jesus even predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. When the disciples tried to impress upon him the buildings of the temple “Jesus said to them, ‘Do you see all these things? Assuredly I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’” (Matt 24:2; cf. Mark 13:1–2).

Paul writes of the growth of the temple: “In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:21–22). The church as a building is “being fitted together” (συναρμολογομενη). The building is growing into a holy temple in the Lord (αὔξει εἰς ναόν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ). F. F. Bruce writes, “Biological language is used of building just as architectural language is used of body in Ephesians 4:12–16.” The word ναός is defined as “a place or structure specifically associated with or set apart for a deity, who is frequently perceived to be using it as a dwelling, temple.” The saved Gentiles and saved Jews are being built together in the holy temple. The word “being built together” (συνοικοδομεῖσθε) was an architectural term. Just as the walls and the roof are put together to form a building, so God is building Christians into his holy temple. The building is growing into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:22).

38 The Greek word means “to join together so as to form a coherent unity; fit or join together” (BDAG, 966). The word is used to describe the church as a building (Eph 2:21) and as a body (Eph 4:16). “Once the stones for a building had been shaped, bronze dowels and dowel holes were prepared, the dowels were fixed in place with molten lead, and the stones raised one upon the other, each held firmly in place by the dowel. Masons of that time had a word, harmologeo, that summed up this whole process. Paul uses a compound in Eph 2:21 and 4:16, speaking of the ‘fitting together’ of all that went into the construction of the temple of God, but he has turned it into a compound to highlight the extraordinary integration into this building of such heterogeneous ‘materials’ as the Jews and the Gentiles” (Williams, Paul’s Metaphors, 18).

39 F. F. Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 430

40 BDAG, 665.
THE MYSTERY

Paul used the Greek word μυστήριον twenty–one times in his epistles. The word mystery is used several times in Ephesians. The mystery was made known to Christians (Eph 1:9). The mystery was made known to Paul by revelation (Eph 3:3). Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand his knowledge in “the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4). The mystery is “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Eph 3:6). The mystery is great and concerns Christ and the church (Eph 5:32). In Ephesians 3 Paul emphasizes the church as the mystery that was revealed and proclaimed.

The mystery is that saved Gentiles are co–heirs, co–members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ with saved Jews (Eph 3:6). Saved Gentiles are co-heirs (συγκληρονόμα) with saved Jews. They are members of the

41 The mystery of lawlessness is that the tendency to break God’s moral laws is prevalent in society and is being restrained by the Spirit of God in the church (2 Thess 2:7). The mystery of the Rapture is that Jesus Christ will come back for the church before the seven year tribulation period begins and some Christians will not die (1 Cor 15:51–57). The mystery of Israel’s partial blindness is that right now most Jews do not believe in their Messiah Jesus. This has happened until the complete number of elect Gentiles have come to faith in Jesus as Messiah (Rom 11:25). The mystery of the indwelling Christ is that Jesus Christ lives inside each Christian since as God He is omnipresent (Col 1:27). The mystery of godliness is that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Tim 3:16).

42 The word συγκληρονόμα means “inheriting together with, co-heir” (BDAG, 952). Paul wrote, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom 8:16–17). The Greek word κληρονόμος is used by Paul of believers in Romans 8:16–17; Galatians 3:29; 4:7; Titus 3:7. Abraham is called “heir of the world” (Rom 4:13). Christians belong to Christ and are Abraham’s seed and
same body: the body of Christ (the universal church). Saved Gentiles are also partakers of the promise in Christ. The promise probably refers to the Holy Spirit, who is referred to as the Holy Spirit of promise (cf. Eph 1:13). Gentile believers are heirs according to promise (Gal 3:29). The mystery is that saved Jews and saved Gentiles are on equal footing in the church.

The church then is partaker of the spiritual blessings of the new covenant which include forgiveness of sins and the indwelling Holy Spirit. The church does not and cannot fulfill the new covenant. The new covenant made with Israel will be fulfilled in its entirety when the Lord Jesus Christ returns at this second coming and establishes his kingdom on this earth (cf. Jer 31).

Gentile Christians now are co-heirs with Jewish Christians in the church. Together they will inherit the kingdom of Christ and God. They will reign with Jesus Christ on the earth (Luke 19:17; Rev 2:21).

**THE WHOLE FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND EARTH**

Paul bowed his knees to the father of the Lord Jesus Christ “from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph 3:15).

Who is “the whole family in heaven and earth” (πᾶσα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς)? The word *family* (πατριὰ) is used in the LXX to refer to a human family led by a father (Exod 12:3; 1 Chr 23:11). The word is also used in the LXX to refer to a tribe or clan with a human father (Exod 6:17, 19; Num 2:34; 4:22). The word occurs three times in the NT (Luke 2:4; Acts 3:25; Eph 3:15). Luke 2:4 says that Joseph was of the family of as a result they are heirs: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29). See my master’s thesis which explains Galatians 3:29 in its context (Gary Robert Gromacki, “A Critique of the Use of Galatians 3 in the Theological Systems of A. Pieters, D. Fuller, and A. Hoekema” [Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984]).
David. The word is used in the plural in Acts 3:25 and again refers to a human family. Luke records Peter’s message where he quotes from Genesis 12:3: “And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Acts 3:25).

Concerning the adjective “whole” (πᾶσα) Hoehner writes, “The anarthrous adjective πᾶσα could be translated ‘all’ or ‘whole’ family (AV, NIV), as in 2:21, but in this phrase it seems more appropriate to accept the normal grammatical usage meaning ‘every’ family (RV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NEB, TEV, JB, NJB, NRSV).” Hoehner believes that “the whole family in heaven and earth” refers to human families and angels in Ephesians 3:15:

The present tense of the verb would seem to indicate that God is still naming every family because he is still creating them. Thus, every family, whether in heaven or on the earth, has its origin in God as creator. Because of the context, some restrict the ‘family’ only to the redeemed, and those of the family in heaven may refer to departed Christians. However, in keeping with the preceding context (v.10), it more likely has reference to angelic beings. Furthermore, God is called the Father of spirits (Heb 12:9) and Father of lights (Jas 1:17), which probably have reference to the angelic realm. This concept of heaven and earth is similar to Eph 1:10 where it states that Christ will head up all things in heaven and on earth. In the present context the heavenly families are linked to the earthly families in their common dependence on the Father.

There are several problems with Hoehner’s argument. First, technically angels are not a “family” in the same sense that humans are a family. Each angel was directly created by God. Angels do not procreate and produce other angels. There is no Scripture that says that angels are a family. Angels are classified into different groups: cherubim and seraphim.

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43 Hoehner, Ephesians, 475.

44 Ibid.
Second, Paul states in Ephesians 2:18–19 that Gentiles and Jews both have access to the Father and are members of “the household of God.” The focus in the context of Ephesians 2 is on saved Gentiles and saved Gentiles and not on angels.

Third, in biblical theology, it is important to consider how the word is used in the book by the author. If Paul used the word πᾶσα to refer to the “whole” building in Ephesians 2:21, then he probably used the word in Ephesians 3:15 to refer to the “whole” family.

Finally, the word πατριὰ is not used in the NT to refer to angels. The whole family in heaven and earth must be a reference either to the universal church or to all the redeemed people of all time. Only saved people are members of the family of God. Christians who have died are part of the whole family who live in heaven. Christians who are alive are part of the whole family who live on earth. The immediate context (3:14, 16–19) favors the view that the whole family in heaven and earth refers to the universal church.

CHILDREN AND CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Paul told the Ephesians to be “imitators of God as dear children” (Eph 5:1). He also commanded them to “walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8). The word children (τέκνα) reflects a spiritual family relationship between Christians and God. Paul describes Christians (the church) as “dear children” and “children of light.” As children in God’s family, Christians are loved by God and they are characterized by light (a metaphor for holiness). Just as children imitate their parents so Paul told the Ephesian Christians to be imitators of God. Since the Christians are light in the Lord, they should walk as children of light (Eph 5:8).45 One way they can imitate God is to forgive others (Eph 4:32).

45 Before they were dear children and children of light they were by nature “children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). Now that they have a new identity they are to live like God and walk in the light. Before they were light in the Lord, they were once darkness (Eph 5:8). Paul
THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Though the church is not specifically called the “bride of Christ” in Ephesians 5:22–33, the analogy is made between a husband and wife and Christ and his church. This analogy shows that the church is the bride of Christ.

Marriage is an institution created by God. It is a covenant agreement between a man and a woman (Mal 2:14). God said that it was not good for man to be alone. God made a helper fit for him (Gen 2:18). God created the woman from one of man's ribs and brought her to the man (Gen 2:22). The first marriage was the marriage of Adam and Eve. Other marriages in the Bible include: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah, Jacob and Rachel. In the Song of Solomon a wedding is described. The relationship between God and Israel is described as a marriage (Isa 54:5–8; Jer 2:1–3; 3:14; 31:31–32; Ezek 23; Hos 2:19–20). Jesus sanctioned marriage by his attendance at the marriage of Cana in Galilee where he performed his first miracle of turning water into wine (John 2:1–11). Jesus condemned divorce since God has joined a husband and his wife (Matt 19:6; Mark 10:9).

Jewish Wedding Customs

Betrothal or engagement is a promise of marriage made some time before the wedding. Rebecca was promised to Isaac in Mesopotamia, but the wedding of Rebecca and Isaac took place in Canaan (Gen 24:67). Jacob worked as a shepherd and waited seven years before his marriage to Leah. He then worked another seven years for Rachel (Gen 29:15–30). Leah and Rachel complained that their father sold them to Jacob (Gen 31:15). The mohar was a sum of money which the groom was bound to pay to the girl’s father. The word occurs three times in the Bible (Gen 34:12; Exod 22:16; 1 Sam 18:25). The amount of money emphasizes their change in identity and encourages them to walk or live a distinctive lifestyle as a result.
depended upon the girl’s father and the social standing of the family. The law on the fulfillment of vows valued a woman at thirty shekels, and a girl under twenty years of age at ten shekels (Lev 27:4–5). The *mohar* was a compensation given to the family. Merab was promised to David, but when the time came she was given to another man (1 Sam 18:17–19).

Michal was promised to David on a payment of a hundred foreskins from the Philistines which David brought before the time had passed (1 Sam 18:25–27). Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant during the betrothal period. He was going to divorce Mary privately but the angel of the Lord told him to take Mary as his wife (Matt 1).

Gifts given by the groom on the occasion of the wedding are different from the *mohar* (Gen 34:12). These presents were given to the girl and to her family as a reward for her accepting the proposal of marriage. As soon as Rebecca had agreed to marry Isaac, Abraham’s servant brought out jewels and dresses for her and rich presents for her father and mother (Gen 24:53). In Israel, parents might give presents to their daughter at her wedding (Gen 24:59; 29:24, 29). A piece of land was given by a bride’s parents after the wedding (Josh 15:19).

