

ONE SPIRIT, ONE BODY, ONE TEMPLE: PAUL'S CORPORATE TEMPLE LANGUAGE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 6

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“one temple for the one God”

—Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.193

Abstract: *A small number of contemporary scholars have suggested that in 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul speaks of the body of Christ as the one temple of the Holy Spirit, not the individual bodies of every Christian. This study contends that such a reading is historically likely, literarily plausible, and redemptive-historically coherent. It is also helpful in clarifying both the rest of the pericope and the entire letter. Historically, three considerations point in this direction: (1) The rest of the Pauline corpus speaks of the corporate church as the singular temple of God. (2) Other early Christian authors (especially Peter and even the Gospels) describe the corporate church as the singular temple of God. (3) Greek, not Jewish, sources describe human bodies as temples, and that of multiple gods. Literarily, two lines of argument are presented: (1) careful attention to the nouns and pronouns in the immediate context, and (2) the discourse through chapters 3–6, as well as the retrospectively illuminating chapters 12–14. Redemptive-historically, it is significant that the true God has always had one dwelling place in the creation.*

Key words: *1 Corinthians, temple, body of Christ, Greco-Roman context, biblical theology*

All good interpretations depend on literary and historical plausibility. Short of direct access to an author's mind, we have the text and the range of possible interpretations within the author's conceptual environment. The more we understand of an author's cognitive milieu the better suited we are to discern a text's meaning written in such a setting, and equally how it was feasibly received by its first audience(s). When interpreting biblical writings, we also have the advantage of the full corpus of inspired texts and the redemptive-historical trajectories of particular biblical themes through the canon.

Paul of Tarsus wrote within a variegated conceptual environment that encompassed Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds. While his audiences had a predominantly Hellenistic history and mindset, the apostle aimed to convince and exhort along Hebraic theological lines.¹ This consideration, along with an appreciation of

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¹ See, for example, Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ*, SN'TSMS 137 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23–24; Philip N. Richardson, *Temple of the Living God: The Influence of*

the entire Bible's understanding of the role of the Lord's temple, supports a communal understanding of both the body and the temple in 1 Corinthians 6:19. A handful of contemporary scholars have argued as much, that Paul speaks of the body of Christ as the one temple of the Holy Spirit, not the individual bodies of every Christian.² The present study contends that such a reading is historically likely given the theological significance of "temple" within a monotheistic framework, gives full weight to the grammar, and is helpful to clarify both the surrounding pericope (esp. vv. 18 and 20) and the rest of the letter.³ Finally, the reading proves redemptive-historically coherent: the Creator God has consistently inhabited one earthly dwelling place. For Paul to suddenly speak of individuals as multiple temple-dwellings would be redemptive-historically incongruent.

We begin with observing that the nouns referring to "body" and "temple" in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 are singular, whereas the verbs and pronouns are plural.⁴

ἡ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐστίν οὗ ἔχετε ἀπὸ θεοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἐστὲ ἑαυτῶν; ἡγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς· δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν.

A translation that captures these nuances would read:

Or do you all not know that your collective body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is among you all, whom you all have from God, and you all are not your own? For you all were purchased at a price; now indeed you all should glorify God in your collective body.⁵

Hellenistic Philosophy on Paul's Figurative Temple Language Applied to the Corinthians (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), inter alia, esp. 154–55.

² R. Kempthorne, "Incest and the Body of Christ: A Study of I Corinthians vi. 12–20," *NTS* 14 (1968): 568–74; Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 56–58; Tom Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences of Paul's Biblical Writings* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2004), 122–29. See as well T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 64n95.

It is read both ways by F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 151–52; cf. also G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 252; Yulin Liu, *Temple Purity in 1–2 Corinthians*, WUNT 2/343 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 145–73.

Dale B. Martin contends that "body" throughout 1 Corinthians entails immediate fluidity between individual and corporate realities: "Since no secure boundary separates the offender's body from the church's body, the offender's presence in the church represents an invasion of sarx into the church itself." Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 174; similarly, Albert L. A. Hogeterp, *Paul and God's Temple: A Historic Interpretation of Cultic Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence*, BTS 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 340. Richardson comments that "the temple is still a corporate image in 6:19 (though applied to the individual bodies of those within the community)" (*Temple*, 179).

³ Naselli concurs that the plural verbs and pronouns with the singular "body," as well as the influence of the corporate temple in 3:16–17, are reasons why one might read 6:19 in reference to the church as a whole. However, he does not consider the Jewish monotheistic conceptual framework of the image. Andrew David Naselli, "1 Corinthians," in *The ESV Bible Expository Commentary, Volume 10: Romans–Galatians* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 272n85.

⁴ Richardson also highlights these details (*Temple*, 178, 182).

⁵ The King James captures these plural pronouns and singular "body" and "temple" (with the plural pronouns "ye," "you," and "your," whereas "thou," "thee," and "thy" were in 1611 still used as singular

The implications of this observation alone are clear: Paul is not addressing an individual—real or imagined—to signify that their corporeal body is a temple. Rather, Paul is speaking to a group—the entire Corinthian church—as a communal body, the body of Christ. Anthony Thiselton calls this “an understandable secondary gloss ... classical Greek sources offer evidence of the distributive use of the singular where a plural meaning might be suggested.”⁶ Yet observing such a grammatical possibility does not explain Paul’s usage *here*.⁷ Our argument will pivot, therefore, not on the grammar but on three levels of context: (1) historical, (2) literary and (3) redemptive-historical. What is the historical probability that Paul, the Jewish monotheist, would speak in one way or another? What reading best preserves the literary flow of thought, locally and across the whole discourse? And how does either interpretation operate within the full witness of holy writ?

I. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Metaphors do not operate in the abstract, nor is it self-evident what they mean in and of themselves. Rather, metaphors make sense within a defined conceptual frame. An utterance’s larger literary and historical contexts constrain possible meanings and direct readers to legitimate interpretations.⁸ The question for the exegete is what the author meant by the metaphor, as well as how the original audience would have understood it. Without having so much spelled out, the exegete looks to the literary and historical contexts for the conceptual frame inside which the metaphor functions.⁹

The challenge for reading 1 Corinthians 6 is that two different conceptual frames could be operative for Paul in his use of the “temple” metaphor, the selection of which would take the reader in quite opposite interpretive directions: the Greek concept of temples and the Jewish concept of the one temple.¹⁰ Inside which conceptual frame does this metaphor make sense?¹¹ In this section we look

pronouns), as do the Luther Bible (“daß euer Leib ein Tempel des Heiligen Geistes ist”) and the Vulgate (“membra vestra templum est ... glorificate et portate Deum in corpore vestro”).

