

References, Citations and Allusions in 1 Corinthians

Deb Hurn October 2007

In Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians there is a record of a number of interactions between Paul and the ecclesia. A lot can be learned about this particular epistle just from understanding this. 1 Corinthians is a very controversy-driven letter. Paul was dealing with a maelstrom of conflicting religious and cultural views in Corinth. The city was a melee of pagans, Gnostics, Jews, philosophers and all sorts of sub-factions which had their influences on the ecclesia there. The ecclesias were racked with many hobbyhorses and chestnuts, and they sought Paul's advice by letter, more than once.

The following is a list of proposed citations, references and allusions by Paul to Corinthian practices, controversies and queries. There could well be several more 'hidden' issues that Paul is addressing on their prompting. Sometimes Paul responds to information received, sometimes he responds to written questions. His technique appears to be to quote the words or catch-phrases of writers or visitors from Corinth (who themselves cite his critics), and then either partly agree and turn their comments round, or directly present a contrary teaching.

How much does Paul quote? It can be as little as a word or phrase, and as much as a sentence or two. Without the letter *from* the Corinthians in front of us, we cannot really know for sure which phrases are their questions or contentions and which are Paul's answers. Paul is quite a master of literature, and artfully blends their questions with his replies. He 'serves it back to them' with a flourish and his Lord's beautiful liberating flavour.

The following needs to be viewed in colour. The colour key below is repeated in the footer of each page:

Brown: reference by Paul to reports of, and correspondence with, the Corinthian ecclesia.

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References. Citations and Allusions in 1 Corinthians.

		Bible Text	Comments
1Co 1	v11	For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. ¹	¹ Verbal or written reports to Paul about disputes in the Corinthian ecclesia.
1Co 4	v3	But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: ² yea, I judge not mine own self.	² Paul has to defend himself in this epistle, in ch. 9 chiefly, from personal criticism, apparently detailed within the letter before him from the ecclesia at Corinth.
	v8	Already are ye filled, already ye are become rich, ye have come to reign without us: ³ yea and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.	³ Paul echoes some of their claims.
	v10	We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak,	⁴ Paul reflects to them the arrogant tone of his critics among them.

but ye are **strong**; ye have **glory**, but we have **dishonor**.⁴

1Co 5	v1	It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even among the Gentiles, that one of you hath his father's wife. ⁵	⁵ Verbal report to Paul.
	v9	I wrote unto you in my epistle ⁶ to have no company with fornicators;	⁶ A previous letter, unknown, showing a pattern of correspondence with this ecclesia. e.g. 2 Cor 10:11.
	v11	but as it is, I wrote unto you ⁶ not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat.	
1Co 6	v8	Nay, already it is altogether a defect in you, that ye have lawsuits one with another. ⁷	⁷ A new topic. Paul is aware of this practice, whether by reports or from their written admission to him.
	v12	All things are lawful ⁸ for me; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful ⁸ for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any.	⁸ Citations: Corinthian views which Paul then modifies with godly wisdom.
	v13	Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: ⁸ but God shall bring to nought both it and them.	
	v18-19	Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; ⁸ but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. ⁹ Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God?	⁹ Paul rebuts the idea that physical acts have no bearing on inner spiritual life.
1Co 7	v1	Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote: ¹⁰ It is good for a man not to touch a woman.	¹⁰ Referring to the current letter before him from the Corinthian ecclesia with a direct citation following.
	v2	But, because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ¹¹	¹¹ Paul re-works the proverb with pragmatic provision for improved morality.
	v3	Let the husband render unto the wife her due: ¹² and likewise also the wife unto the husband. ¹³	¹² Citation: This was a major theme of Jewish marriage law (Ex 21:10-11), and each <i>ketubah</i> –marriage contract– specified the obligations of the husband to the wife. ¹³ Paul characteristically emphasizes the mutuality of marriage so that the wife cannot ‘abuse’ the husband by maximizing his obligations and minimizing her own.

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v4	<p>The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: ¹⁴ and likewise also the husband hath not power over his own body, but the wife. ¹⁵</p>	<p>¹⁴ Citation: this common assumption makes women feel uneasy. I doubt, therefore, that Paul would lead with this as if from God. Rather he cites it from their letter to him, thereby creating the tension before balancing and resolving it.</p>	
v20	<p>Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called. ¹⁶</p>	<p>¹⁵ This was a shocking suggestion at the time as it would be in many cultures now, for wives had little power, least of all over their husbands' own bodies. But once again Paul restores mutuality to marriage, so that the husband cannot 'abuse' the wife by demanding that his sexual needs be met exclusively or even primarily. Reciprocal concession of 'power' over their bodies also means that neither spouse may meet their sexual needs elsewhere.</p>	
v21-24	<p>Wast thou called being a bondservant? Care not for it: ['Don't let that bother you' CEV] nay, even if thou canst become free, use it rather. ['If you have a chance to become free, take it' GNB] For he that was called in the Lord being a bondservant, is the Lord's freedman: likewise he that was called being free, is Christ's bondservant. ¹⁷ Ye were bought with a price; become not bondservants of men. ¹⁸ Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God. ¹⁹</p>	<p>¹⁶ Citation: The 'elite' in the ecclesia objected to believing slaves seeking and securing their freedom; it disturbed the hierarchy that they sought to retain within the ecclesia.</p> <p>¹⁷ Paul's characteristic and recurrent theme of mutual submission and the inversion of power in Christ.</p> <p>¹⁸ Just as slaves were free within the ecclesia despite low status in their working lives, so the uncircumcised were free to remain as they were (cp. Gal 5:1-3).</p> <p>¹⁹ "Brethren"—Paul's pronouncement follows. He has given a lengthy answer, and the final verse—"abide with God"—gives a spiritual perspective that transforms the initial citation. It is similar in resolution to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" (Mar 12:17), and 'whether we eat/live or whether we eat not/die, we do all as unto the Lord' (Rom 14:1-8).</p>	
v25	<p>Now concerning virgins ²⁰ I have no commandment of the Lord: but I give my judgment...</p>	<p>²⁰ The Corinthians have asked Paul about betrothal issues.</p>	
1Co 8	v1	<p>Now concerning things sacrificed to idols: ²¹ We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth. ²²</p>	<p>²¹ Paul responds to their enquiry.</p> <p>²² The Corinthians claim knowledge but Paul gives the true perspective</p>