The *chuppa* or wedding ceremony followed the betrothal. The elaborately dressed bride was escorted to meet the groom (Isa 61:10). It was a time for music and laughter. The Jewish groom and his friends left his home and traveled to the home of his bride. The bride wore a veil (perhaps a symbol of her virginity) which shielded her identity until the ceremony was completed (Gen 29:23–25). Maidens lit their lamps and joined the procession (Matt 25:1–13). Jesus admonished them to be prepared lest they miss the feast. The husband and wife would enter the bedroom and consummate their union on their wedding night.

After the wedding ceremony, there was a celebration and a marriage feast. At the wedding in Cana, guests were invited, and feast which included wine was served at the wedding celebration (John 2:1–12). It was against custom to mourn or fast on the day of the wedding (Matt 9:15). Music and dancing
were often a part of the feast (Jer 7:34). Gifts were given (1 Kgs 9:16) and special wedding songs were sung (Ps 45; 78:63). Joy was the evident emotion of the bride and groom (Jer 16:9).

Jesus as the Groom
and the Church as his Bride

John the Baptist claimed to be a friend of the bridegroom and he called Jesus a bridegroom. He said,

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:29–30)

The disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees asked Jesus why they fasted and his disciples did not. Jesus told them,

Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. (Mark 2:19–20; cf. Matt 9:14–15; Luke 5:33–35)

Jesus told the parable of the wedding feast where he compared the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast (Matt 22:1–14). A king arranged a marriage for his son. He sent his servants out to call those who had already been invited to the wedding, but they refused to come. He sent out other invitations but they were refused as the invitees went their own way to do their own business. Some of the invitees seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king became angry and sent his armies to destroy the murderers and burn their city. Then he sent his servants into the highways to invite as many as they could find to the wedding. The wedding hall was then filled with guests. This parable references the first coming of Christ. A king (God the Father) arranged a wedding for his son (Jesus Christ). The servants (the disciples) were sent to invite guests to the
wedding. Many Jews (including the Jewish rulers of Jesus’ day) were invited to wedding feast but they refused. As a result God judged the Jews with the destruction of Jerusalem (their city) in A. D. 70 by the Romans. Invitations to the kingdom are now being extended to all in the highways by God’s servants.

Jesus came the first time and paid the purchase price for his Bride (the church) by his death on the cross (Eph 5:25). After his death and resurrection Jesus ascended into heaven. Jesus told his disciples in John 14:2, “I go to prepare a place for you.” Just as the groom would go to his father’s house to prepare a place for his bride prior to the wedding feast, so Jesus has gone to the Father’s house in heaven to prepare a place for his bride, the church. Jesus promised his disciples in the upper room that he would return for them. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

During the time when the groom and bride were apart, the bride was to prepare herself for her wedding day. Paul emphasizes the importance of the bride living a holy life in 2 Corinthians 11:2: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”

The groom would secretly come and surprise his bride and there would be a wedding. At the rapture of the church, Jesus will return for his bride, the church (1 Thess 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:51–58). He will take his bride to heaven to be with him. Revelation 19:7–8 describes the marriage of the Lamb, Jesus Christ:

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

At the end of the tribulation period the Lord Jesus Christ will return with his bride to earth to establish his kingdom on the earth. This is called “the marriage supper of the Lamb.” “Then he said to me, ‘Write, Blessed are those who are called to the
marriage supper of the Lamb!’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’” (Rev 19:9).

Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in his Olivet Discourse (Matt 25:1–13). He compared the kingdom of heaven to ten virgins who took their lamps to meet the ridegroom. Five virgins were wise as they took enough oil for their lamps. They were prepared when the groom came. Five virgins were foolish as they did not have enough oil for their lamps and were unprepared for the coming of the groom. When the groom came the door was shut and they were left out of the wedding feast. Jesus compared this story to his second coming. At his second coming to earth, those who are wise (the saved tribulation saints) will enter the wedding feast, but those who are foolish (the unsaved) will not enter and enjoy the kingdom.

The NT ends with a wedding invitation: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17). The NT also ends with a promise of Christ’s soon return (Rev 22:12, 20).

**Christ and His Bride**

**the Church in Ephesians 5**

The relationship between a husband and a wife is compared to the relationship of Christ and His church in Ephesians 5:23–24: “For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”

The church is to be subject (ὑποτάσσεται) to Christ as wives are to their own husbands. Paul wrote that husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her (Eph 5:25). Jesus demonstrated his love for the church by giving himself (dying on the cross for his church). The purpose (ἵνα) for Christ sacrificially loving the church was in order that he might bring her to a state of complete holiness (Eph 5:26–27). The purpose (ἵνα) of Christ giving himself up for
her was so that he might sanctify her. The word *sanctify* (ἁγιάσῃ) means to set apart. Christ has set apart the church to be his holy Bride. The means of making her holy is by cleansing her by the washing with water through the word of God. The cleansing (καθαρίσας) does not refer to water baptism, to but the sanctification process.

Paul writes that Christ loved and gave himself for the church so “that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). The purpose (ἵνα) of the cleansing is so that Christ might present the church to himself a glorious church. This will happen at the marriage of the Lamb (Rev.19:7). Jesus will give Christians new glorified bodies. He will also clothe Christians in fine linen, clean and bright (Rev.19:8). John says that the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. So in a sense Christians are now preparing the wedding clothes that they will wear at the marriage of the Lamb.

The Great Mystery

“This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32).

The word *mystery* refers to something hidden by God which humans cannot figure out by themselves but is revealed by God for all believers to understand. What is the “great mystery”? Lincoln thinks that the mystery of Ephesians 5:32 is just a different aspect of the mystery mentioned in Ephesians 2:11–3:13. But the union of Christ and the church is not the same as the union of saved Jews and saved Gentiles in the church in Ephesians 2:11–3:13.

Stott confuses the concept of mystery in the same way. He writes,

It is appropriate for him to do so because a “mystery” is a revealed truth, and the profound “mystery” here, namely the church’s union with Christ, is closely akin to that of Jewish–Gentile unity in the body of Christ, which had been revealed to him and of which he has written in 3:1–6. He thus sees the marriage relationship as a
beautiful model of the church’s union in and with Christ. When applied to Christ and his church, the “one flesh” is identical with the “one new man” of 2:15.\textsuperscript{46}

The mystery is the relationship between human marriage and the relationship between Christ and his church. Marriage was revealed in Genesis 2 as an institution of God. The mystery is the NT truth that the relationship between a husband and a wife is to be like the relationship between Christ and his church.

**CONCLUSION**

One major theme in the biblical theology of Ephesians is ecclesiology. Using different metaphors, Paul describes the identity and function of the universal church. The church is to walk in holiness as saints. The members of the body of Christ should work together in unity and use their gifts to serve and build up the body. The church should be filled (controlled) by Christ who fills the church as his fullness. Saved Jews and saved Gentiles are reconciled in the one new man and should work at displaying unity in a racially divided world. The Holy Spirit indwells the universal church as the church is a holy temple and dwelling of God. The church was not revealed in the OT, but as a mystery it is revealed in the NT. Christians are no longer strangers and foreigners. They are fellow citizens with the saints in God’s kingdom and they are members of the family of God. Christians are children in God’s family and should imitate God. As the bride of Christ, the church should submit to the authority of Christ, her husband.

\textsuperscript{46} John Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 231. The problem with Stott’s view is that the new man refers to the union of saved Jews and saved Gentiles in Christ. The one flesh in Ephesians 5:31 refers to the physical union of husband and wife which Paul then uses as a picture of the union of Christ and the church in Ephesians 5:32.
Ancient Corinth, Prostitution, and 1 Corinthians 5–7

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INTRODUCTION

A simple surface reading of the book of 1 Corinthians makes it manifestly clear that the church of Corinth was a far cry from a model first-century church. The church of Corinth is infamous for its many problems, problems that demanded more of Paul's attention and time than most other early churches did. Paul spent a great deal of time both seeking to address these problems in I Corinthians: divisions (1 Cor 1:10–17), lawsuits among believers (6:1–8), abuse of Christian liberty (8:9–12), abuse of the Lord's Supper (11:20–22, 27–30), abuse of the spiritual gift of tongues (14:18–23), and disorder in the worship service (14:26–40). However, there is one subject matter that was intensely problematic and for which the city was notoriously known. This was the issue of "immorality" (πορνεία) (1 Cor 5:1–12; 6:9–11; 6:12–20; 7:1–9; 10:6–8; 2 Cor 2:5–11; 12:20–21).

There is no question that sexual sin was a problem in Corinth during the Greek era. However, there is scholarly debate regarding the temple of Aphrodite in the first century, the presence or absence of temple prostitutes, and whether the reputation of Greek Corinth should be applied to the Roman era as well. This article will attempt to address these issues, as well as any implications they may have on the passages in 1 Corinthians dealing with the issue of πορνεία.

To answer the above concerns, one must begin by studying the history and background of the city of Corinth. This article will examine the founding, development, and destruction of Corinth during the Greek era. It will then examine the Roman
era. Extant writings, archaeological sites, and archaeological artifacts will be the primary evidence used to establish the history and development of this city.¹ A thesis will be proposed concerning the operation, or lack thereof, regarding the temple of Aphrodite. A brief exposition will be done on select passages in 1 Corinthians dealing with the issue of porneiva.

**ANCIENT CORINTH IN LIGHT OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND EXTANT WRITINGS**

The city of Corinth has a long and storied past, much of which was not uncovered until recently. Excavations of ancient Corinth did not become possible until 1858.² W. Dörpfel A. Skias was the first to excavate in the seasons of 1886, 1892, and 1906. In 1896, the Greek government authorized the American School of Classical Studies to begin evacuations. Since that time, to the present, excavations continue and new discoveries are consistently found.³

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² A massive earthquake struck ancient Corinth in 1858. Those who survived relocated and rebuilt a new city, just a few miles to the northeast. It has been since only then that excavations became possible.

Archaeological discoveries provide evidence that Corinth was probably one of the first regions of Greece to be inhabited. However, it was not until the eighth century B.C. that it became an important city for military and commercial reasons. It became a significant commercial city because it was located on an isthmus, connecting the Peloponnese Peninsula to the rest of Greece. Due to its superb location, trade routes going north and south went through this city. Strabo indicates that the city of Corinth was “opulent” due to the required taxes levied on those who used these ports. Corinth was also only 1.5 miles from Lechaeum’s port and approximately seven miles from the Saronic Gulf. This resulted in its being heavily trafficked by trade going east and west as well. The Diolkos road was built to aid this trade route. Murphy–O’Connor dates this road to the sixth century BC. This important road was in use all the way into the ninth century AD. It was 3.7 miles long, and ran from the Saronic Gulf to the Gulf of Corinth. This road was used to avoid the dangers of sailing around the peninsula. Strabo speaks of this, “It was a desirable thing for the merchants coming from Asia, and from Italy, to discharge ... at Corinth.... ‘For goods exported from Peloponnesus’ or imported by land, a toll was paid to those who

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4 O’Connor claims archaeological discoveries provided evidence that the city was inhabited as early as the sixth millennium BC (Murphy–O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 33).