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 474.

⁷ Peterman demonstrates how pronouns may “contain different levels of rhetorical directness,” but do not have fixed meanings; they have to be interpreted in reference to their context. Gerald W. Peterman, “Plural You: On the Use and Abuse of the Second Person,” *BBR* 20 (2010): 212–13.

⁸ Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, ASem (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 68–84.

⁹ Eco calls this “inferences by common frames.” Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in Semiotics of Texts*, ASem (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 20–21.

¹⁰ In Eco’s terms, two “common frames” are available to the reader, and it is difficult from the text alone to know which is “actualized” and which is “narcotized” (cf. *Role*, 23). As thorough as Nijay Gupta’s consideration of 1 Corinthians 6:19 is, it is this question, as well as the redemptive-historical question, that he does not ask. Nijay K. Gupta, “Which ‘Body’ Is a Temple (1 Corinthians 6:19)? Paul beyond the Individual/Communal Divide,” *CBQ* 72.3 (2010): 520–34.

¹¹ In calling this a “metaphor” we do not imply that the church is merely a metaphorical temple. The temple involved a theological reality that is now experienced in the church. As Nicholas Perrin puts it, “Paul, writing almost two decades before the fall of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, identifies his addressees as the temple in a realistic (as opposed to a purely metaphorical or analogical) sense, [and] the

at the Corinthian philosophical milieu, the Pauline corpus, and the rest of the New Testament to make the case that Paul is more likely operating within a Jewish, not Greek, conceptual frame.¹²

1. *Temples/the temple.* Among the religions of antiquity, the idea of sacred space was common enough. But “for Jews, this sanctity was even more enhanced by their exclusive notion of only one temple.”¹³ The entire logic of *temple* within a monotheistic system necessitates but one earthly sanctuary.¹⁴ It is a theological inevitability. Conversely, the idea of individual bodies as individual temples—and hence many thereof—is an entirely Stoic and Philonic idea.¹⁵ It is true that drawing hard lines between two philosophical camps that existed historically side by side is exceedingly difficult, but given the way that Greeks and Jews understood the logic of temple they could not be further apart.¹⁶

a. *Of Greek temples.* The Greeks and Romans recognized several gods, and therefore the legitimacy of multiple temples, shrines, and sanctuaries. Moreover, a single god could have multiple temples and idols, partitioning him/herself into all of them.¹⁷ Closer to our concerns, Hellenistic authors who metaphorized human bodies and/or souls as temples—sometimes in addition to domiciles or as a polem-

implications are nothing short of stunning.” Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 5–6. But it is at least a metaphor; so for the sake of this argument we refer to Paul’s language as such.

¹² To avoid making naïve distinctions between Jewish and Greek influences in Paul’s thought, Troels Engberg-Pedersen argues that “when speaking of an idea or practice as having ... a distinctly Jewish root, we must remember our focus on a single idea or practice ... extract[ed] from the comprehensive cultural web in which it had its occurrent place and that it took its overall meaning, not primarily from its cultural root, but from its place within the contemporary cross-cultural web.” Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Introduction: Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide,” in *Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville: WJK, 2001), 4. In this case, however, that “single idea” is the concept of temple, and “the comprehensive cultural web” does indeed evince a “divide” between Jewish and Greek thought, as we aim to demonstrate below. Moreover, judging by the way Paul used the OT scriptures, “the root” is certainly a part of “the comprehensive cultural web” for this idea; this is perhaps more so than with other ideas because of the temple’s relationship to Jewish convictions of monotheism.

¹³ Lee I. Levine, “Temple, Jerusalem,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1289.

¹⁴ God’s heavenly temple should not be understood in distinction from his earthly sanctuary, but the latter is an extension of the former. See John Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 221; Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, SHBC (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 109–11; Beale, *Temple*, 31–50.

¹⁵ See also Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 9th ed., KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925), 166n1; R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament*, OxfTM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 53–55.

¹⁶ We are mindful of the complexities of “Hellenism” as a “comprehensive cultural melting pot,” as well as the difficulties in adjudicating cleanly between Greek or Roman or Jewish thought; see Engberg-Pedersen, “Introduction”; quote from p. 2. So we dare not use dichotomist interpretive categories. But as Engberg-Pedersen says, “One must look entirely open-mindedly at the facts” (3); we aim to demonstrate that the facts evince a “divide” between Jewish and Greek concepts on the idea of temple.

¹⁷ See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 224–25.

ic against both buildings and statues—imagine that these deities have as many temples as they do devotees.¹⁸

Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher of the late first and early second centuries AD, comments in his *Discourses* 2.8.11–13 that people are “a fragment of God; you have within you a part of Him.... You are bearing God about with you,” and so therefore the “impure thoughts and filthy actions” of a man are defiling the deity within.¹⁹ Epictetus goes on in line 14, “in the presence of even an image of God you would not dare to do anything of the things you are now doing,” but “God Himself is present within you, seeing and hearing everything.” In line 18 he makes these intriguing connections: “If you were a statue of Pheidias [the sculptor], his Athena or his Zeus, you would have remembered both yourself and your artificer, and ... you would have tried to do nothing unworthy of him that had fashioned you, nor of yourself.” This is an interesting comparison between the statue and the singular man because for the Greek the statue and the temple are coterminous. Next Epictetus compares the artist of the statue to Zeus, the ultimate artist, who has shown himself in making a man. He asks in lines 20–21,

Is it not mere stone, or bronze, or gold, or ivory? And the Athena of Pheidias, when once it had stretched out its hand and received the Nike [a symbol of victory] upon it, stands in this attitude for all time to come; but the works of God are capable of movement, have the breath of life, can make use of external impressions, and pass judgement upon them. Do you dishonour the workmanship of this Craftsman, when you are yourself that workmanship?

Here the meaning of statues is transferred to the individual as a part of God lives in every man. With no commitment to monotheism or the unity of God, the Greeks can imagine Zeus to be partitioned out over multiple statues.²⁰ So if men are the better (or true) statues, then it would make perfect sense that parts of Zeus can be distributed over all men everywhere.

This is also seen in the first-century-AD Stoic philosopher Seneca, who writes,

We do not need to uplift our hands towards heaven, or to beg the keeper of a temple to let us approach his idol's ear, as if in this way our prayers were more likely to be heard. God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean, Lucilius: a holy spirit indwells within us.²¹

Seneca does not call a man a temple or idol, but notes that idols live in temples (see also 1 Cor 8:10) and that is exactly what a person does not need because of his personal indwelling. So the individual man becomes a functional substitute for both idol and temple.

