

# Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 16, 1 Corinthians

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his New Testament History and Literature course, lecture 16 on 1 Corinthians.

All right, let's go ahead and get started.

Last class period we began, actually, last week we started looking at Paul's letters, one of the more significant corpora in the New Testament or sections comprising the letters of the Apostle Paul, a figure that we're introduced to in the book of Acts. And we began looking last class period, we began to look at the book of 1 Corinthians, and I want to slow down. This is one of the books that we'll slow down and look at a couple, a sample text in a little bit more detail, actually three or four chapters or sections of 1 Corinthians in more detail to examine what the issue or problem was that Paul's addressing and how he addressed that and how your, our ability to uncover what may have been the problem or issue at stake, how that can make a difference in the way we actually interpret the text.

In a couple of instances, it may actually result in an understanding that is very different than what it looks like at first reading or a reading that you may be used to. But let's open with prayer and then we'll look more specifically at certain sections of 1 Corinthians.

Father, we realize that we face a daunting and humbling task, and that is attempting to understand, analyze, and wrestle with what is nothing less than your very words and your very speech and communication to us. So, Father, I pray that we will be willing to wrestle with the text and ask the difficult questions about the text and about ourselves. And Lord, that we would take the greatest pains and do whatever is necessary to understand them as clearly and accurately as possible. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

All right. So, we ended by looking at 1 Corinthians from the standpoint of 1 Corinthians being only one part of an ongoing communication between Paul and the Corinthians.

We, again, you read in Acts chapter 18, you can read more detail about the background of Corinthians or to the letter of Corinthians on Paul's first visit to Corinth, where he spent roughly a year and a half establishing a church there. And then due to certain factors and certain issues arising in the church, Paul finds it necessary to address those problems and issues in writing a series of letters. And we said technically our 1 Corinthians is really 2 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians refers to a letter that Paul had apparently written previously that we don't have any longer, we have no access to. So, 1 Corinthians is technically 2 Corinthians. What we call 2 Corinthians is technically 4 Corinthians because 2 Corinthians mentions, we'll look at 2 Corinthians later, but 2 Corinthians mentions a severe letter that some persons actually feel has been combined with another letter into 2 Corinthians.

We'll talk about that later, but assuming that the severe letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians is a separate letter, we have then, we know of at least 4 letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians that we know of. Again, only 2 of them exist or are extant in what we call 1 and 2 Corinthians. So, what that means is it's going to be even a little more difficult to try to reconstruct what was going on because there is so much interaction already between Paul and his readers.

He simply is going to assume, obviously, that they know what's going on and he will respond to them. But again, we have to do the hard work of attempting based on 1 Corinthians, based on what we can know historically to try to reconstruct what were the issues that Paul was addressing in the church at Corinth. There are, there are actually two ways, a couple of ways to divide the book up or to think about the book of 1 Corinthians or two ways to consider its plan or how it's put together.

One of them is you could divide the book into the manner in which Paul received the information about the Corinthian church. In other words, after Paul had left Corinth, after spending a year and a half there and establishing a church, how did Paul find out about the different problems that arose? Well, the first 6 chapters seem to address problems that came to Paul via word-of-mouth report. So, he heard by report someone telling him that there were certain problems that arose and in the first 6 chapters, he deals in order or kind of takes each problem in turn that he has been made aware of and deals with it.

Whereas in chapters 7 through 16, Paul seems to respond to written reports. So for example, in chapter 7 in verse 1, Paul says, now concerning the matters about which you wrote. So, whether it was a letter or whatever, again, perhaps then the Corinthians also wrote Paul a letter, but now Paul seems to respond to a series of issues that he has been made aware of through letter.

Another way to divide the letter is to divide it according to the way that Jews during this time would have frequently characterized Gentiles and that is according to two major sins. You find this in the Old Testament, you find this in Jewish literature, you find this elsewhere in the New Testament. It was a common Jewish understanding that Gentiles were basically characterized or guilty of two sins, that would be sexual immorality and idolatry.