8 Ibid., 1135.
had the keys of the country.” The ships at Corinth and Saronic would unload and haul their cargo on the Diolkos road onto another ship waiting for it at the corresponding port. During the sixth century BC, the Acrocorinth, standing 1,886 feet above the city proper, was also fortified. It was at this time that the Greek city-state reached its zenith.

During the Greek era of Corinth’s ancient history, the city was also known for its growing cult worship. Archaeological remains attest to the many pagan temples being established in the seventh and eighth centuries BC. Locations of worship have been identified for Demeter, Kore, Hera, Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, and possibly a local nymph, all dated before the end of the seventh century. Four more worship centers were discovered and assigned to the sixth century: Asklepieion, a second site to Zeus; Dinsomoor; and Kokkinovrysi. There are other indicators that worship in Corinth may have also surrounded Poseidon,

9 Strabo, Geography 8.6.20.


12 Pausanias’ writings helped to identify the location where Apollo was worshipped: “As you go along another road from the market-place, which leads to Sicyon, you can see on the right of the road a temple and bronze image of Apollo” (Pausanias, Description of Greece 2.3.6, trans. and ed. Paul Halsall [Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P 1903]). All further references are to this translation.


14 Ibid., 253.
Amphitrite, Pan, Isis, Sarapis, and Artemis Korithos. Of course, the most important of all the pagan deities being worshipped in Corinth is that of Aphrodite. The temple of Aphrodite was located atop of the Acrocorinth. This temple was possibly established as early as the eleventh or tenth century BC, but certainly by the eighth.

Regarding the immorality linked with the worship of Aphrodite, Strabo’s statement has caused great debate:

The temple of Venus at Corinth was so rich, that it had more than a thousand women consecrated to the service of the goddess, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated as offerings to the goddess. The city was frequented and enriched by the multitudes who resorted thither on account of these women.

Some scholars have taken Strabo’s statement at face value. While others say this statement of Strabo’s is erroneous, hardly

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15 Ibid., 251–54.

16 In the fifth century BC, Euripides already refers to the Acrocorinth as Aphrodite’s “sacred hill and habitation” (Strabo, Geography 8.6.21).

17 Pottery shards have been discovered that might push back the dating to the early Geometric or even Protogeometric period (Bookidis, “Sanctuaries of Corinth,” 248).

18 Strabo, Geography 8.6.20.


credible, exaggerated, and completely false. O’Connor is often cited as proving Strabo wrong, using the argument that “there was never any temple of Aphrodite in Corinth capable of containing that number.” In the Lexham Bible Dictionary (LBD), Williams makes a surprising statement that Strabo was “thoroughly disproven,” but references only O’Connor’s statement above as proof. However, it seems that O’Connor assumes that these temple prostitutes lived and worked in the temple itself. Is it not possible, and in fact more probable, that they lived and applied their trade in the city, where people were more likely to come, rather than atop the Acrocorinth? For a traveler, or citizen of Corinth alike, to make the journey to the

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24 Ibid.

25 The LBD also refers to Conzelmann’s work in 1967, Korinth und die Madchen, as proof but does not refer to a specific location in it that can be searched (Drake Williams, “First Letter to the Corinthians, in The Lexham Bible Dictionary, ed. John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz [Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2012]). It appears that Drake accepted O’Connor’s assessment of Conzelmann without investigating it since he simply repeated the same information cited by O’Connor. On the other hand, Kurke makes a persuasive rebuttal: “Nonetheless, I am not convinced by Conzelmann’s major claim (that Corinthian temple prostitution is Strabo’s invention), since it does not account for the fact that the Corinthian practice as Strabo describes it diverges in every detail from Herodotus’ account of Babylonian temple prostitution (Hdt. 1.199) and from Strabo’s own description of sacred prostitution in Armenia (Str. 11.532–33) and Egypt (Str. 17.816)” (Leslie Kurke, “Pindar and the Prostitutes, or Reading Ancient ‘Pornography,’” Arion 4, no. 2 [Fall 1996], 69).
Acrocorinth would require a great deal of time and energy and would result in exhaustion. A more likely scenario may be that prostitute-priests/priestesses lived and worked in the city, a city devoted to the goddess of love, Aphrodite. Strabo “doubles-down” by stating, “The city was frequented and enriched by the multitudes who resorted thither on account of these women. Masters of ships freely squandered all their money....”

In the same text, Strabo makes clear that the temple of Aphrodite on the summit of Acrocorinth had “upon it a small temple.” Either Strabo was a very illogical person (recording contradictory information virtually side by side), or O’Connor and others have misunderstood him to be contending that the 1,000 prostitutes lived and worked in the temple atop Acrocorinth.

As Burnett states, “Their work is done in the city, for its citizens, but as slaves they are the property of the goddess.” Further, in Geography, Strabo writes,

> ...the multitude of harlots at Corinth, who are dedicated to Venus, and attracted by the festivities of the place, strangers resorted thither in great numbers. Merchants and soldiers were quite ruined (other translations “squandered all their money”), so that hence the proverb originated, “every man cannot go to Corinth.”

Strabo contends that (1) Corinth was known for its worship of Aphrodite, (2) “harlots” were dedicated to this goddess, and (3) many men would spend holidays there squandering their

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26 Strabo, Geography 8.6.20.

27 Strabo, Geography 8.6.21.

28 For a detailed response to O’Connor’s theory see McRay’s five-point detailed argument in Archaeology and the New Testament, 315.


30 Strabo, Geography 12.3.36
money. For this reason, Strabo also cites the ancient proverb that must have been famous, “not for every man is the journey to Corinth.” According to Strabo’s writings, sexual immorality was prominent and alluring in Corinth. It is also useful to note that Strabo speaks of another temple of Aphrodite, the one in Eryx. It was “full of female temple–slaves” who were dedicated to the “fulfillment of vows not only by the people of Sicily but also by many people from abroad.”

Other extant writings seem to confirm a similar description of the moral milieu of Corinth. A highly debated one is the notorious Pindar fragment 122. This fragment reads,

Young women visited by many,  
servants of Peitho in rich Corinth,  
you who burn the tawny tears of pale frankincense,  
on many occasions fluttering in thought  
to the Ouranian mother of desires, Aphrodite?  
To you she has granted without the possibility of refusal,  
O children, to have the fruit of your soft bloom plucked in lovely beds. And with necessity, everything is beautiful...

*(the last lines two lines are missing of this stanza)*

*(the first two lines are missing of this stanza)*

But I wonder what the masters of the Isthmus will say of me,  
finding such a beginning of the honey–minded skolion,

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32 Pindar was a famous Greek poet who was born in the sixth century BC. A short biography of his life was discovered at Oxyrincus, Egypt in 1961 (P. Oxy. 2438). Quintilian, the first–century AD rhetorician said of him, “Of the nine lyric poets Pindar is by far the greatest, in virtue of his inspired magnificence, the beauty of his thoughts and figures, the rich exuberance of his language and matter, and his rolling flood of eloquence, characteristics which, as Horace rightly held, make him inimitable” (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.61, trans. and ed. Harold Edgeworth Butler [London: Harvard U P, 1920]).
as a consort to common women.
We teach the quality of gold with a pure touchstone ...
(one line is missing)

O mistress of Cyprus, here to your grove
Xenophon has led the hundred–limbed
herd of grazing women,
rejoicing in his vows accomplished.\textsuperscript{33}

This poem appears to be announcing the giving of 100
prostitutes as an answer to Xenophon’s prayers, following his
victories at the Isthmian games. This song would have been sung,
possibly by Pindar himself, as Xenophon presented the 100 girls
as an offering to Venus/Aphrodite at her “grove.” This is how the
late Latin and Greek professor of John Hopkins University, Basil
Gildersleeve, understood it. Concerning this fragment he writes,
“The wealth of the family is shown by Xenophon’s vow to
consecrate a hundred ἑταιραι as ἱερόδουλοι to Aphrodite.\textsuperscript{34} In
this poem, Pindar recognizes these girls as “servants of Peitho.”
Burnett explains that Peitho was “a minor goddess of seduction
whose special concern was the amorous persuasion of the young
and inexperienced.”\textsuperscript{35} Pausanius informs his readers that at the
Temple of Aphrodite in Athens, Peitho also was found.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} Leslie Kurke, “Pindar and the Prostitutes, or Reading Ancient
‘Pornography,’” \textit{Arion} 4, no. 2 (Fall, 1996): 51–52.

\textsuperscript{34} Basil L. Gildersleeve, \textit{Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes}
(Medford, MA: Harper and Brothers, 1885), 227. This Xenophon is
certainly the same man which Pindar’s 13\textsuperscript{th} Olympian Ode is dedicated.
In this Ode, Xenophon is honored for his two victories “since he has been
victorious in both the pentathlon and the foot race; he has attained what
no mortal man has ever attained before” Pindar, Olympian 13.30
m%3D13> [accessed 23 March 2014].

\textsuperscript{35} Burnett, “Servants of Peitho,” 52.

\textsuperscript{36} Pausanias, \textit{Description of Greece} 1.22.3.
fragment reference above of Pindar’s is quoted from and commented upon by Athenaeus around AD 200. Athenaeus in his *Deipnosophists* writes:

> And even private individuals sometimes vow to Venus [Roman name for Aphrodite], that if they succeed in the objects for which they are offering their vows, they will bring her a stated number of courtesans. As this custom then, exists, with reference to this goddess, Xenophon the Corinthian, when going to Olympia, to the games, vowed that he, if he were victorious, would bring her some courtesans. And Pindar at first wrote a panegyric on him.... But afterwards he composed a scolium on him, which was sung at the sacrificial feasts; in the exordium of which he turns at once to the courtesans who joined in the sacrifice to Venus, in the presence of Xenophon, while he was sacrificing to the goddess himself....

Many contemporary scholars argue that Athenaeus misinterpreted Pindar’s poem, despite the fact that Athenaeus was over two thousand years closer to the events which transpired than are contemporary scholars. Athenaeus contends that Xenophon made a vow. When Xenophon’s request came true, and “he attained what no mortal man had ever attained before” (see footnote 34), Xenophon fulfilled his side of the vow and gave 100 women as ἱερόδουλοι to Aphrodite. Given the evidence cited above, there is ample reason to take the statements of Strabo, Pindar, and Athenaeus at face value, and no persuasive reason for why they should not be taken literally.

