

The Breaking of Bread in Corinth

This well known quotation from 1 Corinthians 11 really needs to be put in its context.

17 ¶ But in giving you this charge, I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better but for the worse.

18 For first of all, when ye come together {1} in the church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and I partly believe it. {1} Or: in congregation}

19 For there must be also {1} factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you. {1} Gr. heresies}

In these 3 verses Paul is writing not just about minor differences of opinion over the meaning of words, but fairly significant doctrinal differences based on individual gnosis claimed by certain individuals through their 'gifts', by the which they no doubt claimed divine inspiration and that 'God' or 'Jesus' spoke or was speaking through them (the emphasis on speaking in tongues); by the which it seems they divided the ecclesia in Corinth into competitive factions. This was a significant (modernist) Darwinesque feature of Hellenistic culture of the time. This competitive spirit went on to characterize Christianity down through the ages... so we are certainly not alone in this problem. All of which 'gifts' of divine inspiration or special 'gnosis' he goes on to deal with in what is for us chapter 12. Paul suggest that this factionalism, which he only partly believes is occurring, "must be" as it is through the cauldron of debate hot or otherwise, having to defend one's concepts and ideas against attack etc, and having to reflect upon behaviour that causes one to think deeply on the values and belief system we have heard with our ears (Job), that they crystallize and are either rejected burned with fire, or through this refining process they become one's own meaning of life and place in the metanarrative etc. To use another metaphor the wheat and the tares will always grow (that's the point-growth) in proximity to one another, that is the way life is, so it is a useless exercise to try and root out the tares. Beside the fact that some wheat will be rooted out too, as is happening in ecclesias, religions, cultures and societies around the world today it is a very destructive practice. Monoculture, exclusivity, is a human device by the which we try to make the world over, restructure it, in our own image, in the way we 'think' it should, must or ought to be according to the ideal picture we have in our heads (idealism). This is because we do not understand the nature of reality and thus 'fear' what appears to be the chaos of everything growing together, the way the Creator intended. Monoculture has its own problems which are often more insidious, that of dis-ease which can decimate the population.

20 When therefore ye assemble yourselves together, it is not possible to eat the Lord's supper:
21 for in your eating each one taketh before other his own supper; and one is hungry, and another is drunken.

22 What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the {1} church of God, and put them to shame that {2} have not? What shall I say to you? {3} shall I praise you? In this I praise you not.

{1} Or: congregation 2) Or: having nothing 3) Or: shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.}

It is highly possible they were treating their assembling to eat the "Lord's supper" in one of the upper class members 'front rooms' as a sort of symposium in a way that was common in the

culture in those times. Perhaps they did not run to quite the same 'excess of riot' as they may have done prior to their conversion and acceptance of 'the way', but these gatherings were now open to equal participation by women (wives), the 'lower' strata of their society as well as males of the middle and upper classes, whose exclusive privilege these symposia were under the dominate Greco/roman culture of this 'roman colony' as Corinth was at this time having been sacked and rebuilt by the Romans. But such 'unChristian' class and caste distinction was still being thoughtlessly promoted and practiced. The internal evidence could also suggest the rich were treating these gatherings as we might a picnic, bringing and eating their own bread and wine not sharing it with the less fortunate brother or sister who, according to the rules of society did not deserve it. Thus some were drunk and others starving. Paul was disturbed perhaps even outraged by this lack of respect and filial love and care of the poor brothers and sisters, "putting them to open shame". In their society the accumulation of goods the amassing of riches was a sign to the recipient of the god's [plural or now singular] pleasure because of their righteousness', of their do gooding etc and ipso facto the rightness of the philosophy that justified their behaviour. It was this that made them rich, and for the sake of cognitive balance in the black and white polarity of this worldview the polar opposite must be true of the poor, each, in this worldview, got what they deserved by 'divine' decree. Whereas the reality of the situation was that it had more to do with the rigid structure of society which was by design unjust and inequitable. Most of the time the poor were kept poor and not allowed to rise above their station etc by the rigid legal artifice of not acknowledging any other than men born in the city states of Greece as citizens, thus making them a permanent underclass. Greece was a slave owning society and these non- persons without whom the city/state just would not be able to function did all the menial work surviving as best they could in a repressive and degrading social system. It made no economic sense in this system to allow them to better themselves or to even allow them to think themselves equal to their masters. This hierarchical structure was propagandized as divinely decreed and immutable law. This was what was so different and so attractive about Christianity particularly among the poor and stateless who struggled to survive.