Again, it appears all through the Jewish literature and so the first chapters, 5 through 7, could all be seen as addressing a series of issues related to the problem of sexual immorality. Again, this puts those under the category of a common sin that Gentiles, according to Jews, were guilty of. And then chapters 8 through 14 address the issue of idolatry, another characteristic sin of Gentiles, according to many Jews.

And then chapter 15, kind of at the climax of that, deals with the hope of the resurrection. So those are two ways to understand how 1 Corinthians is put together. When you read 1 Corinthians, it becomes very important or very clear that Paul just seems to take a number of issues and a number of problems and deal with them and they're often introduced by this phrase, now concerning.

So now concerning meat offered to idols, now concerning spiritual gifts, now concerning this, now concerning about the matters about which you wrote. So Paul seems to deal with a series of issues, but again, they could be categorized according to one of these two schemes. So that's one way of organizing and understanding what's going on in 1 Corinthians.

I find this one very compelling because, interestingly, Paul is going to address many of the Corinthian problems from the perspective of the Old Testament. And it's almost as if he's putting an Old Testament spin on the problem of the Corinthians and his solution to those problems as well. Now, when we ask the question then why... Yeah, go ahead.

It should be 5 through 7. We'll talk a little bit about chapters 1 through 3 and what's going on there. But why did Paul have to write 1 Corinthians in the first place? In other words, what were the issues or some of the problems that caused Paul to have to sit down and write this letter? And as I said, Paul had spent a year and a half establishing a church in the city of Corinth, the capital of Achaia in modern-day Greece. After leaving, certain issues and problems arose that had infiltrated the church that now Paul has heard of by word of mouth and through written form.

And now he sits down and composes this letter to respond to this series of problems. Actually, again, this is the second letter that Paul has written that we call 1 Corinthians. So why did he have to write it? What were some of the major problems going on in Corinth? Well, I want to highlight two of them, although there seem to be many.

And the way that these could be summed up is simply this. It seems that the Corinthian culture had now infiltrated the church. In other words, the way that things took place, the way people did business or what was going on, and the way people thought in Corinthian secular culture had now infiltrated the church and caused a number of problems that Paul is now going to address.

A couple of the issues were, one of them was a crisis in leadership. Remember way back, I guess about the first week or two of this class, of course, you remember that far back, we talked a little bit about some of the cultural values, one of those being the patron-client relationship. That is, a patron was a wealthy member of society of some significant status who would usually bestow some kind of a benefit on a poor member of society, someone of lower social status, usually in exchange for that person's support, politically or otherwise.

In other words, the person would pay the patron back by going around and telling everyone how wonderful he is, something like that. So Corinth was steeped in this cultural value and had its share of patrons, wealthy individuals of a certain social status. And social status was very important.

The Corinthians would have viewed their leaders in Corinthian society in terms of their social status and that would have been very important to them. There was also the possibility of the influence of what has been called sophists, which comes from the Greek word *sophos*, meaning wisdom. A sophist was a wise teacher and sophist would have basically competed, they would have been these wise teachers who would have competed for a following.

And so, this competition among leaders, this political wrangling, promoting status, vying for status, emphasis on social status and wealth, this would have been a very important factor, social factor, in first century Corinth. In my opinion, one of the issues that would have raised a number of problems, and I think explains some of the problems we're going to read about in 1 Corinthians. Another one that we've already talked about is the problem of sexual immorality.

Though in the Greco-Roman Empire, there were certainly limits and boundaries, certain sexual activities that they would have looked down upon and would have been unacceptable, the Roman attitude towards sexuality was obviously much more open and much more free and loose than Christians would have had. And so, especially at times in connection with certain religious practices and certain religious celebrations with pagan religions, adding that all together, if a number of the Corinthian Christians during that 18-month period Paul spent in Corinth, if a number of those Christians came out of that environment and now still find themselves in that environment, that's obviously going to be a problem for them. And a number of issues that Paul addresses, I think, relate to a number of the Greco-Roman views towards sexuality.