Other writings from ancient literature also help establish the moral milieu of Corinth during the Greek era of its history. When discussing the importance of education, Plato (ca 428–347 BC) used the phrase Κορινθίαν κόρην literally translated “Corinthian girl,” when speaking of prostitutes. He states, “... if a man is to be in condition, would you allow him to have a Corinthian girl as his

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fair friend? Certainly not.”

The reputation of Corinth was one of significant moral depravation. In fact, it was so bad that Aristophanes (446–386 BC) coins a verb from the city name Corinth, κορινθιαζομαι, to mean fornication. In the writings of Athenaeus a term κορινθιαστης was used. This noun is also from the same cognate as Corinth and means “whoremonger”.

Apparently this κορινθιαστης was the name of a play written by Philetaerus (fourth century BC). Poliochus (fifth century BC) also wrote a play by this name that Athenaeus references. Finally, there is intrigue surrounding the worship of Demeter which might also have involved sexual relations. Pausanias speaks of “the mysteries” of the worship of Demeter.

From the ancient extant writings of Stabo, Plato, Athenaeus, Pindar, and Aristophanes, it is apparent that the Greek city–state of Corinth was infamous for its moral degradation, much of which focused on the worship of their patron deity, Aphrodite. Not only do the ancient writings affirm this depiction, archaeological discoveries do as well. Some of these discoveries include: ancient coins, the temple of Aphrodite, the inscription at the amphitheater, and dining rooms in the temple of Demeter.

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41 Athenaeus, *Deirnosophistae* 13.559.

42 Athenaeus, *Deirnosophistae* 7.313c

At Corinth, since 1915, 90,000+ silver, billon, and bronze coins have been discovered. The temple of Aphrodite is prominent on ancient coins minted in Corinth during the Greek era from as early as 500 BC. Just as the city of Ephesus was famous for its worship of Artemis/Diane, Corinth was branded for its devotion to Aphrodite. The prominence of the worship of Aphrodite is seen in the coinage printed at Corinth going all the way back to 510 BC. Not only was the impact of Aphrodite visible on the coinage, it is also highlighted by the location of the temple itself on the Acrocorinth. The Acrocorinth would have been visible from miles around. The Acrocorinth would be the first thing that any traveler would see (including the Apostle Paul). The ancient city sat at its foot.

At the ancient theater a very significant discovery was made. The discovery was that of a stone with an inscription. The Roman theater was probably rebuilt from the Greek one. As is often the case, much of the old building materials would have been repurposed to construct the new theater. One such piece was discovered with an inscription. The inscription was just one word, in large capital letters, KOPFAN. From the letters, it was clear that this was Attic Greek. This same word was found in Pindar’s poem. The word is in the genitive case, showing possession. That one word is translated “belonging to the girls.” This inscription dates back to the early years of the theatre’s existence, probably the fourth century. During that period of time, ladies would not have been seen at a theater. Such behavior was not acceptable. In the words of McDonald, “These [girls] can scarcely have been any but the notorious temple prostitutes of


Aphrodite, since respectable women did not attend the theater." Shear provides a likely conclusion:

The block is broken at one end, but by comparison with the dimensions of other Greek seats it is evident that the word was centered on the face of the stone with space at either side. It is therefore improbable that the word is part of a longer inscription. The girls of Corinth par excellence may have been the famous *hierodoules* of the temple of Aphrodite who are called by this name in Pindar’s hymn to Xenophon, the Corinthian.

This discovery confirms the description Pindar gives of “the girls” who are devoted to the worship of Aphrodite as prostitute–priestesses.

Another inscription was found concerning one of “the girls” who is mentioned by name. Her name is Lais. Lais, the cartesian of Aphrodite, was taken captive at war time and brought to Corinth. Athenaeus says she was “superior in beauty to any woman who had ever been seen.” Pausanias identifies the location of her burial site: “As one goes up to Corinth are tombs.... Before the city is a grove of cypresses called Craneum. Here are a precinct of Bellerophon, a temple of Aphrodite Melaenis and the grave of Lais, upon which is set a lioness holding a ram in her fore–paws.” Pausanius provides one more confirming piece of evidence that prostitutes were a part of the worship of this Greek goddess.

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46 William A. McDonald, “Archaeology and St. Paul’s Journey’s in Greek Lands, III, Corinth,” *BAR* 5, no. 3 (1942), 46.


48 Plutarch, *Nicias* 15.4.

49 Athenaeus, *Deirnosophists* 13.52.

50 Pausanius, *Description of Greece* 2.2.4.
Further support of the immorality prominent in Corinth at this time surrounds the ancient site of the temple of Demeter. At the temple of Demeter fifty dining rooms were uncovered. As previously mentioned, there is “mystery” surrounding what happened during the worship of Demeter. However, pottery may fill in the missing information. Many pieces of pottery have been discovered and are on display in various museums showing ancient dining couches (κλιναί) that were used for sexual purposes. Eating and intercourse were two pleasures often combined.\(^{51}\)

The evidence above makes a strong case for temple slaves functioning as prostitutes leading in “worship” of Aphrodite. Ancient extant writings, excavation sites of this ancient city, and archaeological artifacts also all point to the moral depravity of the city-state of Corinth. The question remains, did this moral wickedness continue on through the Roman Era?

As many commentators contend, the history of Corinth is really the history of two cities, the Greek and the Roman. Corinth with all its wealth, trade, and strategic military location, became a leader amongst the Achaean League. The league was formed to protect and stand united against the attacks of the Roman Empire. Rome mandated that this league dissolve. Corinth refused and in 146 BC, Corinth was utterly destroyed by the Roman army led by Mummius. The majority of the men were killed and the women and children were sold as slaves.\(^{52}\)

**Corinth: The Roman Era**

For nearly one hundred years, Corinth was occupied by few citizens.\(^{53}\) In 44 BC Julius Caesar formed a new Roman Colony by


\(^{52}\) Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 7.16.8.

\(^{53}\) Furnish acknowledges that great loss of life took place in Corinth; however he contends that ancient and modern writers are wrong to
the same name, choosing to do so most certainly because of its ideal location to control and tax commerce, as well as maintain a military advantage. Many of the new settlers were recently freed slaves.\textsuperscript{54} Corinth quickly returned to its wealthy status.\textsuperscript{55} It became the most important commercial city of southern Greece. As a result of the wealth of Corinth, it repopulated rapidly. It became the third most populated city of the Roman Empire; only Rome and Alexandria were larger.\textsuperscript{56} In 29 BC it became the seat of the Roman proconsul as well as the capital of the province of Achaia.\textsuperscript{57} Guthrie and Carson and Moo warn the student of the NT conclude it was completely devastated and abandoned. Unfortunately, Furnish includes no citations for his argument (Victor Paul Furnish, “Corinth in Paul’s Time: What Can Archaeology Tell Us?” \textit{BAR} 14, no. 3, [May/June 1988]: 18).


\textsuperscript{55} Strabo even indicates that it was wealthier than the earlier Corinth due to the Isthmian games that it hosted every two years (Strabo, \textit{Geography} 8.6.20). In addition to this, Corinth also became known for its bronze, which also brought a great profit to the city; Josephus the historian for Rome writes about this bronze: “Of the gates nine were completely overlaid with gold and silver as were also the door–posts and lintels; but one, that outside the sanctuary, was of Corinthian bronze, and far exceeded in value those plated with silver and set in gold” (Josephus Flavius, \textit{Jewish War} in \textit{The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged}, trans. and ed. William Whiston [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987], 5:201–05).


\textsuperscript{57} Carson and Moo, \textit{Introduction to the New Testament}, 420.
not to read Old Corinth into the New.\textsuperscript{58} O’Connor goes as far as to emphasize that both cities had their own, “distinctive institutions and theos.”\textsuperscript{59}

In older commentaries, it was common practice to attribute continuity between the Old and New Corinth. However, in recent days it is more popular (as indicated by Guthrie’s, Carson and Moo’s, and O’Connor’s comments) to emphasize discontinuity. While it is a mistake to read the Greek Corinth into the Roman Corinth, it is equally a mistake to assume that the reputation of Old Corinth would perish with no lasting impact upon New Corinth, especially when the conditions of Old Corinth (port city, many travelers, large population) and the conditions of New Corinth were the same. Would not the conditions which primed the first, if present again in the second, logically result in a similar outcome? As Barnett states, “it would be surprising if new Corinth, as a recently founded, rapidly expanding and prosperous city, served by two seaports and with numerous short-term visitors, was not characterized by the sexual practices of the earlier era.”\textsuperscript{60} Add to this that (1) Rome tended to syncretize,\textsuperscript{61} building upon rather than replacing, the previous culture of the

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\textsuperscript{59} Murphy-O’Connor, \textit{St. Paul’s Corinth}, 3.
\textsuperscript{61} Broneer states, “Many of the cults in the city were old and well established. They had continued to function during the century that Corinth lay in ruins, and when the colonists arrived in 44 B.C. they restored the worship of most of the ancient gods.” (Oscar Broneer, “Corinth: Center of St. Paul’s Missionary Work in Greece,” \textit{BA} 14, no. 4 [December 1951], 83).
\end{flushright}
Greco era, and (2) many people of the second settlement were just one step above slaves. They were likely to be less “civilized” and “refined” than people of the earlier era. In all likelihood, they would initiate a less moral cultural milieu rather than a more moral one.

There is no question that the paganism of the Greek city–state continued on into the Roman one. Pausanias, in his work Description of Greece, identifies many of those temples. Fee counts at least 26 sacred places spoken of in Pausanias’ writings. In addition to the Greek deities worshipped, the Roman settlers added additional temples to Aphrodite–Tyche, Herakles, Poseidon, Apollo, and Hermes and a temple for all the gods, as well as one to worship Octavia, the deified sister of Augustus. In addition to these temples, in his article, “The City of Corinth and Its Domestic Religion,” Williams makes a strong case, based upon archaeological discoveries that shrines were also built upon the remains of destroyed homes, usually by family members, to honor the heroes and gods that were worshiped by those previously living in the destroyed homes. The paganism of Old Corinth did not decrease, under the new administration; rather it increased. Regarding the temple for which Corinth was famous, the temple of Aphrodite/Venus, O’Connor acknowledges, “Like all the inhabitants, Paul would have been perpetually conscious of the craggy mass of Acrocorinth towering above the

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62 This is evident in the archaeological remains of ancient Corinth. The ruins of the old temples were restored and reinstated along with other civil buildings.

63 Pausanias is believed to have passed through Corinth around AD 165, although Describing Greece was not written prior to AD 180.