¹⁸ In a broader survey of temple imagery in Hellenistic philosophy, Richardson also points out an emphasis on the world and the individual as the place/s of divine dwelling (*Temple*, 42–120).

¹⁹ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.8.11–13 (Oldfather, LCL).

²⁰ See also Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.14.6: “our souls are so bound up with God and joined together with Him, as being parts and portions of His being” (Oldfather, LCL). Similarly, Philo, *Creation* 51 (§146): “his intellect is connected with divine reason ... a fragment or a ray of that blessed nature” (Yonge).

²¹ Seneca, *Ep.* 41.1–2 (Gummere, LCL).

With Philo, the first-century-BC Alexandrian Jew, we have an interesting case. While he is, of course, an interpreter of the Torah, he is widely recognized for his attempts to “scripturize” Hellenistic philosophical concepts.”²² His interpretive frame is, therefore, Greek.²³ In *On the Cherubim* (2.29), he calls the soul an “abode worthy of God” (§98) and “a habitation” that God “visits” (§99). For “stone,” “wooden materials,” “gold,” and the “skill of workmen” are not suitable, nor “porticoes and vestibules, and chambers, and precincts, and temples ... but a pious soul is his fitting abode” (§100; ἀξιόχρεως μέντοι γε οἶκος ψυχῇ ἐπιτήδειος).²⁴ Here an “abode” is in conceptual parallel to a temple and that abode is the individual soul.

In *On Sobriety* 13 he calls “a soul” the “abode” for God (§62), contrasted to where God “is said to dwell in a house” (§63). Thus, God is the “dweller within him” to unite the individual’s mind to heaven (§64).²⁵ In turn, in *Dreams* 1.23 he encourages himself and others, “Do thou, therefore, O my soul, hasten to become the abode of God, his holy temple” (§149). Again, in *Dreams* 1.36 he says there are “two temples belonging to God”: one is the world; the other is “the rational soul, the priest of which is the real true man” (§215).²⁶ In Philo we see, therefore, an understanding that God’s temple is not a physical house, but the individual souls of individual men.²⁷

In sum, the idea of multiple temples and shrines for either the one God or multiple gods is a thoroughly Greek idea that translates easily into individually personalized temple metaphors.

b. *Of the one Jewish temple.* Jewish eschatological expectations, on the other hand, all envision one earthly temple.²⁸ This is so axiomatic that there is not even a single controversy over how many temples there might be, and no rebuke of any counter-view. In Isaiah 2:2–3 and Micah 4:1–2, Zion is not the first among equals, but there will be no other mountain-shrines at all. Haggai 2:6–9 emphasizes that the Lord’s glory and peace will be granted exclusively at the one and only temple. Testament of Benjamin 9:2 gathers these themes together and emphasizes that the eschatological temple will be more glorious than the first because it will serve as the place for a single gathering of Jews and all the nations together (ἐκεῖ συναχθήσονται). Similarly, in 1 Enoch 90:33 the Lord exults because all humanity is again gathered together into his one house (see also Jubilees 1:17 and 11QT^a XXIX, 8–9).

Of those that speak of people as a temple, the Qumran sectarians stand out because they “thought of their community as a replacement for the Jerusalem tem-

²² William Yarchin, *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 19.

²³ See esp. Richardson, *Temple*, 121–23.

²⁴ Philo, *Cherubim* 2.29 (Yonge).

²⁵ Philo, *Sobriety* 13 (Yonge).

²⁶ Philo, *Dreams* 1 (Yonge).

²⁷ For a broader survey of Philo’s figural temple language see Richardson, *Temple*, 121–153.

²⁸ See McKelvey, *New Temple*, 9–57; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 77–90; Andrew M. Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity in 1 Peter*, LNTS 345 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 15–21, 44–69; Nicholas G. Piotrowski, “Discern the Word and Understand the Vision’: Ongoing Exile in Second Temple Judaism and Its Relevance for Biblical Theology,” *CTR* 16 (2018): 37–38.

ple.”²⁹ They were “the bridge to that future and perfected temple.”³⁰ Its leadership styled itself as “the foundation,” and the rest of the *Yabad* fulfilled its role as “the holy of holies” when it took shape as a whole (1QS VIII.5–10). Thus priests and laity combined to embody a communal temple.

The Rule of the Community emphasizes that they are to carry out their temple and priestly functions as one (1QS V.3–6). They are “to achieve together truth and humility” (1QS V.3) and understand that anyone who volunteers does so to “join them for community” (1QS V.6). Yet their individual behavior brings ramifications throughout the *Yabad* (1QS V.4–5). When someone sins there is a communal restoration process before they can return to the colony (1QS IX.1–2). Only when such individual sin is redressed can the community fulfill its priestly/temple role on earth (1QS IX.3–5), at which time “the community shall set apart a holy house for Aaron” (1QS IX.6). That is, the restitution of community members is necessary for community wholeness and only then do they function as the temple.³¹

We see here an understanding that it is the collective unity of the *Yabad* that comprises one temple, not individuals comprising multiple temples. Yet the individual behavior of some threatens the temple-functionality of the group. While the DSS contain other attitudes toward the Jerusalem temple (4QFlor I.2–3; 11QT^a XXIX.7–10), the underlying theological assumption remains that there is—there can only be—one temple, however conceived. When it comes to people constituting the temple, the DSS have no concept of any individual as such.³²

The 21st-century exegete sees in Greek and Jewish thought a similar instinct: to metaphorize people with temple imagery. The rationale and warrant, however, are quite distinct. In the Greek system the motive stems from a critique of the very idea of temples (and statues); the beauty of creation and the intellectual capacities of mankind are better for communing with the divine.³³ In Jewish thought, the problem is not with the idea of temple, but Jewish concepts of sin and the transcendence of their covenant God still necessitated the mediating realities of a tem-

²⁹ Sharyn Echols Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22–25 in the Context of Markan Theology*, SBLDS 105 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 51; see also Bertil E. Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament: A Comparative Study in the Temple Symbolism of the Qumran Texts and the New Testament*, SNTSMS 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 16–46; McKelvey, *New Temple*, 46–53; Paul Swarup, *The Self-Understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls Community: An Eternal Planting, A House of Holiness*, LSTS 59 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 108–92; Mbuvi, *Temple*, 18–20, 53–59; Michael K. W. Suh, *Power and Peril: Paul's Use of Temple Discourse in 1 Corinthians*, BZNW 239 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 171–76; Richardson, *Temple*, 26–34. This view, of course, is not without its detractors; see André Caquot, “La secte Qoumrân et le temple (Essai de synthèse),” *RHPbR* 72 (1992): 3–14.