So those are two very important issues or kinds of viewpoints or values in the Corinthian society and the Greco-Roman world that had infiltrated the church and began to cause a number of problems. And now Paul will begin to address those in 1 Corinthians. So, what I want to do is I want to look at just a handful of important passages in 1 Corinthians and try to reconstruct what, given what we know about the

letter of 1 Corinthians, but also what we know about the city of Corinth and some of the things we said, can we perhaps reconstruct the situation that would have caused Paul to write what he did? And how might that help us make sense of what we read in these different sections of Corinthians? A couple of these I'll just touch on very briefly, but a couple I'll linger on, spend a little bit more time on, and dwell on in a little bit more detail.

The first one is chapters 1 through 3. In chapters 1 through 3, this is where Paul addresses the issue of how the Corinthians are treating other apostles and other church leaders. And so, for example, this is how Paul begins in chapter 1 and starting with verse 10. This is kind of the first problem that Paul addresses.

And in a way, what he says in these chapters helps explain a number of other problems as well. It's kind of indicative of Corinthian thinking and Greco-Roman thinking and how it had affected the church. So, this is chapter 1 in verse 10.

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people, that seems to be the source of the word of mouth that has reached Paul about some of the problems in Corinth. So, he says, it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.

And so that raises the question, what kind of quarrels? What are they fighting over? What's causing this division that now has Paul so concerned? And he goes on and says in verse 12, what I mean is this. Each of you says I belong to Paul or I belong to Apollos or I belong to Cephas or I belong to Christ. Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Now, what appears to be the problem and what he's going to address through chapter three is that these verses suggest that the division and quarreling had been caused by dissension kind of crystallizing around these key figures.

I belong to Paul. I belong to Apollos. I belong to Cephas or Peter.

Now, as you read this, again, you wonder, well, why would they do that? Well, given what we just said, it appears that the Corinthians were treating their church leaders in the same way that they would have been accustomed to treating leaders in Corinthian society. That is this emphasizing social status, this whole patron-client dynamic, the way they treated these sophists as the sophists being wise teachers competing for followers. If all of that somehow factored into it, you can see how the Corinthians may now have been treating their church leaders and dominant church figures like Paul and Apollos and Cephas or Peter may have been treating those persons in the same way that they were accustomed to treating leaders in the city of

Corinth, who were vying for attention and treating them in terms of their political clout and their social status, et cetera, et cetera.

So perhaps then now Paul recognizing that is now going to address that problem by basically his response is, if you treat us that way, if you treat your church leaders that way, you are reflecting, yes, you may be reflecting the wisdom of Corinth, but the wisdom of Corinth is actually foolishness when it's measured against God's standard of wisdom, which revolves around the gospel of a crucified, humiliated, and suffering Lord who died on the cross. So, Paul basically says this clamor for political status, treating church leaders like you do your leaders in secular Corinth in terms of social status and rallying around and causing division, that all reflects the wisdom of Corinth, but when measured against God's wisdom in the gospel of a crucified and suffering Lord, that wisdom actually turns out to be foolishness. So he calls on the Corinthians to stop treating their leaders in the same way as they've been accustomed to treating their leaders in secular Corinth, but instead to treat them more in line with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So that's problem number one. So, in the first three chapters then, Paul's not just addressing division in general or the human propensity to quarrel and compete. Again, he seems to be addressing a very specific problem that has come about because of Corinthian culture and the way that the Corinthians treat their leaders.

Again, the social status and treating leaders in light of that, the patron-client relationship. This also may be one of the reasons why Paul and this becomes clear later on in 1 Corinthians, but this may also be why Paul refused the financial support of the Corinthians. While he was quite willing to receive financial support from most other churches, he did not in Corinth.

Instead, he set up his own business to make a living, and perhaps because he wanted to distance himself from, you know, if he were to receive financial support, he could be perceived in light of this whole political wrangling and the social status and the patron-client relationship, et cetera. So, he wanted to avoid that, and so it seems that with the Corinthians, he takes on a different strategy. And if you read the letter to the Philippians that we'll look at later, he gladly received their financial support, so he could devote himself completely to spreading the gospel on their behalf.

But when it came to the Corinthians, because of some of the problems Paul himself made work for his own living. Chapter 5. 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Again, we'll skip ahead. We won't touch on every chapter.

I've just selected a handful of them. Chapter 5 is a very interesting text, and I think one that can only be explained when we understand, again, some of the background and the problems that would have precipitated the issue in 1 Corinthians 5, and caused Paul to have to address it. And this is how chapter 5 begins.