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v4-6	<p>Concerning therefore the eating of things sacrificed to idols, ²² we know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him. ²³</p>	<p>²³ Vv. 4_b to 5 are usually attributed to Paul, but they could as reasonably be comments in the letter from Corinth advocating license by laying claim to special Christian “knowledge”.</p>	
v7	<p>Howbeit there is not in all men that knowledge: ²⁴ but some, being used until now to the idol, eat as of a thing sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ²⁵</p>	<p>²⁴ The statement of v. 4_b which may have been used by ‘strong’ Corinthian believers to justify their offence of the ‘weaker’ believers. ²⁵ Paul cautions ‘enlightened’ believers to consider the ignorance and the scruples of others.</p>	
v7	<p>But food will not commend us to God: neither, if we eat not, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better. ²⁶</p>	<p>²⁶ Citation: similar to ‘all things are lawful’.</p>	
v9	<p>But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to the weak. ²⁷</p>	<p>²⁷ Yet again, Paul tempers liberty with love.</p>	
1Co 9	v3	<p>If to others I am not an apostle, ²⁸ yet at least I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. My defence to them that examine me is this. ²⁹</p>	<p>²⁸ Paul has been discredited in Corinth. ²⁹ Paul is forced to a lengthy self-defence due to detailed personal criticism in the letter before him.</p>
1Co 10	v23	<p>All things are lawful; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful; but not all things edify. ³⁰</p>	<p>³⁰ By manipulating the citations, Paul continues to bring their off-centre ideas back into line with God’s view.</p>
1Co 11	v8-10	<p>For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man: for neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man: for this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels. ³¹</p>	<p>³¹ Citation: The Judaising believers sought to justify ecclesial hierarchy by gender with Biblical reasoning. There may be other citations in ch 11, but this seems the most likely.</p>

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v11-12	Nevertheless , neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, so is the man also by the woman; but all things are of God. ³²	³² The telling word ‘Nevertheless’ and the close match in structure to 7:20-24 indicates that Paul has first cited their unbalanced and misleading view (11:8-10), and then provided the balance, ending with the ultimate perspective “in the Lord” and “all...of God” (cp. also 7:17,19).
v18	For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear ³³ that divisions exist among you; and I partly believe it.	³³ Probably news from Chloe’s household, ref 1:11.
v34	And the rest will I set in order whensoever I come. ³⁴	³⁴ More local issues indicated, but Paul doesn’t say what they are.
1Co 12 v1	Now concerning spiritual gifts , ³⁵ brethren, I would not have you ignorant.	³⁵ A lengthy treatment follows, as prompted by their enquiry.
1Co 14 v34-35	Let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law. And if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home: for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church. ³⁶	³⁶ Citation: Like other pseudo-wisdom in the letter before him—which Paul then either contradicts or modifies—this passage presents as a series of authoritarian edicts. It seems that the Corinthian ecclesia is itself citing to <i>him</i> the words of a Judaising brother who has written—from Jerusalem?—to advise <i>them</i> on ‘proper’ communal worship, as per the ‘synagogue model’. They are seeking Paul’s opinion and ruling on these matters. As this issue has major implications, he gives the full citation from their letter and then a spirited and indignant dismissal of those who would teach such things, vv 36-40.
v36	What? was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it unto you alone?	
v37	If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord.	
v38	But if any man is ignorant, let him be ignorant. [“But if anyone ignores this, he should be ignored”. ISV]	

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	v39	Wherefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.	
	v40	But let all things be done decently and in order.	
1Co 15	v12	Now if Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ³⁷	³⁷ Reference to a contention at Corinth, whether reported or written is unclear.
	v33	Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals. ³⁸	³⁸ Paul is willing to cite from a Greek dramatist if it furthers his argument (from "Thais" by Menander).
	v35	But some one will say, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come? ³⁹	³⁹ Citation of specific questions in the letter before him.
	v45	So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁰	⁴⁰ LXX of Gen 2:7.
1Co 16	v1	Now concerning the collection for the saints, ⁴¹ as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye.	⁴¹ Reference to a written question
	v12	But as touching Apollos the brother, ⁴² I besought him much to come unto you with the brethren: and it was not all his will to come now; but he will come when he shall have opportunity.	⁴² Response to a written enquiry about a brother who had become a 'cult' figure in Corinth, listed in 'popularity' with Paul, Peter and Jesus! This wise brother is lying low so as to not feed their fire.

* For further thought: A friend alerted me to the possibility that the section in 1 Corinthians 6 about going to law may also contain some citations. The perplexing notion that we will judge angels is unsupported elsewhere in scripture and reminds me that the Jews had developed their theology in Babylon to include evil angels who could well require future 'judging' by righteous mortals. The passage, however, is very hard to divide into any possible citation and response, as there doesn't seem to be a 'response', unlike all the other proposed citation passages. At this point I can't see that there is anything that I can pick out there. If anyone has any ideas, let me know.

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