

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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THE COVENANTAL STRUCTURE OF I CORINTHIANS: PART II

Part I of the *Covenantal* developed the thesis that I Corinthians (first five chapters) is a covenant document. As a whole it follows the covenant pattern, and especially in the third part of the book (1 Corinthians 1 :10-15:58), the **stipulations section**. In this segment, Paul applies the covenant in detail. He uses the Ten Commandments to organize his counsel to particular problems in the Corinthian Church. He starts with the first commandment in chapter one, and he ends with the tenth commandment in the fifteenth chapter.

What do the Ten Commandments have to do with the covenant? Everything: They are a twofold, five and five, statement of it. This can be simply proven by understanding that the Book of Deuteronomy calls the commandments a "covenant" (Deuteronomy 4:13). Since the Book of Deuteronomy is itself a covenant, following a fivefold pattern, the Ten Commandments therefore state the covenant twice. I will not stop to elaborate any further on this because I have already presented the material in my book on the covenant, *Prosper*.¹

But, the Pauline pattern is simple. **The Apostle moves from the Ten Commandments to the practical problems of the Church at Corinth.** To refresh our memory of how this methodology was observed in the previous newsletter, the following provides short outlines of the parallels between the Ten Commandments and I Corinthians.

Ten Commandments

First Commandment:

Monotheism and redemption themes. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3).

Second Commandment:

Worship and idolatry themes. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship or serve them ." (Exodus 20:4-5).

Third Commandment:

Misuse of God's name and false teaching themes. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

Fourth Commandment:

Work, rest, sanctions (blessing and cursing), **evaluation** and **judgment** themes. "Remember the sabbath

day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:9-11).

Fifth Commandment:

Fathers, children, obedience and inheritance themes. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you" (Exodus 20:12).

Sixth Commandment:

Murder and conflict themes. "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

Seventh Commandment:

Adultery and idolatry themes. "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

Eighth Commandment:

Theft and proper payment of any monies themes. "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

Ninth Commandment:

Witness, oath, sanction (blessing and cursing) and judgment themes. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

Tenth Commandment:

Coveting, possessions and inheritance themes. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house ." (Exodus 20:17).

I Corinthians

First Commandment (1 :10-31):

Mono-Christ and unity themes. There are "divisions among you . I have been informed concerning you that there are quarrels among you . . Has Christ been divided?" (1 Corinthians 10-13).

Second Commandment (1 :18-31):

Foolishness and true **wisdom** themes. The truly wise worship Christ and not man. But the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness to God, is humanistic in its worship. This message is found in the passages of the Old Testament that are quoted by Paul (1 Corinthians 1:19 quoted from Isaiah 29:13-14; I Corinthians 1:31 quoted from Jeremiah 9:12, 14, 23-24).

Third Commandment (2:1-16):

False teaching and non-humanistic-sermons themes. "My message and my preaching were not in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You* pp. 214-224. See also, Dr. Gary North, 1986), pp. xiv-xxii.

(Tyler, Texas: I. C. E., 1987),
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persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1 Corinthians 2:4).

- Fourth Commandment (3:1-4:13):

Work and evaluation of work themes. "If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss" (1 Corinthians 3:14-15).

- Fifth Commandment (4:14-5:13):

Father, children and discipline themes. "I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. Shall I **come** to you with a rod **or** with love and a spirit of gentleness? . . . It is actually reported . . . that someone has his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 4:14, 21; 5:1ff.).

- Sixth Commandment (6:1-11):

Conflict and strife themes. "Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" (6:1)

- Seventh Commandment (6:12-8:13):

Physical and spiritual adultery themes. "Because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband . . . Now concerning things sacrificed to idols" (7:2; 8:1).

- Eighth Commandment (9:1-27):

Payment of workers theme. "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing" (9:9).

- Ninth Commandment (10:1-14:40):

Ratification of covenants, sanctions (blessing and cursing), witness, testimony, bond, prophesy themes. "IS not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? . . . Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels. . . . Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says [testifies], 'Jesus is accursed.' . . . The greatest of these is love. Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (9:19; 10:16; 11:10; 12:3; 13:13; 14:1).

- Tenth Commandment (15:1-58):

First fruits offering and resurrection themes. "Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming" (15:23).