It's a rather bizarre text, at least for us in some ways. He says, starting the verse, this is chapter 5. It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that is not even found among the pagans. In other words, basically what Paul is saying, this is not just rhetoric.

What I take it is, that he's going to describe a situation that even in the secular Corinthian society would be condemned and looked down upon. He says, of a kind that is not found even among pagans. A man is living with his father's wife, which probably is a clear reference to his stepmother and not his biological mother.

But here's the kind of astonishing thing. If you think that's astonishing, he goes on and says, but, and you are arrogant about it, or you are boastful about it. Should you not rather have mourned? Mourning is not being sad because of what is happening, but mourning in the Old Testament was a sign of repentance.

So, he's basically saying, rather you should repent of this. Instead, you're boasting and you're arrogant because there's this person in your midst and by in your midst, he's referring to the church. There's this person in your church who is sleeping with his father's wife, his stepmother, and you're boasting about that rather than repenting and doing so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you.

So instead of dealing with this person, they're boasting about it and tolerating it. So, the question is, I mean, that raises another number of questions. What is going on? What would cause this person to do this thing? And why in the world would the church tolerate it and boast about it? Something that Paul says, even the secular pagan Corinthians look down upon this and don't even tolerate this, yet you do.

First of all, the problem is clearly, the problem clearly seems to be that and notice that Paul does not so much address the man himself or the man's stepmother. Instead, what his issue is, and yes he would have been upset about that, but what really has Paul upset is not so much the man's sexual sins, but the fact that the church arrogantly tolerates it. So, the key issue here is the church tolerating it instead of dealing with the situation and, as he says, removing the person from their midst.

And we'll talk more about that in a moment as well. So again, his solution to the problem is that the Corinthian church should expel this immoral person in order to preserve the purity of the church. Again, it's so interesting, Paul doesn't say, Paul says very little about this individual, but he says everything about the way the church is treating the situation and the way they're tolerating it and not doing anything about it.

Now, to address a couple of questions. First of all, why, again, the first question is why would this individual in the first place, why would he be, and it's not clear in this text whether he has actually married his stepmother or whether he's just living with her outside of marriage, but in either case, Paul is upset about it and we'll see why in just a moment, why that would have been forbidden. But again, this individual is doing something that even the Greco-Roman society would look down upon.

Why might he do this? Probably, there may be a couple of explanations and I'm not sure which one, but one of the explanations may be that the reason why this person would marry his stepmother is perhaps the father has passed away and died or they may also be divorced and what might happen is that if this stepmother married someone else, then the father's inheritance would go with her. So, in marrying his stepmother, he may be doing that just to try to keep the money in the family instead of her marrying someone else and some of it or all of it going with her new spouse. So that may be one reason why he would marry his stepmother to try to keep the money in the family.

There may be other reasons as well, I'm not sure because the text is silent, but there could be an explanation for that along those lines. But the other question is, why would the church tolerate this? Think a little bit about some of the background we've been talking about. Why would the church be willing to tolerate and even boast about this person? Again, you think, well, it's a church, certainly.

Certainly, they would realize that this is a sexual sin that isn't even permitted in the secular Greco-Roman world and in Corinth. Why would they be willing to overlook this and tolerate, even boast about it? They didn't realize what? Okay, so perhaps they're so used to this or seeing this that they don't think it's out of the norm for them. Okay, so perhaps given what we've talked about, about the rampant immorality in Greco-Roman society, is it possible that they just didn't think much about this? That's a possibility.

What else? Anything else? Could it be that they were boasting that their... All right. Yeah, were they... Maybe they had heard Paul talk about, how we're saved by grace through faith, and they thought that they were emphasizing that over judging this person. Okay.

What if this individual is an influential person in society who may be a patron? Perhaps this is one of the places where the church in Corinth met. Usually, they would meet in the home of a wealthy individual. But what if this is a wealthy patron, an influential person in society? That might be the reason, I suspect, why they would let him go and overlook this, is because they don't want to cut themselves off from this financial source, and they don't want to speak out against someone of this social status and standing, so they're willing to let this go, and instead boast in this person as an influential member of society.