³⁰ Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 34. Equally, Perrin argues that the community responsible for the Psalms of Solomon “took it upon itself to serve as a kind of provisional temple until the imminent climax” (29).

³¹ On the specific “temple-related terminology” in the Community Rule, see Eyal Regev, “Community as Temple: Revisiting Cultic Metaphors in Qumran and the New Testament,” *BBR* 28.4 (2018): 607–13.

³² So also P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 121; Richardson, *Temple*, 27–28.

³³ Dowd, *Prayer*, 51–52.

ple as well as its incumbent priesthood and sacrifices.³⁴ The goal of the *Yahad* was not to replace the idea of temple, but to serve as a sort of interim purification “while the *Yahad* awaits its eschatological validation.”³⁵ Equally, we see different warrants for how such substitute temples are conceptualized. For the Greek who has no concept of there being one God, or even the unity of a god, there are no constraints on how to imagine people as temples. There can be as many temples as there are gods, and even more temples because the gods can partition themselves out. Such ideas are oil in the water of Jewish monotheism. There can be only one temple by warrant that there is only one God. As Josephus comments, “There ought also to be but one temple for the one God; for likeness is the constant foundation of agreement. This temple ought to be common to all men, because he is the common God of all men.”³⁶

In which conceptual environment does Paul operate? In which thought world does his temple metaphor function and, in such terms, make sense to readers? As exegetes seek to discern the meaning of Paul’s temple language it is far more historically plausible that the Jewish theological rationale (worshippers still need a temple if communion with God should happen) and warrant (there is only one God and so there can be only one temple) are what oriented Paul’s thinking.³⁷ As a Jew with monotheistic convictions, it is simply historically dubious that Paul would have conceived of multiple manifestations of the temple-presence of the one Creator and covenant God.³⁸

2. *The Pauline corpus.* This is evinced by the rest of Paul’s writings. When the apostle speaks of people as the temple of God elsewhere, he always means the full Christian community.³⁹

Only three chapters earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul has clearly identified the entire congregation as the temple of God.⁴⁰ In 3:5–8 he recalls their divisions (1:12–

³⁴ See N. T. Wright, “Yet the Sun Will Rise Again: Reflections on the Exile and Restoration in Second Temple Judaism, Jesus, Paul, and the Church Today,” in *Exile: A Conversation with N. T. Wright*, ed. James M. Scott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 36–45.

³⁵ Regev, “Community,” 613.

³⁶ Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.193 (Whiston).

³⁷ The other side of the matter is, of course, the reading community. Could different persons have heard and interpreted the metaphor differently? Kar Yong Lim contends that the metaphor is equally effective when interpreted in regard to the pagan temple as in regard to the Jewish temple; since the pagan temple was seen as a microcosm of the world and the center of life, destruction of a temple was an emotional image with which to persuade the Corinthians. Kar Yong Lim, *Metaphors and Social Identity Formation in Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 147–51. But such a conception is not the author’s sense (where we are focused), and, as we will explore below, such a reading—the natural inclinations of the audience notwithstanding—disjoins the larger discourse.

³⁸ If Timothy Brookins is right that Stoic “wisdom” is what is dividing the Corinthian community, particularly used by some members to justify individual autonomy, then the distance between the Greek thought-world and that of Paul is all the more heightened as the apostle seeks to redress such problems in the church. Timothy A. Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy*, SNTSMS 159 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 153–200.

³⁹ This is widely known; as representative of the field, see Beale, *Temple*, 245–68.

⁴⁰ See also John R. Lanci, *A New Temple for Corinth: Rhetorical and Archaeological Approaches to Pauline Imagery*, StBibLit 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 128–34.

13) by asking, “Who then is Apollos? Or who is Paul?” Encouragement then follows to remember that it is God alone who gives the growth, at which point in 3:9 Paul calls the Corinthian community God’s singular building (θεοῦ οἰκοδομὴ ἐστε). Verses 10–15 then emphasize that there is only one foundation for such a building (esp. v. 11). Thus, because the entire congregation is God’s singular temple, they should not divide. Again, the grammar bears this out in verses 16–17:

Οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν; εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθείρει, φθερεῖ τοῦτον ὁ θεός· ὁ γὰρ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιός ἐστιν, οἳτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς.

A translation that captures this emphasis would read as follows:

Do you all not know that you all are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells among you all? If someone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which you all are.⁴¹

On these verses R. J. McKelvey comments that Paul’s

Jewish Christian readers could not fail to see the point. God does not dwell in a multiplicity of temples. He is one and can inhabit only one shrine (cf. 1:13, “is Christ divided?”). To cause disunity in the church is to desecrate the temple of God, and desecration of a holy place leads to destruction.⁴²

Clearly the only other temple language in 1 Corinthians calls the entire church “the *singular* temple of God.” We will reconsider these verses below in terms of the letter’s overall discourse.

In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul tells the Corinthian believers that “we are the temple of the living God,” placing emphasis on the plural pronoun (ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμὲν ζώντος) and quoting Ezekiel 37:27, “I will dwell among them” (ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς).⁴³ The specific wording of Ezekiel 37:26–27 speaks of how the Lord’s tabernacle/dwelling place will be set up among the people (וְהָיָה מִשְׁכְּנִי וְהָיָה עִמָּם). This language also reflects the Lord’s promise in Leviticus 26:11, where the singular tabernacle is set up among all the people of Israel.⁴⁴ The point is that Paul again emphasizes the corporate body as the one temple of God, and he does so by invoking the imagery of Israel’s one and only tabernacle as the means by which the Lord was present among the full community of Israel. “Consequently, the Corin-

⁴¹ Liu (*Temple Purity*, 121) and Richardson (*Temple*, 167–68) also emphasize the plural pronouns.

⁴² R. J. McKelvey, “Temple,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 809. McKelvey, however, does not extend this logic to chapter 6. How strange if Paul himself would divide that very temple only three chapters later.

⁴³ Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians*, NTL (Louisville: WJK, 2003), 165–66.

⁴⁴ The rest of 2 Corinthians 6:16 quotes Leviticus 26:12, “and I will walk in your (pl.) midst,” and could well be an echo of Genesis 3:8, both of which use forms of הָלַךְ and תָּנַח. Equally, the promise to make Israel fruitful and to multiply them in Leviticus 26:9, וְהִפְרֵיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְהִרְבֵּיתִי, recalls Genesis 1:22, 28. The upshot of these observations is to link Eden to the tabernacle and, in turn, to the church. As there was one Eden and one tabernacle, the church—in its entirety—comprises the exclusive covenantal presence of God on earth.

thians are the beginning of the prophesied end-time tabernacle or temple.”⁴⁵ The warrant for the ethical imperatives in 2 Corinthians 6:17–7:1 is, therefore, anchored in Israel’s purity laws for priests because ministers of the new covenant now serve within God’s house—that is, among the believing community.