64 Fee, “First Epistle to the Corinthians,” 3.

65 Broneer, “Corinth,” 84–85.

city.” Strabo and Pausanias make it apparent that by the time of their writing a temple to Aphrodite was present on “Aphrodite’s Hill.”

It is certainly true, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great wealth, good favor more than silver or gold.” When one has a good reputation, it is incredibly valuable. It is equally true that when one has a bad reputation, it can have enduring and drastic consequences. The same applies for the reputation of a city. Corinth valued great riches, not a good reputation. The result was a lasting and worldwide legacy throughout the ancient world for immorality, even to the point that derogatory words were formed from the name of the city itself. It is also true that a city’s bad reputation is extremely difficult to rehabilitate. This is especially difficult when such a reputation attracts those of a disreputable sort. In light of the increased wealth, increased population, and increased paganism, it is highly unlikely that New Corinth was able to liberate itself from the vices of Old Corinth. What Greco–Corinth was infamous for—immorality, prostitution, and licentiousness—the Roman–Corinth city was as well. Although, it is not possible to dogmatically state that the temple of Aphrodite in the Roman era involved temple prostitution, it is safe to say, prostitution was widely accessible. These prostitutes may or may not have been in an official capacity, as prostitute–priests/priestesses. However, it is safe to say, in a city devoted to the worship of Aphrodite, its patron deity, and in a city were the visual reminder of that worship (Acrocorinth) is literally visible from every piece of real estate, those who participated in prostitution (both the prostitutes as well as their solicitors) would have likely seen themselves as involved in the worship of this goddess of love.


68 Strabo, Geography 8.6.21; Pausanias, Description of Greece 2.5.1.

69 Proverbs 22:1; This quotation and all others, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New English Translation.
Prior to applying the implications of these archaeological discoveries and extant writings to Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthian church, it is first beneficial to set the historical context of Paul’s writing. This will be accomplished by developing a brief survey of the interactions Paul had with the Corinthian believers.

**Paul’s Interactions with the Church at Corinth**

Paul first visited the city of Corinth on his second missionary journey. This visit is one of the most well established dates of Paul’s journeys. In fact, it is from this date that many of the others events are calculated. Luke records the journeys of Paul. He informs Theophilus (Acts 1:1), that during Paul’s second missionary, at the time when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews brought Paul before Gallio for judgment. Gallio refused to make a decision based upon Jewish laws, and subsequently released Paul (Acts 18:12–17). An archaeological discovery at Delphi helps to solidify a narrow time-frame in which this event would have occurred. At Delphi, a stone was discovered which at one time was likely to have been a part of the exterior wall of the Temple to Apollo. This stone had the following inscription on it:

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	ext{Tιβερ[ιος Κλαυδις Κ]αισ[αρ Σεβαστ]ος Γ[επμανικς,}
\text{αρχιερευς μεγιστος, δημαρχικης εξουσιας το \iota, αυτοκρατωρ το}
\text{k[a digamma follows the kappa]}...
\text{Λουκς Γαλλιων ο φ[ιλος] μου κα[ι ανθυ]πατος [thV ΑjcaiaV]} \ 70
$$

This discovered inscription was a copy of a message from Roman Emperor Claudius, naming Lucius Junius Gallio as the proconsul of Achaia. This inscription states that this event was during Claudius’s twelfth year of his “tribunical power” and after his twenty-sixth year as emperor. Clearly, the reign of Gallio must have started before August 52, when Claudius would have made

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his twenty–seventh proclamation.\(^{71}\) Carson and Moo explain, “Proconsuls normally began their tour of duty on July 1, which means that Gallio probably began their tour of duty on July 1, 51. However, it is possible that the rescript belongs to the very end of the seven–month period, in which case Gallio may have taken up his duties on July 1, 52.”\(^{72}\) A reign of a proconsul usually lasted only a year. It is likely that Gallio did not even last that long due to a fever that Seneca, the younger brother of Gallio, writes about: “I remembered master Gallio’s words, when he began to develop a fever in Achaia and took ship at once, insisting that the disease was not of the body but of the place.”\(^{73}\) The combination of the archaeological evidence along with the writings of Luke and Seneca, makes an AD 50–51 dating very strong.

Paul stayed in Corinth for one and a half years, during which time he established a church there. After Paul’s visit to Corinth he wrote a letter that he refers to as his “former letter” (1 Cor 5:9). Apparently it was not inspired, and therefore not preserved by God. No manuscripts of this letter are available. It is possible that Paul was misunderstood in this first letter regarding with whom they should and should not fellowship (1 Cor 5:10). At a later date, members of Chloe’s household reported back to Paul that there were disputes taking place in the church family (1 Cor 1:11). As a result, Paul saw the need to send a second letter. The epistle called First Corinthians was that letter. Paul writes in his first inspired letter (second referenced letter) that he was planning to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8). After Pentecost he planned to go to Macedonia and after Macedonia return to Corinth to spend an extended period of time with them (1 Cor 16:5–7). It is believed that this first preserved letter, 1


\(^{73}\) Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 104.1.
Corinthians, was written in the spring of AD 55. Apparently this epistle did not resolve all the problems requiring a “painful visit.” This visit is not recorded in Luke’s account of Paul’s journeys. It may be that this “painful visit” was to deal with “a certain man” (2 Cor 2:5–11; 7:12). A third letter was written, referenced as his “severe letter,” also not inspired and not preserved for the church (2 Cor 2:4). Paul left Ephesus and went to Macedonia. Titus’ arrival and report encouraged him regarding the church of Corinth (2 Cor 7:7). The majority of people in the Corinthian church were receptive to Paul’s apostolic teaching, but there was still a minority who were opposing Paul. Paul writes his fourth letter (2 Corinthians), to address this problem, defending his apostolic authority. Paul probably wrote 2 Corinthians around AD 56–57 from Macedonia. At the writing of that epistle, Paul anticipated another trip to Corinth (2 Cor 13:1; Acts 20).

**IMPLICATIONS ON THE EXPOSITION OF 1 CORINTHIANS**

The Roman city of Corinth, established in 44 BC, was growing quickly, it was becoming extremely wealthy, it had a previously established reputation for immorality, and it was a city on two ports with a multitude of visitors each year. These conditions established “a perfect storm” scenario which resulted in New Corinth becoming as immoral as Old Corinth. This is also the picture one gets when he reads Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. Not only is the city of Corinth immoral, but that sexual licentiousness infiltrated the church.

Prior to delving into the texts, it is valuable to first comment on 1 Corinthians 3:1–3. In these verses Paul identifies the spiritual condition of the recipients of his letter, the members of the church of Corinth. Paul writes,

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So, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready. In fact, you are still not ready, for you are still influenced by the flesh.

Here and elsewhere, Paul identifies the church of Corinth as believers. He uses the intimate term of ἀδελφοί, “brothers,” which indicates that he does not question their eternal status. He recognizes them as members of the family of God. Paul goes on to explain that when he first arrived in Corinth he was not able to treat them as πνευματικοῖς “spiritual people,” but rather σαρκίνοις, “fleshly people.” They were simply νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῶ, “immature in Christ.” Paul develops the imagery of their previous immaturity by speaking of them as infants. Their spiritual maturity was so limited that, just as babies require milk in their first stages of growth, they too required γάλα, “milk,” and not βρῶμα, “meat.” However, Paul further elaborates that they have not progressed in their faith. They are still σαρκικοί, “fleshly people,” and still immature. They were not progressing beyond the stage of infancy. The congregation is composed of immature believers living in a decadent society. The result is unfortunately predictable.

1 Corinthians 5:1–2

It is actually reported that sexual immorality exists among you, the kind of immorality that is not permitted even among the Gentiles, so that someone is cohabiting with his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you have been deeply sorrowful instead and removed the one who did this from among you?

The first time Paul addresses an issue relating to immorality is in chapter five. Paul learned, probably from Chloe’s household (1:11), that πορνεία, “immorality,” existed among members in their assembly. Mare rightly contends that this word conveys “the idea of extramarital sexual relations of any kind.”

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75 Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 217.
seventeen times that Paul uses this word, eleven are found in 1 Corinthians. Sexual immorality was permitted and acceptable behavior in the pagan culture of Corinth. But Paul explains that the kind of πορνεία that has commenced is a sort that is not even permitted by ἔθνεσιν, “the nations.” This egregious act, γυναῖκα τινα του πατρὸς ἔχειν, someone “has” the wife of his father. The verb in the infinitive form ἔχειν is often used to indicate marital relationships. These relationships are certainly sexual by nature, and Paul’s qualifying of this act as πορνεία reaffirms this understanding. A member of the church is participating in an incestuous relationship with his step–mother. It is not clear if this instance of ἔχειν indicates marriage or possibly cohabitation, either of which were certainly off limits. Keener gives a helpful understanding of the nature of the πορνεία not even permitted by ἔθνεσιν:

The marriage of full brothers and sisters was considered immoral throughout the Roman Empire except in Egypt; parent–child incest was universally abhorred throughout the Roman world. From the revulsion against the idea exhibited in the Greek Oedipus stories to slanders leveled against emperors, it was one of those few crimes that all cultures agreed were terrible. Its Roman legal punishment was banishment to an island. Relations with stepmothers were treated like relations with mothers—as incestuous.76

The Romans did indeed have a law against this: “Moreover, I cannot marry my former mother–in–law or daughter–in–law, or my step–daughter or step–mother.”77 Cicero describes an act of this kind, and the great disapproval surrounding it.


The mother-in-law marries the son-in-law, no one looking favourably on the deed, no one approving it, all foreboding a dismal end to it. Oh, the incredible wickedness of the woman, and, with the exception of this one single instance, unheard of since the world began! Oh, the unbridled and unrestrained lust! Oh, the extraordinary audacity of her conduct! To think that she did not fear (even if she disregarded the anger of the gods and the scorn of men) that nuptial night and those bridal torches! that she did not dread the threshold of that chamber! nor the bed of her daughter! nor those very walls, the witnesses of the former wedding! She broke down and overthrew everything in her passion and her madness; lust got the better of shame, audacity subdued fear, mad passion conquered reason. Her son was indignant at this common disgrace of his family, of his blood, and of his name. His misery was increased by the daily complaints and incessant weeping of his sister; still he resolved that he ought to do nothing more himself with reference to his grievous injuries and the terrible wickedness of his mother, beyond ceasing to consider her as his mother; lest, if he did continue to behave to her as if she were his mother, he might be thought not only to see, but in his heart to approve of, those things which he could not behold without the greatest anguish of mind.\(^78\)

Certainly the Jewish community in Corinth would also have prohibited this behavior (Lev 18:8; Deut 22:22). The OT and rabbinical writings speak of the “father’s wife” as a reference to the stepmother (Gen 35:22; 49:4; 2 Sam 16:22; 20:3; 1 Chron 5:1).\(^79\)

The first obvious problem regarding the church of Corinth in this text was the incestuous relationship. The second wrong behavior involved the apathy and inaction on the part of the church to this deed. Paul says, “And you are proud! Shouldn’t you have been deeply sorrowful instead and removed the one who did this from among you?” (1 Cor 5:2). The church was...