In other words, Chapter 5 may be very close to, or may share features with Chapters 1 through 3, boasting about leaders, treating them in light of social status and political status, etc., patrons, and maybe this, again, is a wealthy patron, someone of social status, and so no one's going to touch this guy, and they're willing to overlook him. Now, a couple of other things. I think the key to understanding this passage as well is to understand not only the background in secular Corinth but also to understand that the way Paul describes the situation and his solution is clearly rooted in the Old Testament.

For example, we just asked, why were they willing to tolerate and boast. Leviticus 18, in Leviticus 18, we find the author condemning incest and various types of incestuous relationships. One of them is a relationship with the wife of one's father, that would be a stepmother. So, Paul seems to be thinking of the prohibitions against incest in Leviticus Chapter 18.

You also find Deuteronomy also prohibiting incestuous relationships. Second, the fact that he calls upon the congregation to come together and make a judgment reflects the Old Testament conception of the congregation, the assembly of God's people, Israel, coming together to make a judgment or decision as well in the book of Deuteronomy. In other words, Paul is looking at this situation through the lens of the Old Testament.

He's calling upon, especially Deuteronomy, other Old Testament texts to provide a lens and perspective for the Corinthians to look at this situation. Another one is, especially the book of Deuteronomy, but other texts emphasize the need to maintain purity within the community, especially for admission into the temple. It's interesting, back in Chapter 3, one of the most famous phrases in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3, how does Paul describe the church in Chapter 3? He says, Do you not know that what? Do you not know that you are the temple of God? Applying Old Testament temple imagery now to the church at Corinth, not their building, but the people themselves as they gather for worship.

So, Paul envisions the church as a purified community, a holy temple, and that's the reason why he calls for them to expel this individual or to remove him from their midst, to maintain the purity of this community, this new community, this temple church in Corinth. So, again, Paul doesn't say a whole lot addressing the individual who's committing the sin, but he has everything to say to the church by portraying them as a holy community along the lines of the Old Testament community of God that were to be pure, that was to remove impurity from their midst, by portraying them as a temple to which you could only be admitted if one was pure. By portraying the church in that way, Paul then calls for the church not to tolerate this person, no matter what his social status, but instead to remove him from their midst in order to maintain the purity of the people themselves.

There's obviously, there is a hint in the text that the ultimate goal is that this person will be restored, but at the same time, Paul will not tolerate the intolerance of the church, the fact that they're just, or I'm sorry, he will not tolerate the tolerance of the church, that is that they're just going to overlook this perhaps because of his social status. All right, so that's one example of how I think understanding a little bit about the situation in Corinth, the background, might help you. If this is a guy who is an influential member of society, now you can see why they might want to let him go, but Paul says you can't evaluate, you can't respond to this situation in light of the values of Corinthian society.

Instead, he provides them with a set of Old Testament lenses to look at their situation in a new light, to see it in terms of this purified temple community of God and the need to maintain purity in their midst. Right, 1 Corinthians chapter 7, is another intriguing text. It begins, this is kind of the first of a section that Paul now apparently will respond to issues that have come to him via written form, perhaps in a letter.

He says, now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is well for a man or is good for a man not to touch a woman. Now, let me show you two different translations of this verse. This is an older, the New American Standard Bible, some of you may have that, and there may be other versions that would do something similar.

This is the New Revised Standard Version, but as you look at this, the wording is very similar, what's the difference between these two? What's the difference between the two? A tough one is, it implies more that Paul is saying it's good for a man not to touch a woman, and then the bottom one, quotation marks, that's what they say, and Paul is going to do that. Very good. Does everyone hear that? A very astute observation.

This one here, the difference is punctuation. The way this is punctuated suggests that this is what Paul said. Paul is going to write to the Corinthians and tell them it's not good for a man to touch a woman.