A brief comparison of the Ten Commandments and 1 Corinthians indicates a parallel. These short thematic outlines help the reader to see the comparison. The flow is obvious. Paul covers the same themes as Moses. He moves through the Ten Commandments to deal with the problems of the Corinthians.

In the last newsletter, I concentrated on the first five commandments. Now, let's consider the last five in detail.

Covenantal Structure of 1 Corinthians

(6:1-11)

Moses says, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Jesus expounds on this commandment,

You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" and Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." . . . If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in

order that your opponent may **not** deliver you to the judge (Matthew 5:21-26).

Jesus interprets the **sixth commandment**. He connects murder with anger and unresolved conflict. He indicates that if two brothers would properly resolve their dispute, then they would not end up prosecuting against one another.

Paul virtually paraphrases Jesus words, meaning he too is interpreting the **sixth** commandment. He says,

Brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren (1 Corinthians 6:6-8).

Paul criticizes the Corinthians for going before **unbelievers** with their disputes. But he says that they should avoid going to court at all. They should suffer the defraud rather than go to court against one another. Sound familiar? Jesus had said the same thing: avoid going to court against your brother. Why? These kinds of attempts to be reconciled are the spirit of the law of the **sixth commandment**, maybe even the letter of the law!

The seventh commandment of Moses says, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). Often in the Old Testament, adultery and idolatry are associated.

The term **moicheuseis** is used in the NT to describe the concept covered by the term **na'aph** or adultery in the OT. In ancient Israel the primary meaning of the term adultery was the physical act of adultery. However, gradually the term was used to designate idolatrous worship and unfaithfulness to God. The significance of the act and the connotations of the terms seemed to deepen and widen over time.²

Jeremiah provides "a Scriptural example of where the Hebrew refers adultery to a form of idolatry when he says,

And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. And it came about because of the lightness of her harlotry, that she polluted the land and committed adultery with **stones and trees** (Jeremiah 3:8-9).

Jeremiah is clear. Israel had committed **adultery/idolatry** and been divorced, but Judah had not paid attention. She had also become idolatrous. As Jeremiah says in such a graphic way, Judah "committed adultery with **stones and trees**" (3:9).

When we turn to the New Testament, the same association is made. The Apostle John says,

I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads my bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and **eat things sacrificed to idols** (Revelation 2:20).

John ties together adultery and idolatry (what he calls, "Eating things sacrificed to idols"). This association is important because it is precisely the same connection made by the Apostle Paul in the **seventh-commandment-section of 1 Corinthians**.

After discussing conflict-among-the-brethren issues, Paul introduces the next section with a discussion of the **relationship between moral and spiritual adultery**. He

says, “Do you, not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?” (1 Corinthians 6:15). This sets the stage for the next two chapters.

In chapter seven, he discusses fidelity to covenants. His message is, “Let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called” (7:24). He cites two cases: marriage and virginity. Regarding marriage, he exhorts married people to submit their bodies to one another – submission being another hierarchical theme found in adultery contexts (Hosea 2:2) – and not to drive one another away. Regarding virginity, Paul makes an application of the **remain-in-your-covenantal-status** principle. He does not say that marriage is adultery in the case of the virgin (7:36-38), but he does encourage celibacy for the single.

Then Paul presents the theme of spiritual adultery, **idolatry** (8:1ff.). He specifically calls it **eating meat offered to idols**. He does not say that the meat itself is infused with demonic being. Rather, he says that one should not eat sacrificed meat in the place where it has been sacrificed to false gods, because a “weaker brother” will think that he has participated in some kind of idolatrous act. Thus, the Apostle applies in the eighth chapter of 1 Corinthians the commandment of adultery/idolatry to one of the practical problems of daily living in the Corinthian Church.

(9:1-27)

Moses forbids **stealing** in the eighth commandment: “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15). In the eighth commandment section of 1 Corinthians, Paul apparently defends himself against the charge that he and his workers have **stolen**, because they have received money for preaching the gospel. He defends himself by saying that it is perfectly Biblical for workers to receive pay. He presents his case in the following manner:

My defense to those who examine me is this: do we not have a right to eat and drink? . . . Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? . . . For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? (9:3-9).

No, God is not directly concerned about oxen in this statement. He is referring to workers who are being hindered from working. Just as one would not think of feeding the ox while he is threshing, one should not think of failing to pay a worker for a job that he has done. No payment hinders the worker. So, Paul defends himself and his workers. They should receive payment for the preaching of the gospel.