\(^78\) Cicero, *Orations* 6.15–16.

πεφυσιωμένοι, “being proud” or “being puffed up.” They ought to have shown signs of great grief for this immoral behavior, and this sinning brother, but instead they chose not to act, and by not acting illustrated their great pride. It is probable in light of the instruction given in 6:12–13 that they had adopted the attitude that “everything is permissible.” They had disregarded Paul’s teaching in his previous letter, not to associate with immoral people (5:9), and instead accepted a lifestyle characterized by license, which demonstrated their arrogance and pride. The same verb is translated “puffed up” (4:6), and “arrogant” (4:18) by the New English Translation. They lived in a very immoral environment, and not much time has transpired since they too participated in this immoral lifestyle (6:11).

1 Corinthians 5:9–12

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. In no way did I mean the immoral people of this world, or the greedy and swindlers and idolaters, since you would then have to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who calls himself a Christian who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater, or verbally abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Are you not to judge those inside? But God will judge those outside. Remove the evil person from among you (emphasis added).

It becomes quickly apparent that this is not the first time Paul has addressed the issue of immorality. Paul uses the aorist verb tense. He indicates that ἔγραψα, “he wrote,” concerning μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι, “not fellowshipping with,” πόρνοις, “immoral people.” It is correct to understand this as a true aorist and not as an epistolary aorist for at least two reasons found in the literary context. A prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ ἐπισταλῇ includes the definite article τῇ to indicate “the epistle.” Paul has a specific letter in mind. If he were speaking of the present letter he would likely have used a form of the relative pronoun οὗτος rather than
Paul also uses a νῦν “now” in verse eleven to indicate both a transition and a comparison. Having completed his discussion about what he did write, he now moves on to give instructions to follow in this epistle that he is currently writing. Now he does utilize an epistolary aorist which is accurately reflected in the NET translation as “I am writing.”

Paul clarifies, however, that his command is not, nor was, to stop fellowshipping with πόρνοις who are τοῦ κόσμου, “of the world.” Paul proceeds to argue that if this were what was required, it would necessitate departing the world. After Paul clarifies what he did NOT mean, he explains what he DID mean. This is clear in his statement οὐ πάνως τοις πόρνοις τοῦ κόσμου. Paul’s apostolic instructions were not to συναναμίγνυσθαι ones who call themselves ἀδελφὸς and participates in πόρνος. As Fee duly notes, “Paul is not advocating that only the sinless can be members of the Christian community; rather, he is concerned about those who persist in the very activities from which they have been freed through the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb (v. 7).”

Paul does not single out just this sin, but adds to immorality, a list of other abhorrent behaviors that should not be mentioned amongst believers.

Paul continues to elaborate. Believers cannot hold unbelievers to a standard of morality when they do not believe in the God who is the source of those standards. However, a professing believer in Christ must observe these moral standards. Paul uses the verb κρίνω, “to judge,” three times, indicating a play on words. Paul asks, who am I to κρίνει τοὺς ἐξω, “judge the outsiders”? Aren’t you supposed to κρίνετε those

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80 The apostle John used such a construction in his first epistle. He used ταύτα (1:4; 2:1; 2:26; 5:13) which is often translated “these things” or “this” to speak of what he previously wrote in the same letter.

within? God will κρινεῖ those outside. Paul’s Jewish mindset is evident in the words selected. He speaks of those “outside” and those “inside.” The literal meaning is reflected in the NET translation above. An appropriate interpretation of the text is represented by most other translations by supplementing for clarification the word “church” or in the case of the NCSB, “community” (NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB), although neither are in the original text. It is apparent that Paul is speaking of those who are professing to be believers as “inside” and unbelievers as “outside.” This is also evident when the apostle previously speaks of τις ἀδελφὸς ὀνομαζόμενος, “one who calls himself a brother” (5:11).

Paul repeats clearly what was previously misunderstood in his former letter or possibly ignored entirely; the responsibility of the church is to judge “insiders” but since they did not, Paul does. He commands them to ἐξάρατε, “expel,” the sinning brother. Here Paul uses language familiar to Jewish believers. It is a clear allusion to passages from Deuteronomy that require the Jewish community to judge and punish those who participate in certain heinous sins (17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7). In the OT these offenses were punishable by death. Paul is not demanding physical death, but rather physical separation from the church with the desire that they would repent and be restored.

The archaeological artifacts and ancient ruins discovered in Corinth (both from the Greek era and the Roman era), as well as the extant writings, paint a picture of a society plagued by immorality. So much immorality existed in the world and more specifically in Corinth that Paul contends that to avoid fellowshipping with immoral people of the world would mean departure from the world.

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82 Paul did not demand the punishment of the woman involved in this incestuous relationship, probably indicating that the woman was not a believer. If she were a believer, she too would be judged by the same standard. According to Paul’s teaching, God will be her judge, not the church.
1 Corinthians 6:12–20

“All things are lawful for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “All things are lawful for me”—but I will not be controlled by anything. “Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both.” The body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Now God indeed raised the Lord and he will raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that anyone who is united with a prostitute is one body with her? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But the one united with the Lord is one spirit with him. Flee sexual immorality! “Every sin a person commits is outside of the body”—but the immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body (emphasis added).

In chapter five Paul treats almost exclusively the subject of sexual immorality. He addresses it in general and the brother involved in an incestuous relationship specifically. It is interesting to note that the topic of sexual immorality is interrupted by an excursus about lawsuits and Christians bringing issues before secular judges rather than spiritually minded church members.83 Verses 12–20 Paul returns to the

83 Peter Richardson makes an interesting argument that “all of chapters 5 and 6, including 6:1–11, has to do with sexual questions.” He contends, (1) the structure argues for the connection of chapters 5 and 6; (2) the occurrences of key vocabulary are used in chapters 5, 6, and 7; (3) and the argument of 6:1–11 is about “the impropriety of sins of adultery and infidelity being judged by anything other than Christian standards.” While Richardson makes an interesting case, it is not certain, and therefore for the purposes of this paper it will not be developed further. See further, See Peter Richardson, “Judgment in Sexual Matters: In 1 Corinthians 6:1–11,” Novum Testamentum 25, no. 1 (1983): 37–58.
subject of immorality, but a specific kind of immorality, sexual
relations with prostitutes. In typical Pauline style, the apostle
starts with belief/doctrine, prior to developing behavior/duty.
He is cognizant that right belief is foundational to right behavior.
Paul begins this topic with a surprising attention grabbing
statement, Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν, “all things are lawful for me.” A
closer inspection of the text evidences that Paul employs a
teaching method of using an imaginary opponent with imaginary
objections. Paul provides arguments of an imaginary opponent,
probably reflecting common concepts of the day, and then
proceeds to give a rebuttal. The arguments of the imaginary
person are (1) “all things are lawful” (repeated twice in verse 12),
and (2) “food is for the stomach and stomach for the food.” It is
also important to note a reoccurrence of two key words: πορνεία,
“sexual immorality,” and σῶμα, “body.”

Paul’s first statement, Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν, “all things are
lawful,” was a familiar saying to the Corinthians. While there is
some debate as to its source, some say it was Pauline. But such
a statement seems neither Pauline nor consistent with other
biblical writers. It is more likely to have had some philosophical
source (Cynics, Stoics, or Gnostics) and for that reason was
familiar to all Corinthians. The editors of the NET translation
state, “If it is a Corinthian slogan, then it is a slogan used by the
Corinthians to justify their immoral behavior. With it they are
claiming that anything done in the body or through the body had
no moral relevance.” Whether the arguments made by the
Corinthian church was the twisting of Paul’s original statement

84 Fee, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 1250.

85 Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, First Epistle of St. Paul
to the Corinthians, ICC, ed., S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs
(Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 120.

86 Fee, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 251; The NET Bible (Biblical
or a pagan philosophical theory, Paul argues against the logical result of this statement. Paul begins by agreeing in part to their philosophical position. A verbal form of the Greek verb ἔξεστις is found only in the gospels, Acts, and the Corinthian epistles.\(^{87}\) Sometimes this verb is used to speak of what was lawful according to the Roman law (Acts 16:21; 22:25). It is not likely that Paul is speaking in this manner, since all things are not lawful by the Roman law, including incest. Most often this word is used to reference what was or was not allowed according to the Jewish Law (Matt 12:2,4,10,12; 14:4; 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Mark 2:24, 26; 3:4; 6:18; 10:2; 12:14; Luke 6:2,4,9; 14:3; 20:22; John 5:10; 18:31). Paul could have been saying, all things are now lawful since Christ has abolished the OT law by fulfilling it in its entirety (Matt 5:17). Finally, sometimes this verb simply meant what was permissible, not relating to a particular set of laws (Matt 20:15, Acts 2:29; 21:37; 2 Cor 12:4). Given that Paul’s audience was composed primarily of Gentiles although some Jews were also there, it makes best sense to understand this to mean “permissible” as is reflected in the interpretive translations of the NIV, NLT, HCSB, ISB. This same usage is found by Paul in 2 Corinthians which also argues for this understanding.

Paul responds to the popular saying by stating ἀλλ᾿ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει, “but all things are not beneficial.” He does not argue with their first contention, but responds by saying the issue is not so much what is ἔξεστις, “permissible,” but rather what is, συμφέρει, “beneficial.” Paul repeats this Corinthian phrase again. Such an argument was probably used by pagan philosophers excusing their sexual relationships with prostitutes, as a lawful and legitimate way to control their bodies.\(^{88}\) Paul rebuts this wrong idea with the phrase ἀλλ᾿ οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπό

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\(^{87}\) It is used twenty-nine times; twenty-six are in the indicative mood, and three times it is used as a participle.

\(^{88}\) Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, 1 Corinthians* 6:12.
τινός, “but I will not be mastered by it.” Although the philosophers were saying prostitution allowed them to control their bodies, Paul was saying the opposite. If I will participate in prostitution it means ἐξουσιασθήσομαι, “I will be mastered,” by my body, and not my body mastered by me. Paul uses a word game to make his point. The word ἐξουσια means authority. Paul is saying, if I solicit a prostitute, I profess by my actions to have ἐξουσια, “authority,” over it when in fact ἐξουσιασθήσεται, “I will be mastered by it.” This is clear in his next argument. This is further elaborated in Paul’s third rebuttal.