Therefore, it would appear that Paul is going to address the problem of rampant sexual immorality and he wants it to stop. Understanding touching to be, you know, not just physical touch, but touching as a sexual object is what the word implies. Whereas this one, notice the way it's punctuated, now concerning the matters about which you wrote, and notice that this is in quotation marks, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

This would be a summary of what the Corinthians were saying and what they were thinking. So how you punctuate this is going to make a big difference in how you

read chapter seven. Is chapter seven Paul's response to the rampant sexual immorality in the church, or is it a response to something that the Corinthians were saying? They were the ones saying it's good for a man not to touch a woman sexually.

And again, in that day, it would have basically been the man making the advances. So, which one is it? The difficulty is that if you could go back and read the original manuscripts of the New Testament, which we don't have, but when Paul originally wrote in the first century, what you would have found is, I can't remember if I put a picture of a manuscript up towards the beginning of the semester, but in the first century, the way they wrote is, first of all, they would have written with no spaces in between words or letters. Everything would have run together.

Second, they would have written with no punctuation, no periods, commas, question marks, or quotation marks. As you read your English translation, at least in the New Testament, all the periods and commas and quotation marks and punctuations are all put there by the editors and the translators of your Bible. So interestingly, our modern-day translations are, to some degree, just as much an interpretation as they are a translation.

They're all interpretations, and even the way punctuation is used can influence the way we read it. In my opinion, I think most are starting to agree that this is the way we should read it, that it wasn't Paul who was saying it's good for a man not to touch a woman, but it was the Corinthians who were saying that. Then the question becomes, why in the world would the Corinthians be saying that? Why would at least some of the Corinthians be saying it's good for a man not to touch a woman, that is, sexually? What in the world would have led the Corinthians to say something like that? Well, some have suggested, well, it's because of a Platonic type of dualism or a Gnostic type of thinking.

Remember, way back at the beginning of the semester, we talked about different Greco-Roman religious and philosophical options, and one of them was Platonism which, among other things, Platonism distinguishes between the spiritual and the physical world. Some may have taken that to the extreme to say that since the ultimate reality is spiritual we must deny any physical and bodily appetites. And so one of the offshoots of that would have been to deny any physical relationships.

And so, because of this Platonic type of thinking that might have influenced the Church of Corinth some of them would have been advocating denying any physical pleasure and instead pursuing the spiritual, which meant not engaging in any kind of sexual relationships, period. And then Paul is going to respond to that. Now, that's possible.

However, it's also possible when you go on and read chapter 7, Paul gives all kinds of advice. He addresses husbands and wives who are married. He addresses people who are divorced.

He addresses people who are apparently thinking about getting a divorce. He addresses people who are single and are thinking about marriage, and getting married. He addresses people who are single and are not thinking about getting married.

So, he addresses a variety of persons, males, and females, so that it doesn't seem like this Platonic dualism between spirit and matter explains all the problems. I wonder if it's not more the fact that because of two things, because Paul has addressed the issue of sexual immorality elsewhere in the letter, and previously the letter that is technically 1 Corinthians that we don't have any longer, that seemed to address issues of sexual immorality. Because Paul addressed that issue and because it was so rampant in Corinth, I wonder if some of the Corinthians may not have been responding, well, maybe the best way, because of Paul's commands to be careful, and because it's so rampant in Corinth, I wonder if some Corinthians were wondering, maybe it's just better if we avoid it altogether.

And that some, even within the marriage relationship, were abstaining. Although Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 7 that the boundaries for sexual relationships are within the marriage relationship, if some thought were abstaining within the marriage relationship, some may have been wondering if they should divorce their spouses, and some who were single were wondering if they should even get married, or etc., etc. So Paul seems to address, I think, a number of problems in 1 Corinthians 7 related to this issue that, again, perhaps because of some of Paul's commands about warning against immorality, and because it was so rampant in Corinth, I wonder if some of the Corinthians were saying, maybe it's better if we just avoid it altogether and abstain, even in the marriage relationship.

And so, Paul, in chapter 7, provides a variety of instructions for married people, people who are divorced or considering a divorce, people who are single and wondering if they should get married, etc. So once again, chapter 7 is not just Paul sitting down and going off on the topic of marriage, etc., etc., is, again, he's addressing a very specific issue and problem that has arisen in the Corinthian church due to what's going on in the Corinthian culture. There's a lot more we can say about chapter 7, but it'd probably take the rest of this semester.