As it is written remember the sabbath. Everyday "in Christ" is a sabbath or shabbat. Freedom in Christ is freedom from these arbitrary rules or laws of men imposed upon the poor and the other most vulnerable sectors of society for the selfish purposes of those in power.

23 ¶ For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was {1} betrayed took bread; {1} Or: delivered up

24 and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body, which {1} is for you: this do in remembrance of me. {1} Many ancient authorities read is broken for you

25 In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.

The words in v27 "unworthy manner" mean just that, they didn't make a difference (a discernment) between the symbolic body and blood of the Lord and the bread and wine (mostly wine) of the usual orgy type of activity where in times past paid 'female entertainers' (who were

not Greek or at least not 'citizens') would regale the assembled patricians and other high born men only (guests at such gatherings could also include the glitterati of society at the time men like Socrates, Aristotle, Homer etc) with poetry, song and dance, and engage in rhetorical debate whilst they ate and drank to excess getting more raucous and raunchy as the night wore on, served by naked young male and female slaves and from which their wives were excluded. These type of social gatherings or symposia were common practice in Hellenic culture amongst the upper or 'ruling' class and seen as the height of sophistication. This hedonistic indulgence was perceived as theirs by right of being the ruling or upper class. The Lord's table should have been a place where all were equal in the sight of God and should have been in theirs as well and worthy of respect, whether Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female. So what follows can be seen in a different and I think more logical light. Not just the remainder of the chapter but the next three chapters as well (12-14) and particularly chapter 13. In these chapters individuality is maintained and championed as essential to the group whereas individualism is exposed as mere self-seeking, which is competitive and divisive.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he {1} discern not the body. {1} Gr. discriminate}

30 For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep.

31 But if we {1} discerned ourselves, we should not be judged. {1} Gr. discriminated}

32 But {1} when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. {1} Or: when we are judged of the Lord, we are chastened}

33 Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, wait one for another.

34 If any man is hungry, let him eat at home; that your coming together be not unto judgment. And the rest will I set in order whensoever I come.

I would suggest it is the unity and inclusiveness of the elements of the Lord's table the symbols of his body and blood that is the central unifying factor that cuts across all the rigid divisive structure of not only Greek society, but also that of the Jewish culture, and the way they explained/justified their exclusivity and the abusive inequality that was part of the fabric of their 'exclusive' cultures and unconsciously practiced by them perhaps because they perceived themselves as more (equal with the upper class Greek males) and others less than human. According to this doctrine we deserve or merit what we get in this life. And it is for this that Paul says they would be 'judged' (discriminated), indeed for which they, as a body were being judged or 'disciplined' at the time by the real divine law, that of cause and effect. This unthinking, unfeeling, unjust, abusive treatment of one another would if it continued factionalize, fracture and eventually destroy the ecclesia, which in this case is 'the Lord's body' in Corinth. It would be the vulnerable, the poor, the noncitizens (non-Greek), the slaves, the women (wives), the less honourable, those who had no standing before the law in the perception of the state who were already suffering and would suffer the most as the body was slowly dismembered because they abused and misused their 'gifts' (30 For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep) selfishly fighting amongst themselves for preeminence and status. What you do to one of these the least of my brothers and sisters you have done it to me. Glibly mouthing these words and others like them we, like they, fail to recognize the real depth of interconnectedness the sense of all in one and one in all they express as in 10:17 Because one loaf one body are we the many for we all share from the one loaf. These discriminatory and competitive elements and practices still permeate the fabric of modernist and post-modernist meritocratic societies and cultures around the world today and are used by astute politically minded men and women who may even perceive themselves as more than human, having

earned the right to victimize and manipulate 'the other' whom they perceive and treat as less than human, to divide and rule as is their perceived right through merit and perpetuate the anxiety of status.