Paul quotes the ancient philosophy, τὰ βρώματα τῇ κοιλίᾳ καὶ ἡ κοιλίᾳ τοῖς βρώμασί, “food is for the stomach and the stomach for food.” Scholars debate and translations reflect whether the third quotation ends at this point (NIV, NLT, ESV, HCSB) or continues on to include the next phrase (NET). It seems best to follow the former translations since Paul quotes a pithy statement and then follows that pithy statement with one of his own. Furthermore, if the source is indeed a pagan philosophy, it is unlikely that it would have spoken of god, or at least a singular god.89

Paul gives seven strong arguments for why to abstain from sexual relations with prostitutes: (1) the body is for the Lord, (2) the body is eternal, (3) believers are members of Christ, (4) prostitution unifies a believer to a prostitute, (5) sexual sin is against one’s own body, (6) believers are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and (7) believers are owned by God who bought them.

Some in the Corinthian church appear to be arguing that just as the stomach is for food, so to the body is also made for sexual relations. Paul systematically negates this understanding. He explains that their σῶμα, “body,” is not for πορνεία, but their σῶμα is τῶ κυρίῳ, “belonging to the Lord.” God created the body and it was created for service unto the Lord. Mare states, “… he [Paul] denies the argument of a parallel between eating and digesting food as a natural process and practicing sexual

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89 For the alternative view see Fee, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 253–57.
immorality as a natural process.” It is important at this point to note that the Corinthian believers were correlating eating with sexual relations. This could be the result of the “mystery” cult worship of Demeter, which is depicted on pottery discovered involving dining couches.

Paul instructs the Corinthian believers that the stomach and food are not important for eternity, but the body is. He proceeds to reason that God raised τὸν Κυρίον, “the Lord,” from the dead, and he will raise ἡμᾶς “us,” to life as well according to his δύναμεως, “power.” The referent of ἡμᾶς is certainly believers. Paul argues that believers will be raised unto life, just as Christ was raised from the dead. Therefore the body is eternal, and since it is eternal, it is important how a believer uses it in this present life.

Paul proceeds to teach more regarding the body. The apostle teaches that the believer’s σῶμα is μέλη, “a member” of Christ. In some unfathomable way, believers are united with Christ. It logically follows that if believers are members of Christ, what they do unites Christ to that action and/or person. Paul then asks, Should you take a μέλη of Christ and make it a μέλη of πόρνης “a prostitute”? The answer is obvious, μὴ γένοιτο, “may it never be so.” Pauline teaching is that to participate in prostitution is to unify a member of Christ with a prostitute. It is apparent in Paul’s mind that having sexual relations is not merely a physical act. To aid his argument, Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24, “the two become one flesh.”

Paul commands his readers φεύγετε τὴν πορνείαν, “flee from immorality.” Paul, speaking with apostolic authority, uses a second person, plural imperative to command the Corinthian church to run away from immorality. He then argues that sexual sin is against the σῶμα. Paul articulates that sexual sin is especially devastating because it is the only sin against one’s own body. This verse has brought great confusion and debate. Fee provides a good solution:

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90 Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 224.
In fornicating with a prostitute a man removes his body (which is the temple of the Spirit, purchased by God and destined for resurrection) from union with Christ and makes it a member of her body, thereby putting it under her “mastery” (v. 12b; cf. 7:4). Every other sin is apart from (i.e., not “in”) the body in this singular sense.\textsuperscript{91}

One cannot say dogmatically whether this is the best understanding of Paul, but it resolves what appears otherwise to be a contradiction to what we have been informed from experience (other sins do affect in a tangible way the physical body).

Paul makes another argument for not participating in prostitution; the body of the believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit. This is related to being a μέλη of Christ, as well as our σῶμα being eternal, but goes beyond both these doctrines to instruct that the body must be treated rightly. Paul poses a question, “Do you not know that your σῶμα is ναὸς ‘a temple’?” The analogy of a temple would certainly have been effective in a society where one could hardly look in any direction without seeing a temple. Paul articulates that the believer’s physical body is a spiritual temple of ἁγίου πνεύματός, “Holy Spirit,” who dwells within believers. For this reason, prostitution should not be an option.

Paul concludes his discourse against prostitution by arguing that we are not our own, we were ἠγοράσθητε, “purchased.” This verb comes from the root word ἀγορά which means market. It has the idea of making a purchase or buying something, which in the Greek commercial setting occurred in the marketplace. It indicates possession on the part of the one doing the purchasing. Although no specific purchaser is mentioned in this phrase, God is clearly in mind. Because God purchased believers, their bodies are not their own, and they are to honor God with it. Joining the body with a prostitute is contrary to honoring God with their bodies.

Archaeological discoveries, extant writings, and ancient artifacts do not change one’s interpretation of this passage, but

\textsuperscript{91} Fee, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 262.
they do provide greater clarity to the issue of immorality in general and prostitution specifically plaguing the church in Corinth. These findings confirm the description Paul gives. The prostitution, for which the temple of Aphrodite was famous, was still a pressing problem during Paul’s Corinth. Prostitution was a constant temptation, and although it was an acceptable behavior by the Roman laws, Paul instructs that it is not acceptable for believers.

1 Corinthians 7:1–5

Now with regard to the issues you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But because of immoralities, each man should have relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband. A husband should give to his wife her sexual rights, and likewise a wife to her husband. It is not the wife who has the rights to her own body, but the husband. In the same way, it is not the husband who has the rights to his own body, but the wife.

The sexual immorality pervading Corinth is also evident in Paul’s writings concerning marriage. Paul mentions a letter that they wrote. The second person plural aorist form of γράφω was used by Paul to indicate that there were a plurality of members who had written Paul in the past. It appears that they had some questions regarding marriage and so Paul addresses those. He begins by saying, καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικός μὴ ἅπτεσθαι, “It is not good for man to touch a woman.” A misinterpretation is reflected in the NIV’s translation of “to marry.” It is best to understand ἅπτεσθαι to be a euphemism for sexual relations. The construction found in verse one, the infinitive form of ἅπτεσθαι + γυναικός, is only found here in all of the NT. However, it is found nine other times in Greek literature (including the Septuagint), all of which have the idea of sexual relations. Fee investigates seven in detail and concludes, “In all of these occurrences it is a

92 The NET Bible First Edition Notes, 1 Corinthians 7:1.
euphemism for sexual intercourse, and in not one of them is there the slightest hint that the idiom extends to something very close to ‘take a wife’ or ‘marry.’”⁹³ Paul is not teaching abstinence from sexual relations between husband and wife, as some early sects were promoting. Paul was not disallowing marriage either, as becomes even more evident in later portions of this chapter. What Paul did promote was abstinence before marriage. In a society plagued by immorality, Paul feels the necessity to repeat something they should already know; they should not have sexual relations before marriage.

There is some controversy in verse two. What does Paul mean by διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἑκάστος τήν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐξετω? The traditional view is reflected in a translation similar to, “but on account of immorality each one should have their own wife ....”⁹⁴ Others would translate similar to the NET, “But because of immoralities, each man should have relations with his own wife ....”⁹⁵ Is Paul arguing for marriage because of the temptation surrounding Corinth and its pagan practices or was Paul arguing for regular sexual relations between a husband and his wife to avoid temptation? Strong arguments can be made for both positions: but it seems that recent research supports the latter view. Keener’s statement represents this position, “‘Let each


⁹⁴ This is the position of Mare (“1 Corinthians,” 228), as well as Robertson and Plummer, 132–33. Robertson and Plummer state, “But the apostle is not discussing the characteristics of the ideal married life; he is answering questions put to him by Christians who had to live in such a city as Corinth. In a society so full of temptations, he advises marriage, not as the lesser of two evils, but as a necessary safeguard against evil” (A. T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911]: 132-33).

⁹⁵ For a developed argument of this particular view, see further Fee, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 278–79.
have’ reflects a Greek idiom for ‘Let them have sexual relations.’ Jewish people saw married sexual intimacy as the best deterrent to sexual immorality, and Paul here agrees (see also Prov 5:19–20)."\(^\text{96}\) Whether one leans towards the traditional interpretation of Roberts, Plummer, Mead, and the NIV editors, or the more recent view of Fee, Keener, and the NET Bible editors, one thing is certain, immorality was so prevalent in the city that it became a major issue for the church, one that required the apostle to repeatedly address it.

Depending on one’s interpretation of verse two, determines whether one takes verse three as further elaboration, or a shift of emphasis. Paul writes, τῆ γυναικὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν ὀφειλὴν ἀποδιδότω, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ τῷ ανδρί. Here Paul commands the man in a marriage to give his wife ὀφειλὴν. This word is only used two other times in the NT, once to speak of a financial debt (Mt 18:32) and again in Romans to speak of obligations of paying taxes (Rom 13:7).\(^\text{97}\) Paul’s point to the Corinthians: husbands have an obligation of “what is owed” to their wives. Paul follows this command with a couple connectives ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ, “and also in like manner,” the woman to the man. Although, ὀφειλὴν is not repeated in the Greek text, it is clearly implied. The clear teaching of Paul is that there are specific marital obligations regarding the marriage bed.

Paul further elaborates, a woman οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει, “does not have authority,” over her σώματος but the man does. Paul then uses the same connective construction as in the previous verse, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ, “and also in like manner” the man οὗκ ἐξουσιάζει over his σώματος but the woman does. Paul continues his homily on marital responsibilities by using an imperative preceded by a negation, μή ἀποστερεῖτε, “do not deprive,” each other. Although there is no objective in the sentence, the implied object is from

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\(^{96}\) Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, 1 Corinthians 7:2.*

the previous sentences, not to deprive each other of their ὀφειλὴν, “marital obligations.” The present imperative employed here indicates that some individuals were already depriving their partners. It could be translated, “Stop depriving one another.”98 It is also significant to note that ἀποστερεῖτε is used in 6:7–8 for the man who defrauded someone else. Fee speaks of this verb, “It is a pejorative word for taking away what rightfully belongs to another (cf. Jas. 5:4).”99 Paul seems to be arguing that depriving that partner is defrauding of what is rightfully his or hers. Paul establishes only one reason for a temporary cessation of sexual relations, and that reason is σχολάσητε, “to devote oneself,” to προσευχῇ, “prayer.” Paul qualifies this with a couple requirements. It should involve συμφώνου, “mutual agreement,” and it should be only for καιρόν, “a season.” Paul explains why he gives these qualifications introducing it with ἵνα, “in order that.” Satan μὴ πειράζῃ ὑμᾶς, “may not tempt you.” Paul utilizes the subjunctive to show that the ceasing of sexual relations between husband and wife provides Satan the opportunity to tempt the married partners and thereby having ἀκρασίαν, “potential power” over them. Once again, the immoral context of Corinth requires special instructions for husbands and wives in light of the near and easy access to and participation in πορνεία.