Yeah, that's right. Or the other possibility, too, that I'm not sure of, but some have suggested not all the Corinthians would have thought the same thing on this topic. So maybe Paul's addressing a different group or faction within the church in chapter 7, different than the ones who would have been supportive of what was going on in chapter 5. That's a possibility, I'm not sure.

Yeah, I don't know. Yeah, was it possible? I mean, from what we know of most larger cities, anyway, there would have probably been several smaller congregations. And whether they got together on occasion and met as a group, I'm not sure.

At least, I guess I haven't thought about that enough to answer that for Corinthians. Is it likely there were several churches, or was there just one? Or, again, were there several that met together on occasion? I'm not sure how to answer that for 1 Corinthians. That's a really good question.

All right, skipping ahead, 1 Corinthians 11. And I want to look at the second part of 1 Corinthians 11. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, in the entire chapter, Paul addresses issues in the church as they gather for worship.

And that's very important to understand. Paul's not addressing what the Corinthians do on their own, although he has things to say about that, he's not addressing what Corinthians do in their own homes or what they do as individuals or in other groups and societies and things. He's addressing in chapters 11 and 12 through 14, the next section we'll look at, he's addressing issues that have emerged when the Corinthians gather together for worship.

Again, whether that's in separate houses or in one house in particular, I'm not exactly certain what Paul's envisioning here. So, chapter 11 addresses the problem of the church when it gathers for worship. And the second half of chapter 11 is what I want to focus on, verses 17 through 34 of chapter 11.

Now, here's how he begins, starting with verse 17. He says, Now, in the following instructions, I do not commend you, as if he's had many commendations for them anyway so far, because when you come together, it is not for the better, but for the worse. To begin with, when you come together as a church, I want you to notice the irony or paradox in the way Paul is speaking.

To begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. So, notice the irony or contradiction. They come together as a church, but they're not really coming together because there are still divisions among them.

And so, I would propose that what Paul's going to say in chapter 11 is still the result of how things go on in day-to-day life in secular Corinth. The division between social status, especially the division between wealthy and poor, patron clients, those kinds of divisions are now going to filter down into the church and cause the problem that Paul's going to address in chapter 11. So, he says, you come together as a church, but in actuality, you're not coming together because there are divisions among you.

Now, in the rest of this, he says, starting in verse 19, Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. So, this is Paul's main issue. When the church comes together they participate in the Lord's supper, or you may call it the Eucharist or communion or other terms that we call it.

In this text, he calls it the Lord's supper. He says, when you come together, it's not really the Lord's supper that you eat. So, he's. When they gather together to have communion or the Lord's supper, that's not really what's taking place.

He says, for when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper and one goes hungry while another becomes drunk. He says, what? Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? Now, what is going on here? First of all, it's important to realize the way they did communion in the first century may be a little bit different than we're used to. At least in all the traditions I've grown up with and at the end, usually it's one Sunday a month.

Although when I was in Scotland, it was a lot more frequent and I enjoyed that. But in the churches where I grew up, usually once a month we have communion and the service goes on as normal with your praise band and your sermon. And at the end, then the ushers come up and communion takes place and everyone's still seated and the bread is passed and you eat it.

And then the cup is passed and you drink it. And then the praise band comes back up and sing something and you're out the door. Now, in the first century, it wasn't that way.

Usually, communion would have taken place in the context of a meal that the church would have eaten together. And so that's why this reference to eating and some getting drunk and some eating before others arrive, this would have been in the context of a church meal that somewhere in there, perhaps towards the end of it, would have climaxed in the Lord's Supper celebrating communion or the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper. Now, the problem is, again, what is the problem with the Corinthians? What has Paul so upset? How is it that they have factions? Or how is it that there are divisions? And why then does Paul say it's really not the Lord's Supper that you celebrate? So, what was the problem Paul was addressing? It seems to me, as I've already said, that this problem of different social levels, such as found in the patron-client relationship and the distinction between the wealthier elite members of society and the poorer members, had now infiltrated down into the church and was now even coming out in the way they celebrated communion.