The thrust of Ephesians 2 is that all the people of God are one through the blood of Christ: one new man (v. 15); one body (v. 16); having access to the Father in one Spirit (v. 18); fellow citizens (v. 19). Paul concludes by saying that Christ joins this multi-membered household of God (v. 19) together (πάσα οἰκοδομῇ συναρμολογούμενῃ) into a singular temple (v. 21; εἰς ναόν).⁴⁶

Thus, in the three other pericopae where Paul calls people God’s ναός, he not only does so in corporate terms, but also emphasizes the larger point of the people’s unity.⁴⁷ The monotheological reality that there can be only one temple for the one God is a preloaded concept that underwrites this critical point of Pauline ecclesiology. If there is a dwelling place of God on earth, there must be but one. If the one temple consists of many people, then they must be united. For there can be no division of God’s temple any more than there can be any division of God himself.

3. *The rest of the New Testament.* What does the rest of the NT tell us about the first-century Christian thought world? The clearest example is in 1 Peter 2:4–5, where individual Christians are not called temples, but stones that come together form the one “spiritual house,” determinatively so by their mutual union with Christ the cornerstone.⁴⁸ Other NT works have more complex narrational and apocalyptic temple-metaphors. In Matthew 16:18 the reader expects the recently designated “Messiah” (v. 16) to declare he will build his temple per Second Temple Jewish expectations.⁴⁹ Instead he builds his church and, after his resurrection, he sends them out from a mountain to baptize more into the one community (28:16–20).⁵⁰ In Mark 11–12 several OT quotations elucidate typological correspondences with

⁴⁵ Peter Balla, “2 Corinthians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 773.

⁴⁶ Additionally, the “peace” (3x in Eph 2:14–17) “denote[s] the peace which was to prevail when Jews and Gentiles were united in the temple at Zion (Is. 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–4, 1 Enoch 90:29–33; Sibylline Oracles 3:755–776).” McKelvey, “Temple,” 809.

⁴⁷ Equally, if the “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is to be understood as the eschatological deceiver of Daniel 7–12, then his setting up εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 4) would refer to his influence within the church, since all his actions are aimed at the people of God per Daniel 7:25; 8:12, 23–25; 11:30–34. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 147–48, 199–203.

Whether Paul means to identify the apostles as “pillars” in the temple in Galatians 2:9 is not entirely clear. See Ulrich Wilkens, “στῦλος,” TDNT 7:734–36; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 122–23. But if that is the case, we would have another Pauline example of the universal church identified as one temple.

⁴⁸ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 148–51.

⁴⁹ Donna Runnalls, “The King as Temple Builder: A Messianic Typology,” in *Spirit within Structure: Essays in Honor of George Johnston on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. E. J. Furcha (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1983), 15–37.

⁵⁰ See Michael Patrick Barber, “Jesus as the Davidic Temple Builder and Peter’s Priestly Role in Matthew 16:16–19,” *JBL* 132.4 (2013): 935–53.

Israel's temple, now converging on Jesus and his followers.⁵¹ In Acts the entire first seven chapters take place in the shadow of the Jerusalem temple before the new community of Spirit-filled believers spreads out all over the earth, marking the international spread of the eschatological temple of God.⁵² The unity of this temple is emphasized in that "they were all together" when the Spirit descended (2:1), continued to have all things in common (2:44; 4:32), and were constantly in "one accord" (*ὁμοθυμαδόν*; 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25). In Revelation 11:1–13 the persecuted people of God are described as a single temple (v. 1; cf. also 3:12).⁵³ Even if it can be disputed whether the church is identified as God's eschatological temple in Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Revelation, it remains unassailable that they do, nonetheless, operate on the understanding that there is only one temple of the living God, however conceived.

In surveying Paul's cognitive milieu, we see a consistent theme: Jewish and Christian thinkers speak of only one temple. Ideas to the contrary are not even broached. Whether referring to a physical edifice or metaphorizing people as a temple, Jewish and Christian writers are consistent: there is one temple, for there is one God. Unsurprisingly, then, across the Pauline corpus we see the same. But McKelvey says "there is one text in Paul's writing which depicts the individual as God's temple."⁵⁴ Could 1 Corinthians 6:19 really be the only outlier in all Paul's writings? Could it be the only outlier in the entire NT?⁵⁵ Could it be the only outlier in all Second Temple Judaism? As we will see below, to read it as such would also require taking it as the only outlier in all Scripture. To do so would align Paul's thought in this verse—and this verse only—with Greco-Roman notions of temples, gods, and bodies over against the consistent vision we see everywhere else in Jewish and Christian thought of his time. It seems historically unlikely and theologically suspicious to read it as such. Thoroughgoing appreciation of Paul's Jewish theological frame would take seriously the historical likelihood that, like everywhere else in Paul, in the NT, and in Second Temple Judaism, 1 Corinthians 6:19 indeed means it is the community that is the singular temple of God, even as supported by the grammar strictly speaking. The question now becomes whether a corporate reading of 6:19–20 will bring coherence to the literary flow of thought or disturb it.

II. THE LITERARY CONTEXT

Reading 1 Corinthians 6:19 in line with these historic trends is not only possible and grammatically preferred, but also superior for recognizing and retaining Paul's flow of thought. The literary context reads more naturally with a corporate

⁵¹ Nicholas G. Piotrowski, "'Whatever You Ask' for the Missionary Purposes of the Eschatological Temple: Quotation and Typology in Mark 11–12," *SBIT* 21.1 (2017): 97–121.

⁵² G. K. Beale, "The Descent of the Eschatological Temple in the Form of the Spirit at Pentecost: Part 1: The Clearest Evidence," *TynBul* 56.1 (2005): 73–102.

⁵³ See Beale, *Temple*, 313–28.

⁵⁴ McKelvey, "Temple," 809.

⁵⁵ Naselli recognizes this idiosyncrasy as well ("1 Corinthians," 272n85).

interpretation, particularly in view of Paul's goal to rebut fractious individualism and exhort the Corinthians to church unity (v. 15, v. 20, chap. 3, and chap. 1).