CONCLUSION

The ancient city of Corinth is one of the most excavated cities of Greece. There is a plethora of information at the disposal of any interested party. Many of those archaeological discoveries help the biblical scholar better understand the historical context in which Paul wrote his epistles to the Corinthians. In addition to the archaeological discoveries, there are many texts that describe the history and events of this infamous city. These too are of great value to the student of the Scriptures. This article has concerned

98 Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 228.

99 Fee, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 281.
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itself with the archaeological remains (the temple to Aphrodite, the Temple of Demeter), archaeological artifacts (coins, vases, and inscriptions), and extant writings (Appian, Aristophanes, Athenaeus, Flavius, Josephus, Pausanias, Pindar, Plato, Quintilian, Seneca, Strabo) that touch on the subject of the immoral setting of Corinth.

This study has been confirmatory, illustrative, and insightful. The archaeological discoveries and extant texts confirm the immoral setting that demanded Paul’s rebuke in First Corinthians. These discoveries and texts support rather than negate the historicity of this Pauline epistle. The archaeological discoveries confirm what is evident in the epistles. The church was faced with the inevitable challenge of going against the accepted norms of society. Unfortunately, at many points they failed.

This study is illustrative. It helps the student of the Corinthian epistles get a better glimpse and understanding of the immoral society and cultural milieu to which the Corinthian epistles were written. It is difficult to imagine a church where a member of its congregation was committing prolonged sexual immorality with his stepmother (5:1). It is equally difficult to imagine a church, aware of these events transpiring, and yet doing nothing to prevent them (5:2). It is hard to picture believers rationalizing their sin by saying everything is permissible (6:12). It is stunning to think that it was common for believers to be actively participating in prostitution (6:16). And it is difficult to conceive of a church where married members were intentionally defrauding each other of their marital obligations (7:5). While all of this is unconscionable, it becomes more understandable when one better understands that these Christians were “mere infants” (3:1) living in a morally depraved society. This is the illustrative nature of the archaeological discoveries, artifacts, and extant writings. They portray a hedonistic setting with few rivals in ancient history that could compete at its level of degeneracy. The church of Corinth, rather than making a profound impact on the society, was profoundly impacted by the society in which they
lived. Rather than being a beacon of light in a very dark habitat, they were all but an extinguished candle with minimal impact.

Not only is this study confirmatory and illustrative, it is also insightful. Several aspects of the archaeological discoveries and extant writings are helpful to the *porneia* passages. In general, understanding the history of the city of Corinth as “read” through archaeological discoveries and extant writings gives the student of these passages a helpful understanding of the historical context. Since meaning of the text is sourced in what the original author intended to communicate to the original recipients, understanding the historical context better is always a worthy pursuit.

In particular, there are also helpful aspects from this study that have a bearing on the specific passages studied. It has not been definitively proven that there were temple prostitutes present in first-century Corinth, although a strong case has been made for it, a case worthy of review here. Those closest to the era, Strabo, Pausanias, Pindar, Athenaeus, and even Plato, gave statements that support the traditional view: that the worship of Aphrodite involved prostitution during the Greco Corinth era. In addition to these texts, an inscription discovered at the theatre, “belonging to the girls,” and the grave of Lais, one of “the girls,” establishes much hard evidence for which those who oppose this position must give better explanations. Concerning the Roman Corinth, it has been argued that the same conditions or “better” conditions were in place for the perfect storm and a resurgence of immorality for which the city was known. The “perfect storm” includes greater wealth, a larger population, a port city, many travelers, the Isthmian games, a settlement of recently released slaves, and probably most importantly, a reputation that is not easily debunked and which attracts those seeking a decadent lifestyle. For these reasons, it is logical to conclude that the cultural milieu of the Roman Corinth was as bad as or worse than the earlier Greek era.

Prostitution was certainly rampant, and those involved in prostitution probably saw it as a means to worship their patron goddess of love, Aphrodite. This is all important, and background
to the study of 1 Corinthians 6, where believers were joining their bodies with prostitutes. It was allowed by the Roman law and was even possibly elevated by philosophers as a means to “control their bodies.” Discoveries pertaining to Demeter and the mystery worship involving food could also play a part in why the argument concerning food is inserted in the same passage as prostitution, 1 Corinthians 6:12–13. This theory deserves further investigation. It was this immoral cultural milieu that caused Paul to command believers to positively give their spouse what is “owed” them and negatively, stop depriving one another of their marital privileges. The study of archaeological remains and extant writings relating to the immoral setting of Corinth is a worthwhile pursuit as it provides confirmation, illustration, and helpful insights to the texts of Scripture.
This premillennial work elucidates the messianic temple of Ezekiel 40–48. Schmitt is the executive director of Future Hope Ministries (www.futurehopeonline.org). Laney serves as professor of biblical literature at Western Seminary. The revised version adds three new chapters: “Ezekiel’s Temple and Archaeology” (chap. 5), “Predictions of a Different Temple” (chap. 6), and “Can Sacrifices Be Part of a Future Temple?” (chap. 12).

The volume excels in its treatment of the temple architecture and complex. The authors contend that the sacred allotment of 48:9–10, measured by reeds, covers about fifty square miles, whereas the measurement by cubits yields an area of about eight square miles (166). Archaeology informs Schmitt’s and Laney’s understanding of the barrier wall in 40:12 (65–67) and the side pillars in verse 14 (70–71). Additionally, the southern and northern halves of the temple are symmetrical, with one exception: the northward-facing Zadokite chamber of 40:44 (104, fig. 8.2; 110–12). Following the MT, Schmitt and Laney locate this chamber beside the “eastern” entrance rather than beside the LXX’s “southern” entrance in order to better accommodate the priest in his procession toward the alter (233–35). Numerous architectural drawings and photos enable the reader to visualize the temple.

Notable interpretations emerge. The authors anticipate two future temples—a tribulation temple and a millennial temple (222). Ezekiel’s temple will rest on the site of the Temple Mount, but the city will relocate southward (169). Christ’s glorious throne in Matthew 25:31 refers to the temple throne of Ezekiel 43:7 (235). Genesis 9:27 reads, “May God enlarge Japheth, and let Him [God] dwell in the tents of Shem” (23–24, 30). When Peter witnessed the transfigured trio, perhaps he thought the kingdom had come, and with Zechariah 14:16 in mind, offered
to build three tabernacles to celebrate the joyous kingdom festival, the Feast of Tabernacles (179n6).

The authors present five principal interpretations of Ezekiel's temple: a memorial of the pre-captivity temple, a postexilic temple, a depiction of the heavenly state, a depiction of the present church age, and a building in the future kingdom (100–101). They advocate the latter, but dismiss the alternatives with a few sentences each. To the four alternatives a fifth could be added: a depiction of eschatological worship, held by scholars like Gary Smith (Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook, HOTE [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014], 123).

Unsupported or under-supported theological assumptions punctuate the book. Six samples stand out. First, the authors devote less than one page to the purpose of the millennial sacrifices, which ostensibly commemorate Christ's sacrifice (140). Second, the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3–14 die at the end of the tribulation (92). Third, the removal of the veil in Isaiah 25:7 seems to predict the tearing of the veil in Herod's temple (188). Fourth, “Many parts of the tabernacle serve as a type” (25). Fifth, “The laver will not be needed in the Messiah's Temple because the blood of Jesus has provided sufficient spiritual cleansing” (184). Sixth, “The kingdom of God has been inaugurated but is not yet culminated. It is a present, developing reality to be fully realized at the return of Christ” (206).

Regarding the sixth assumption, interpreters may consider the aorist imperative in the prayer, “Your kingdom come” (Matt 6:10). A specific imperative in the aorist expresses “action to be done in its entirety on that occasion” (Daniel Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 719–20). Furthermore, before the kingdom comes, Jesus must die, ascend to heaven, receive the kingdom from the Father, and return to earth (Luke 19:11–12).

Although the authors expect resurrected OT saints like Daniel to participate in the future epoch (172–73), they identify David the prince (Ezek 34:23–24) as David's descendant (Messiah) rather than David himself (185). But concerning the
prince of 44:3, they “lean toward the view that the prince is none other than King David” (226; cf. 112).

Arguably, the authors do not apportion enough land to the Israelites during the millennial age (164–65). The land boundaries extend from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen 15:18). Yet Schmitt and Laney’s northwest boundary comes nowhere near the Euphrates. This reviewer found that interesting given their commitment to the accurate and precise fulfillment of prophecy (215). They identify the River of Egypt as Wadi el-Arish rather than the Nile, a better candidate in light of the biblical and extrabiblical evidence, as argued in H. Bar-Deroma’s “The River of Egypt (Nahal Mizraim),” Palestine Exploration Quarterly 92 (January–June 1960): 37.

The first edition appeared in 1997, but in the review copy, the Foreward and Preface claim to be written in “1979,” a probable metathesis. A helpful chart compares the calendrical sacrifices of Ezekiel and those of the Levitical law (150–51). The back matter includes three appendices, a short list of recommended resources, and an index of topics and authors. The absence of a Scripture index frustrated this reviewer’s attempts to locate select verses. Despite some cavalier theological conclusions, laypersons and prophecy scholars will find this offering worthwhile, especially regarding the temple architecture.

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Seasoned consultants give a practical guidebook to help growing churches decide where to meet in these changing times. Tomberlin and Cool, with three other contributors, focus particularly on the kind of facilities usable for church plants and multi-campus congregations. They share the keys both to find and maximize the best available location as a way to reproduce and increase community impact. Coining the term “locality,” they show it is all about the convergence of location and facility. They understand that finding the right building in the right place is crucial to a successful launch.

The authors show the implications of the shift today from building bigger and bigger to having smaller multi-purpose facilities and more locations in order to reach more people for Christ. Despite the economic recession, a large or growing church today does not require mega-buildings but can lease smaller venues. Options evaluated and compared include: meeting in schools, movie theaters, shopping malls, “big box” commercial space (like a warehouse), and in other non-traditional locations.

The authors stress that facilities are not a panacea; buildings do not (1) stimulate growth (”Build it and they will come”), (2) improve members’ giving to ministry, or (3) motivate people to minister. Leaders must re-evaluate their motivation for desiring to build or rent. They must realize facilities merely provide them with a more effective tool for existing or expanding ministry.

This helpful resource also discusses how to meet/greet guests, first impressions and parking lot ministries, funding options for buildings, how to negotiate without losing one’s testimony, how to “redeem” and redesign existing space, rules of thumb for sufficient seating and parking, and the merits of leasing over buying and building. Several appendices give useful building assessment and comparison tools.
Church planters wanting to locate the best space for their new church to best serve their community and a growing plant, will benefit greatly by the research-proven principles and insights shared in this resource. Churches considering a new addition or moving into multi-site ministry will also find this resource quite helpful.

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