So that what is probably going on, and this, I think, is a plausible scenario when you read a lot of the early Greco-Roman sources and understand what was probably

going on in Corinth, is most likely some of the wealthier members, first of all, the church in Corinth or churches would have met most likely in the home of a wealthy member, maybe a patron who would have offered his home and the financial resources basically for this small house church. And so, we're probably in the setting of a fairly large house, at least for that day, of a wealthier member of the church in Corinthian society. Now, a lot of the wealthier members probably would not have been as dependent on the need to work, and so they would have been the first ones to arrive and to begin eating.

And interestingly, they probably would have been served a full meal by servants. Now, the poor members, the reason why Paul tells them, you arrive and you eat before everyone else comes, later on in verse 33, he's going to say, instead, you need to wait for everybody. Why does he say that? Most likely, it would have been the poor members who would have arrived later, perhaps because they had to work and the richer members would not have.

Furthermore, most of the rich, the persons that came first, most of them would have gone to the normal dining spot, which would have had a limited number of seats, and they would have all arrived and been served a full meal by the servants. The poor members who arrived probably would have had to meet or sit in the atrium of the house, a smaller room, and they would have actually been served lesser food, either we might say leftovers maybe, but actually lesser food. Again, this is the way it was in Corinth, this distinction between rich and poor.

And so, you have the rich arriving and they're eating and drinking and having a good time and eating the best meal and being served by servants, and then you have the poor coming later, perhaps after their work, and they're eating lesser food, and Paul says, and you call that the Lord's Supper? You're using, his whole point is, you are using something that should celebrate your union and unity in Christ, the fact that you all belong to the one body of Christ, you are using something that should promote and express your unity, you're using that to cause division and further express social division within your midst. That's what has Paul so upset. So, towards the end of this instruction, he tells them, let me find the exact verse, he says, therefore, this is verse 27, so he says, whenever therefore, or whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord, that is, whoever participates in communion the way you are, Corinthians, in an unworthy manner, will be answerable before the body and blood of the Lord.

And he says, instead, examine yourselves. Now, what does he mean by that? Because, again, if I can, just referring to my own tradition, is sometime within the communion service, usually the pastor reads this verse and says you are, we're called to examine ourselves and make sure that we're not taking of the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner, which usually interpreted means having sin in your life that you have not confessed. So, you have about a three-minute period to think of every sin

that you've committed since the last time you were at communion, which may have been a month ago, and for some of that, thus, that may be more than others.

But, I mean, you're supposed to ask forgiveness for all these sins you've committed the last week or month or whatever, and with the risk that you might forget something. And I've actually known people who have refused to take the Lord's supper, and I think I have in the past because I'm not sure that I'm worthy. I think I have sin in my life and I'm not worthy of taking the Lord's supper.

And I certainly don't want to say that's inappropriate, but I'm not sure that that's what Paul meant. If you read this in its context, what is the problem he's addressing? The problem is not unconfessed sin. The problem is using the Lord's Supper to create division and to perpetuate these social distinctions within the church.

As Paul said earlier, starting in verse 21, when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry while another becomes drunk. What, do you not have homes to eat in, or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? So, the main error that Paul's addressing, or to partake of the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner, is to do so in a way that humiliates or demeans or refuses to acknowledge someone else. That is, to take in the Lord's supper when there is a division or you are demeaning or humiliating or rejecting or have a conflict with someone else.

Using the Lord's supper in a way that creates division. So again, there's a venerable tradition that's grown up around participating in the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner and what that means. Certainly, the Lord's supper is a time for reflection on our attitude towards the Lord's supper and our attitude towards God Himself, but perhaps the priority should be our attitude towards each other.

Are we participating in the Lord's supper when in reality we have demeaned or humiliated or created dissension or division with someone else? That's what Paul means when he says you're taking the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner. And that's why we have to examine ourselves. Have we done something that has created division? Have we demeaned someone else? To discern the body and blood of Christ here means to understand that this Lord's supper proclaims the unity of God's people as members of the body of Christ based on the death of Jesus Christ.

And to use it or treat it in any other way is to participate in an unworthy manner. So again, I think understanding the background that created this problem.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his New Testament History and Literature course, lecture 16 on 1 Corinthians.