Moreover, the Apostle shifts his defense into a form of prosecution for the workers in the church. He says, “Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also, the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel **to get their living from the gospel**” (9:13-14). Paul therefore implies that the Corinthians are “stealing” from their workers if they don’t pay them.

Paul concludes his defense by reminding the Corinthians that although he has every right to receive payment, he hasn’t! He says, “What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel” (9:18). In other words, he has not stolen because he has not even received pay for what he has done. He has become their slave (9:19ff.). Therefore, his discussion of these theft-

related-problems falls well within the scope of the eighth commandment.

15:58)

The ninth commandment of Moses says, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16). Much is implied in this commandment. Most of all, the statement concerns the oath and sanctions of the covenant. How? Remember that a person ratified the Biblical covenant by taking an oath of faithfulness to God and His Word (Deuteronomy 27). Attached to the oath were certain sanctions of blessing and cursing (Deuteronomy 27-28). They backed up the oath. Compliance meant blessing; disobedience meant cursing. If a person broke his oath, however, his guilt had to be proven by the mouth of two or three witnesses. So, the ninth commandment, although it talks specifically about bearing witness, is actually discussing a direct challenge to how the covenant is ratified. It speaks to the problem of **lying on God’s witness stand**.

Yes, this commandment implies judicial action, a **courtroom context**. Judicial action is being called for on the part of one man against his neighbor. Witnesses are summoned. A witness takes an oath before God. In a sense, he ratifies a special covenant to enter the courtroom. Upon taking the role of a witness, he testifies and speaks the truth. The presumption is that a judgment is rendered on the basis of his testimony: a judgment of cursing or blessing depending on the final decision.

Turning to the ninth commandment section of 1 Corinthians, therefore, we are prepared to note the **false witness themes**.

First, Paul reminds the Corinthians of Israel’s false witness in the wilderness. He begins by pointing out that their covenant was **ratified in the ‘sacramental crossing of the Red Sea in baptism and in the Eucharistic meals in the wilderness** (10:1ff.). He then refers to the idolatry that followed, making them false witnesses. How? They lied about their ratification; they bound themselves by sacred baptism and communion and then broke their commitment. Finally, Paul warns the Corinthians that they are in danger of doing the same. They ratify their covenant when they drink the sanctions in the **cup of blessing (sanction word)**. Yet, **some are eating sacramental meals in the temple of idols, the implication being that they are drinking the cup of demons**, in other words, a cup of **cursing** (1 Corinthians 10:21).

Second, Paul speaks of the proper behavior of witnesses. He talks about the woman witness who is **supposed** to cover her head while bearing witness or prophesying. He says that she is to give deference to the **angel-witnesses**, who stand with her when the church draws near to heaven in worship (cf. Hebrews 10:19-22). He says, “Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the **angels**” (11:10). Why are prophesying women to have a symbol of authority on their heads? Meredith Kline points to the answer when he says,

The directive given Israel in the Deuteronomic law of the prophet to heed the words of the prophets under threat of the covenant curses for failure to do so (Deut. 18:15, 19) was an extension of the orders God gave earlier respecting his Angel, this too in the context of the covenant sanctions: “Obey his voice and provoke him not” (Exod. 23:21a). The authority of the prophets was the delegated divine authority of those who spoke in the name of God (Deut. 18:19).³

So, women who prophesy should have their heads covered because they are assuming a role unnatural to them.

They are naturally the bride, the recipient of prophesy. They are not naturally the bearer of the prophetic Word. But when they prophesy, they receive special authority and stand in the company of those who bring the Word of God, angels and men. They must wear a symbol (their uncut hair) of what they are authorized to do.

Third, Paul continues his discussion of the behavior of witnesses in the famous section on the Lord's Supper. He describes how they come "unworthily" as witnesses of the covenant to one of the ratification sacraments, the Lord's Supper; they are coming to testify of the Lord's death in a drunken condition. Because they are "unworthily" ratifying the covenant, they are being judged. What are they being judged for? They are exposing themselves as **false witnesses**. So, he tells them to judge themselves so that they would not be judged (11 :31).