Because of the way the written Greek language seems to have evolved over time they employed many literary devices to impart a sense of meaning. These devices like voice and parallelism gave some structure, rhythm and flow etc to the written word, which was probably meant to give it the feel of the strong oral rhetorical tradition from which it seems to have come. In all of Paul's letters he uses the literary structures of 'inverted parallelism' or 'chiasmus' not only as an organizational tool often repeating and interweaving these structures to organize his words into subdivisions on three or more levels and types, but as a powerful rhetorical device which could be easily understood and remembered by an audience, the majority of whom could neither read nor write. This portion of the letter to Corinth is no exception and a look at the structure (below) reveals several fairly distinct chiasmic structures [symmetrical or inverted parallelism as some call it]. His writings, if not his thinking, make extensive use of the mainly oral tradition of Hebraic and Greco/roman poetic structural forms. Sometimes this is conceptual, in which thesis and antithesis are posited either side of an important central concept (1 Cor.11: 2-16) which is the turning point (chi or X) of his argument. At other times the chiasmic structure is embedded in the use of words as can be seen in this central portion. But again, at least here, the structure is being used to reinforce the central point, which is of equality. Though characteristic of large portions of the Old Testament, particularly the books of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes though not exclusive to these (e.g. Isa.55: 7-8) chiasmic structures were also common in Greek language and the literature that developed out of it. These oral traditions upon which the written language is based seem to be characteristic of both cultures though more highly developed in the Hebraic language and culture.

These structures can it seems be perceived to 'overlap'. A major thematic or overarching chiasmic structure on a macro level involves chapters 11-14 with a powerful central climax in chapter 13. So in chapter 11 we can discern the theme of some sort of disorder, in verses 2-16 it is of dress of both female and male prophets. From verses 17-34 the theme of disorder in the Passover meal that Paul had passed onto the Greek believers. In chapter 12 he discusses spiritual gifts. In chapter 13 the great theme is of love the natural 'in-between'. Chapter 14 refers once again to spiritual gifts in verses 1-25. In the remainder of the chapter Paul once again returns to the twin themes of disorder, this time it is all the prophets (men and women) talking at once in verses 26 to part way through 33 and women (wives) asking questions and/or chatting among themselves during the worship in verses 33-36. This it could be suggested is a signal that they still considered themselves in the subordinate role accorded them by the traditions of the Hellenic and even the Jewish culture that relegated women, particularly wives, who, it must be remembered were not particularly well educated, to mere onlookers and not full participants in the worship.

In 11:4-5 both the men and the women are prophesying. Thus the reader knows that the prophets who interrupt one another in chapter 14 are comprised of both men and women. So when the women in 14:34-35 are told to be silent and listen to the prophets, Paul assumes that it is obvious that some of those prophets are the women prophets of 11:5 when he wrote 14:35-36. He then reinforced the unity of this four-chapter chiasmus with a brief summary. It reads as follows: If anyone thinks that he/she is a prophet (ch 11) or spiritual (ch 12) he/she should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord (ch 13). If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brethren, Earnestly desire to prophesy and do not

forbid speaking in tongues (14:1-25). 5. But all things should be done in decency and in order (26-36) and not, we could add, after the fashion of the symposium. If these four verses are a summary of the entire chiasmus, then the command of the Lord referred to by Paul is the command to 'love one another', which is definitively explained by him in ch. 13. If however, 14:34-40 is only read in a linear fashion, then the 'command of the Lord' becomes the command to tell the women to be silent in church, not the command to love, without which it is all but empty sound or noise. A babble of competitive voices each seeking the preeminence of the self. If then the link with ch. 11 is forgotten, the women prophets are also forgotten. Together these two misunderstandings of the text can and have been shaped by some into a club with which to threaten women into silence in the name of 'the command of the Lord'. Paul's intent is simply to solve some problems, which seem to stem from their individualism and the competitive milieu of their society exacerbated by conflict with legalists who sought to impose the traditions of men upon the group.

There is another chiasmus which overlaps that mentioned above, this appears to start in chapter ten at verse one finishing at the end of chapter eleven. And again we must remind ourselves what is the purpose of the letter to the Corinthians in the first place. The last verse of chapter 11 leaves us in no doubt "And the rest I will 'set in order' when I come". In the third verse of chapter 11 Paul seems to be reiterating as he does elsewhere in the letter the cause of this 'disorder', this disquiet among the brothers and sisters of Corinth and that seems to be the legalism of some who seek to impose their idea of order and justify this by such arguments as are recorded in the following verses, which to verse 9 is probably the 'thesis' if you will, of the letter written to him.