1. *The immediate discourse.* If Paul wanted to refer to individual bodies—to speak of a hypothetical person or encourage all to think of their own selves—the Greek language provided means to do so, and Paul avails himself of such language when needed.⁵⁶ For example, in the very context, Paul uses the plural τὰ σώματα at 6:15. Also, in 7:4 he uses a third person singular verb and a form of ἴδιος to speak of an individual body: ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ... ὁ ἀνὴρ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει. The same is true in 6:18 where, again, we see a third person singular verb and a form of ἴδιος: ὁ δὲ πορνεύων εἰς τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα ἁμαρτάνει. And still there are other ways to refer to hypothetical individuals, typically using third person singular verbs with singular pronouns (10:24; 11:27–28). This indicates that when Paul's grammar moves to plural verbs and pronouns with a singular predicate in 6:19, it has all the appearance of being meaningfully intentional.⁵⁷

The difficulty, however, arises in discerning Paul's flow of thought. The immediate context seems to deal clearly with the individual human body in verses 13–14. Then verse 15 certainly speaks of everyone's bodies (τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν). Equally verses 16 and 18 also reference an individual man and what he is doing with his corporeal body. Yet it must be recognized that the grammar does change, and therein lies the point: Paul uses different language to differentiate. The challenge lies, then, in understanding the point of the argument and where he alternates between a single person's body and the body of Christ.⁵⁸

Yet, the very conundrum may provide the answer. In verse 15 Paul establishes the idea that individual bodies are all members of a larger body: members of Christ.⁵⁹ With that groundwork laid, Paul can discuss individual bodies, as in verse 18, and move right back to the corporate body in verse 19 as the grammar directs.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See as well Kempthorne, "Incest," 573. Pace Naselli ("1 Corinthians," 272n85), the issue in 6:12–20 is not that σῶμα is repeatedly used, but that when it is the number does change, showing nuance in meaning between uses.

⁵⁷ Distributive uses of singular nouns appear elsewhere in other Pauline writings, especially in Ephesians (1:18; 4:23, 29; 5:19; 6:5, 14, 22). But those, of course, have no bearing on the discourse of 1 Corinthians. Each use must be discerned from its own context.

⁵⁸ Moving between singular and plural uses of σῶμα in narrow contexts with intentionality is not unprecedented for Paul; cf. Rom 12:1–5.

⁵⁹ Robert H. Gundry thinks the idea of the "body of Christ" would not have been in the Corinthians' purview yet. Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology, with Emphasis on Pauline Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 75. But Paul's comment in 10:17, ἐν σώμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἑσμεν, does not read like a novel concept; indeed, Paul takes no effort to explain. Presumably this was part and parcel of Paul's teaching when he was in Corinth. Moreover, as a unified speech-act, it matters little where in 1 Corinthians a concept is broached; if it is broached at all, it is a part of the text's conceptual universe. See as well 12:12–14, 27 and context where Paul's emphasis lies not with explaining a novel concept but drawing upon the one body imagery to make (again) the point of unity. On the cultural-conceptual level, σῶμα was a generally known Greek metaphor for describing the dynamics of a group with "unity of life and mind" (TDNT 7:1069).

⁶⁰ Also, if one is convinced by Kenneth Bailey's chiasmic structure in 1 Corinthians 6:13–20, verses 15 and 19 line up in parallel, the former clearly communal. Kenneth Bailey, "Paul's Theological Foundation for Human Sexuality: 1 Cor 6:9–20 in Light of Rhetorical Criticism," *ThRer* 3.1 (1980): 27–41.

In other words, Paul indeed speaks of the corporeal body in verses 13–14. Then in verse 15, to serve the larger point of chapters 5–7 (indeed, the entire book; more on this below), Paul establishes how the Corinthians, so prone to divide, should move in their thinking from their own bodies in isolation to their roles as members of Christ. The joining with the prostitute in verse 16 is surely individual, but the point is to inform the corporate ramifications. The rhetorical question in this verse serves the point of the previous verse; thus the conjunction and move back to a man's union with Christ in verse 17. That a man has joined his individual body to a prostitute hardly needs articulating, but the power of the argument is in the implication that he—as a member of the larger body of Christ—has joined the entire body of Christ to her, implicating Christ himself, therefore, in temple prostitution and idol worship!⁶¹ A communal understanding of the “body” in this passage, therefore, by no means negates the individual call to sexual holiness, but imbues it with even more gravity. Theological realities about the church and the sanctity of the entire community are at stake, not just one's own atomistic piety.⁶² As in chapter 3, individuals are destroying the temple of God.⁶³

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor argues that verse 18b is a Corinthian slogan that amounts to “The physical body is morally irrelevant, for sin takes place on an entirely different level of one's being.”⁶⁴ And it is exactly against that idea that Paul is arguing. Thus verse 18b is a foil in Paul's argument.⁶⁵ The body of an individual does matter because it implicates the larger body of Christ.⁶⁶ If the fornicating man sins against his own body and his body is a member of Christ (v. 15), then he has also sinned against the body composed of all other believers. In this way, “his own body,” in verse 18, though qualified by an individualizing adjective, takes on a high-

⁶¹ That the issue at hand is particularly temple prostitution, see Brian S. Rosner, “Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20,” *NovT* 40.4 (1998): 336–51. Alistair May offers an intriguing hypothesis, however, that the “prostitute” is the non-Christian society. Alistair Scott May, “*The Body for the Lord*: Sex and Identity in 1 Corinthians 5–7,” *JSNTSup* 278 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 7, *inter alia*; see also Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 176; Holland, *Contours*, 129–37.

⁶² To May, Paul argues in chapters 1–7 that the community is ethically distinct from the society (1:2), and so sexual improprieties in the community put that in jeopardy (*Body*, 54–59, *inter alia*). Going in a slightly different direction, though ending in the same place, Liu's reading is that anyone united with a prostitute is spiritually disconnected from the presence of God in the body of Christ (*Temple Purity*, 159–65). The assertion that an individual body is also a temple of God indwelt by his Spirit, however, loses force when separated from the reality that the community of believers belongs together to God in Christ. In fact, the individual derives the substance and meaning of the claim to God's indwelling Spirit from the spiritual community formed by the work of Christ.

⁶³ As Gärtner states simply, they “threaten the life of the community” (*Temple*, 60).

⁶⁴ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12–20,” *CBQ* 40.3 (1978): 393; so too Kempthorne, “Incest,” 568–74; Roger L. Omanson, “Acknowledging Paul's Quotations,” *BT* 43.2 (1992): 201–13; Denny Burk, “Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of the Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20,” *BBR* 18.1 (2008): 99–121. Cf. also C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 196–97.

⁶⁵ See esp. Burk, “Discerning,” 117–19.

⁶⁶ See also Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 173–76; May, *Body*, 7–8, 49–57.

er level of communal meaning.⁶⁷ All this prepares the reader to interpret the temple imagery of verse 19 corporately.