Fourth, Paul gives instruction about how to detect a false witness. He says, "No one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (12:3). He then describes how the spirit-empowered-witness will build up the Christ with spiritual gifts. He lists and explains the function of these gifts so that the Corinthians will be able to recognize a true witness.

Fifth, Paul speaks of the ultimate sign of a true witness: love (13:1ff.). Remember, the eighth commandment forbids bearing false witness against one's neighbor. Jesus summarized the second half of the Ten Commandments as "Loving your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). The Apostle John confirms this description of a true witness when he implies that a false witness is unloving (1 John 4:1-21). He begins the fourth chapter with a description of false witnesses and ends it with a discussion on loving your neighbor.

So, Paul concludes chapter thirteen of I Corinthians by saying that love is the greatest of the triad of faith, hope and love. Why? If a person loves his neighbor then he is the kind of witness who does not lie when the covenant is ratified. He speaks the truth in his covenant with God and he certainly speaks the truth **when called upon to testify in other situations. This can even be turned around to indicate that a person who lies does not love his neighbor. As John says, "the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).**

Sixth, concluding the false witness section, Paul provides corrective guidelines for the gift of prophecy, what could be called the expert witness gift. He addresses a major problem that could be stated as **confusion of the prophetic gift with the gift of tongues**. The gift of tongues was for the unbeliever, especially the false church, Israel. It had been prophesied in Isaiah that this witness manifestation would be a testimony to Israel that their time had ended and the church's time had come (Isaiah 28:11ff. in I Corinthians 15:21). How? The gift of tongues pointed to a shift of revelation. It indicated that the Word of God was no longer given through the Jews but through the Gentiles, best demonstrated by the New Testament's being revealed in the Greek language and not Hebrew. The tower of Babel had been reversed!

The gift of prophecy, on the other hand, is not directed at the unbeliever. It is for the church: "So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe" (14:22). The person with this gift provides expert witness to the church. He or she can be anyone in the church. So, what does he (she) do? He provides special counsel for the church. One writer has said it in

the following manner:

They [members with the gift of prophecy] exercise their office of prophets whenever they speak Spirit-led of the meanings and ramifications of the reality of restoration in the living Christ. They are friends of God because they know what the Father is doing (John 15:4). Hence all Christians are called to a prophetic ministry that is the envy of the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1 :10-12). God's chosen instrument for making all people – and even the principalities and powers in heavenly places – seeing the plan of the mystery hidden for ages is not a select group, a special class within God's people, but the church, the entire community of Christ-believers (Eph. 3:9-10).⁴

These "covenantal partners" therefore carry out a special counseling role among the people of God, for a prophet was one who sat on God's heavenly council. Now the whole church can be involved.

Paul concludes this chapter on the expert witness with some general guidelines. He draws on the "two or three witness" theme from the Old Testament and uses it to lay down a principle of order for the church. Only "two or three" are to speak (14:29), while the others pass judgment. In other words, the special witnesses speak while the general witnesses make a judgment. This in itself is a means of distinguishing the true from the false witness! Thus, Paul completes his lengthy section on the ninth commandment.

(15:1-58)

The tenth commandment of Moses addresses the issue of coveting: "You shall not covet . . ." (Exodus 20:17). Moses expounds this commandment in the tenth commandment section of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 26:1-19). He says, "Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name" (Deuteronomy 26:2). This is the law of the first fruits, or tithing. What does it have to do with coveting? Tithing reminds a person that nothing he has belongs to the Lord, because the tenth represents the whole that is given back and dedicated to the Lord. It also prevents coveting.

Paul draws on this first fruits theme in I Corinthians 15. He teaches the doctrine of the resurrection, while arguing on the same principle that the whole world belongs to God because Christ is the first fruits of creation to be given back to him; the rest of the world is to follow. He then applies this principle to work and tithing (15:58; 16:1ff.). His message is therefore the same as Deuteronomy 26 and the tenth commandment. The tithing of creation, the Resurrection, motivates man to lay up a heavenly inheritance. It prevents man from coveting that which seems to belong to his neighbor but what in fact belongs to God.

Paul's exposition of the Ten Commandments is complete. He began with the commandment on monotheism and ended on the tithing commandment. His counseling technique was simple. He spoke to the Corinthians' most practical needs from the Ten Commandments, the "covenant words of God" (Deuteronomy 4:13)!

4. George Vandervelde, *Gift of* (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1984), pp. 15-16.