10:1-13. Spiritual food and drink of Israel, and their unresponsiveness

10:14-22. The meaning of sharing in the Lord's supper

10:23-11:1. Eating and drinking to God's glory with others, an ecclesia/Paul's example

11:2-16. (X) Equality of relationships and 'authority' in the Lord

11:17-23a. Eating and drinking to God's glory with others, the ecclesia/Paul's example

11:23b-26. The meaning of sharing in the Lord's supper

11:27-34 Spiritual food and drink of the ecclesia, and their unresponsiveness

This conceptual chiastic structure can be more readily perceived if we narrow the focus from macro to micro and use a translation that retains more of the Greek structural elements as in this example from 1Cor10

16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the Anointed's blood?

The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the Anointed's body?

17 (X) Because one loaf, one body are we the many,

for we all share from the one loaf.

18 Consider Israel according to flesh, are not those who eat the offerings sharers in the altar?

We all share life (zoë) and the struggle of life. It is sharing these elements that make one out of the many, it is the voluntary sacrifice of the survival of the individual self and that which pertains to the self that is encouraged in the Lord's supper. It is the meaning of the sabbath, a ceasing from our own works, including the traditions and practices of men by which we seek to control the world external to the self. In the words of this post modern world "Letting go and letting God".

As was stated above the central element or turning point of the chiasmic structure of these two chapters is 1Cor.11: 2-16. When we read these words in their context it is always with a sense of unease as they just don't seem to fit with the general tone or tenor of the immediate context and seems on the face of it to contradict other Pauline concepts, not to mention those espoused in the Biblical metanarrative per se and seem decidedly controlling. When we look at these particular verses from a structural point of view we can again perceive a chiasmus in the arrangement of words that seem to transition at those of verse 10

(2-3) Introduction

(4-7) 'woman,' 'uncovered,' 'to pray,' 'man,' 'glory'

(8a) not 'man from woman'

(8b) 'woman from man'

(9a) not 'man on account of woman'

(9b) 'woman on account of man'

(10x) For this reason, because of the angels the woman ought to have authority over her [own] head

(11b) 'Neither woman apart from man'

(11a) 'nor man apart from woman'

(12b) "just as the woman is from the man"

(12a) 'thus also the man is through the woman'

(13-15) 'woman,' 'uncovered,' 'to pray,' 'man,' 'glory'

(16) Conclusion

The phrase 'dia touto' "For this reason" (for this thing) (This is why) of verse 10 can be understood to not only relate to the foregoing concepts but to those subsequent to it. Paul uses the phrase 'dia touto' fourteen times in his epistles, of which 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 3:5; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 4:1; Philemon 15; and Romans 4:16 should be understood as pointing to concepts which follow the 'dia touto'. To look ahead for the reason or concept leads us to the otherwise difficult 'dia tous angelous' as that concept. This leads us back to the point of the ordering in verse 3 and that is there is no hierarchy based on sex or gender among the angels. Compare Jesus' words in Matt 22: 23-30 (AV)

23 "The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

This answer of our Lord agrees perfectly well with the meaning of the word translated 'authority' which same word is used of Jesus in Matt. 7:29 and other parallel texts, in the sense of power of choice or permission when He spoke authoritatively. For 'this thing' or for 'this reason' then a woman has been given permission over her own head to choose, to exercise self control even in the face of such strong external controlling traditions and erstwhile spiritual signs and metaphors etc that had been woven around this interpretation and the so called 'spiritual truths' they seemed to represent. None of which were sacrosanct "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.". Here, as elsewhere in this letter, 'authority' is to be understood in this active and personal sense. The veil is not a sign of the woman's submission to her husband's authority or even of her social dignity and immunity from molestation; it is a sign of her authority. In the synagogue service a woman could play no significant part: her presence would not even suffice to make up the requisite quorum of ten (all ten must be males). In Christ she received equality of status with men; she might pray or prophesy at meetings of the house church or ecclesia and it is now her choice, the sign of her authority over her own head, to wear or not to wear the veil. The woman is no longer subject to the man at all and particularly not in this setting that foreshadows the age to come but which also in a very real sense was immediate because "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."