Tracking this movement between individual bodies and the body of Christ is certainly challenging, but the syntax makes it possible and the grammar, strictly speaking, calls for it. This is not unprecedented for Paul; he also veers between individual bodies and the larger body of Christ in Romans 12:1–5. He speaks of “your bodies” in verse 1 and the “one body in Christ” with individual “members” in verse 5.

Finally, the language of purchase in verse 20 may not come from a Hellenistic context, that of the slave market where individuals are sold, but from a Hebraic context, that of the bride price.⁶⁸ This too would be corporate, as again the grammar so directs (plural verbs and pronoun with the singular ἐν τῷ σώματι). Neither the OT nor NT ever speaks of individuals betrothed/married to God or Christ, but the entire community of the elect, be it Israel or the church. The church could never be “joined,” therefore, to a/the prostitute—and thus to some other deity—for she is already betrothed to Christ. Having already been bought with the bride price, it is a ghastly thing a man does in going to a temple prostitute, for it is not just his body he joins to her and her god, but as a member of the betrothed church he thereby joins the entire body of Christ—even Christ himself—to another. That is what the OT calls adultery, a terrible accusation against Israel.⁶⁹ Paul would prevent such an accusation against the Spirit-indwelt temple-church in Corinth.

With these contextual considerations drawn particularly from verses 15 and 20, we can offer a fuller dynamically equivalent translation of 1 Corinthians 6:19–20:

Or do you *all* not know that your *communal* body, *of which your individual bodies are members*, is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is among you *all*, whom you *all* have from God, and you *all* are not your own? For you *all* were *exclusively* purchased at a *bride* price; now indeed you *all* should glorify God in your *communal* body *made up of the many members*.

2. *The whole-book discourse.* Not only is this reading plausible among the details of the immediate literary context, accounting for the full weight of the grammar, but it also tracks with Paul’s flow of thought across the epistle. Our verses in question, 6:19–20, form the climax to a longer section, summing up the discourse since at least 5:1.⁷⁰ There Paul broaches the issue of πορνεία. His reuse of the term in 6:13 is not a return to the topic, but an inclusio for the section.⁷¹ The main theme

⁶⁷ Following Kempthorne, Newton also reads verse 18c this way (*Concept of Purity*, 57). See also Grosheide, *First Corinthians*, 151–52.

⁶⁸ Holland, *Contours*, 114–22. The quotation of Genesis 2:24 in verse 16 to support the assertion that the church cannot be “joined” to both Christ and another reinforces the image of marriage in the flow of thought. For an especially thick intertextual reading of 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 see Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7*, AGJU 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 123–46.

⁶⁹ See Deut 31:16; Jer 3:8–9; Ezek 16:30–32, 38; 23:37.

⁷⁰ See discussion in Richardson, *Temple*, 169–72.

⁷¹ See Hogeterp, *God’s Temple*, 337–38.

running through the section is that of congregational unity.⁷² The textual evidence is inconclusive as to whether the lawsuits of 6:1–6 were related to the case of the man and his stepmother in chapter 5.⁷³ What is clear is a corporate failure when members within the community resort to judgments from outside, thereby opening the distinct and holy community (1:2) to impurity.⁷⁴ Thus the charge to “purge the evil from among you” in 5:13 is motivated by the larger concern for the entire congregation as seen in 5:6–7. So when Paul introduces explicitly that bodies are not in isolation, but collectively the body of Christ in 6:15, the idea is hardly foreign after such issues in chapter 5.⁷⁵ To limit the meaning of *σῶμα* to the individual physical body in chapter 6 would cut short the trajectory of Paul’s argument in the letter and neglect the communal emphasis of the larger context.⁷⁶

Further back in the argument, 3:16–17 is clearly communal as noted above. Paul writes of ministers of the church in 3:5–15, depicting the community as God’s singular “building” (3:9) with one foundation (3:11) and calling them all the temple of God with the Spirit indwelling them all. The Greek is so strikingly similar to 6:19 that it is hard to see how they would not conceptually align.⁷⁷ On the level of the discourse the verses would mutually refute one another if they did not align.

1 Corinthians 3:16

Οὐκ οἶδατε

ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε

καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν;

1 Corinthians 6:19

ἢ οὐκ οἶδατε

ὅτι τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς

τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐστίν

οὗ ἔχετε ἀπὸ θεοῦ,

καὶ οὐκ ἐστὲ ἑαυτῶν;

The singular nature of the temple in 3:16–17 is paramount to Paul’s argument. These would-be ministers are not defiling/destroying individual Christians one by

⁷² Suh shows how at least ten more themes tie 1 Corinthians 5:1–13 to the epistle’s larger temple theology (*Power and Peril*, 19–29).

⁷³ For differing views, see May (*Body*, 80n1) and Will Deming, “The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5–6,” *JBL* 115.2 (1996): 289–312. Goulder points out that, all the same, it is not uncommon for Paul to leave and return to an argument. Michael D. Goulder, “Libertines? (1 Cor. 5–6),” *NovT* 41.4 (1999): 344.

⁷⁴ May, *Body*, 81–82.

⁷⁵ See especially R. Bruce Terry, “1 Corinthians,” in *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings*, ed. Todd A. Scacewater (Dallas: Fontes, 2020), 233–39. Terry identifies chapters 5 and 6:9–20 as the poles of a major chiasm, observing how common it is in 1 Corinthians wherein “the second subject actually becomes an argument for the first” (238).

⁷⁶ So too K. Romaniuk, “Exégèse du Nouveau Testament et ponctuation,” *NovT* 23.3 (1981): 203–4.

⁷⁷ Lanci comments that in 3:16 “the plural pronoun ὑμῖν emphasizes that the Spirit dwells in the midst of the community, rather than just within the individual,” but he does not apply that same insight to 6:19 (*New Temple*, 130). We do.

one. They are defiling/destroying the community of believers, the church. The argument is then underscored with God's jealousy for his one holy abode. It is hard to read Paul's vehement objection to ministers defiling God's temple-community only to abandon the singular nature of the temple just a few chapters later.⁷⁸ The meaning of temple in 3:16–17 must remain in force when the reader gets to chapter 6, especially after running through chapter 5.⁷⁹

Going back still further in the discourse, the Corinthian particularization of the larger one temple of God is insinuated as early as 1:2, where Paul tells them they are "called to be saints *together with all those who in every place* call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁸⁰ The Corinthians' participation in the universal church is immediately posited, not to be forgotten by chapters 3 and 6. Thus Paul does not conceive of every Christian congregation as a temple in and of itself (which would multiply the number of temples within creation) but considers the entire universal body of Christ to be the one temple of the one God through the one Spirit. And so all Christians are "saints together" and share the same theological identity. The universal church, often called "the body of Christ" (Eph 1:22–23; 3:6; 5:29–30; Col 1:18, 24), is the temple of God; and local congregations, also sometimes called "the body" (Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 12), are temporal-spatial manifestations of that larger cosmic reality.⁸¹

This line of thought then extends into chapters 12–14, where the point is that the Spirit gifts all, and to experience the Spirit's full giftedness the church must therefore be unified (cf. esp. 12:12–17, 27). If each individual were a temple of the Holy Spirit, perhaps there would be no need for unity with other believers and the whole exhortation becomes unnecessary.⁸²

Set alongside the grammatical and historical considerations above, we see that a corporate temple reading of 1 Corinthians 6:19 is also literarily plausible. It bears up under the immediate context, but more determinatively it is coherent with 1:2, 3:16–17, chapter 5, and chapters 12–14, whereas a reading that understands indi-

⁷⁸ The majority of commentators recognize the corporate emphasis of the temple imagery in chapter 3 but then conclude that in chapter 6, "Paul has taken the imagery that properly belongs to the church (cf. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21–22) and applied it to the individual believer." Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 264; so too Hans Conzelmann, *First Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 112; Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, IBC (Louisville: WJK, 1997), 107; Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 474; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 264; Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, NAC 28 (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 159. If the temple imagery were theologically unrelated to other aspects of Paul's teaching, it might be easy to see how the apostle could so casually reapply the metaphor. But because the temple imagery in chapter 3 subsidizes Paul's teaching on church unity, to suddenly individualize that same imagery in chapter 6 would mute the previous argument.

⁷⁹ On the interpretive role of whole-book coherency see Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, ASem (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 58–60, 148–49.

⁸⁰ Lanci, *New Temple*, 130.

⁸¹ For more in this vein see Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 369–76, 430.

⁸² We do not deny the individual indwelling of the Spirit, only that such indwelling is not of a temple per se.

vidual temples is incongruent on the discourse level. One more consideration remains: Which reading best harmonizes with the symphony of redemptive history?

III. THE REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

All good biblical interpretation must naturally turn on this third hermeneutical axis. One need only consider that throughout the OT the Lord has one earthly tabernacle or temple at a time.⁸³ Psalm 68 is an exultation to this end.⁸⁴ The rationale for this comes out quite clearly in Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8: there is one temple because there is one God.⁸⁵ The first words Solomon utters are that there is no god like Yahweh (v. 23), and now he has come to dwell in one place as an extension of his heavenly abode (v. 27).⁸⁶ Thus, all true worship occurs exclusively at or toward "this place" (vv. 29–30, 35, 39, 43, 49), and this applies to all peoples everywhere (8:41–43, 60). When Israel wanted to worship elsewhere, it was sin. In 1 Kings 12:27–33 Jeroboam introduces a host of deviant liturgies. In addition to the idols and disregard for the priestly class, it is emphasized in verse 30 that they worshiped at new shrines, away from Jerusalem. Then, after the destruction a rebuilt temple was necessary, and there had to be only one (Haggai 1; Ezra 6:13–18). In describing the new creation so effulgent with the glory of God, Ezekiel 40–48 does not envision temples spread out all over the earth, but one temple so incredibly huge there is no room for any other! In Isaiah 56:7 all peoples come to the one holy mountain (see also 60:4–7; 66:18–21). That there is but one temple makes a powerful statement: there is but one God. And if the one creation will be filled with the one Creator's glory, that one temple will simply expand over all.⁸⁷

A lengthier biblical-theological consideration might start with Stephen Dempster's article, "From Slight Peg to Cornerstone to Capstone," where he brings together two intriguing biblical motifs: (1) in the OT, three days is a common trope for typological resurrection, and (2) such three-day episodes often culminate with some kind of temple-inauguration.⁸⁸ Two examples must suffice here.

Isaac is as good as dead in Genesis 22. But after a three-day walk (v. 4) to the land of Moriah (v. 2) he and Abraham worship and return alive (v. 5; Heb 11:19 calls this a type of the resurrection), because of the substitution of the ram. In turn Mount Moriah "will later emerge in the biblical story as the place where animals are

⁸³ Even the multiple shrines of the patriarchs function collectively to mark the one Holy Land for the presence of God (Beale, *Temple*, 94–99), and equally create the expectation that Abraham's descendants would spread the singular presence of the one God over all creation (Beale, *New Testament*, 623–26).

⁸⁴ The tabernacle is a portable Sinai which is then planted on Zion. See T. Desmond Alexander, *The City of God and the Goal of Creation*, SSBT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 51–54, 60–62.

⁸⁵ Another reason is that the goal of the singular creation is to become a sanctum *in toto* (Alexander, *From Eden*, 13–73). One creation, so one temple.

⁸⁶ Gray, *I and II Kings*, 221; Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 109–11.

⁸⁷ Beale, *Temple*, 110–13, 126–54.

⁸⁸ Stephen G. Dempster, "From Slight Peg to Cornerstone to Capstone: The Resurrection of Christ on 'The Third Day' According to the Scriptures," *WTJ* 76.2 (2014): 371–409.

sacrificed for Israelite sins” (2 Chr 3:1).⁸⁹ Thus, Isaac’s typological resurrection marks the foundation of the future temple and sacrificial system.

Similarly, in Exodus 1 the nation of Israel is threatened with death, but in the course of the narrative they come to worship at Mount Sinai (chap. 19), and by the end they witness the glory presence of the Lord enter the tabernacle. Most of the second half of the book is focused on building that tabernacle, and it all commences with the demand that Pharaoh let Israel go three days’ journey into the wilderness (5:1–3). That is the goal toward which everything else is angled throughout the plagues. So when Pharaoh refuses, “the forces of death are unleashed upon his county in three triads of plagues whose ninth plague of darkness lasts for three days (Exod 10:23).”⁹⁰ The summative plague, then, is death throughout his house and his land (12:29–32), whereas Israel (gravely threatened in chapter 1) “went up” out of the land of Egypt (12:38; 13:18), taking the bones of Joseph (13:19), led on the way by the glory cloud and fire of the Lord (13:21–22) that climactically rests in the tabernacle (40:34–38). And so, the people of Israel have moved—over a three-day journey—from death to life through the Passover sacrifice (12:1–28) specifically into the presence of God with the erection of the tabernacle.

More subtle examples abound throughout the OT where a three-day crisis is followed by salvation on the verge of some preparatory act of temple-building.⁹¹ The significance of this is written all over the NT. Jesus insists his resurrection will occur on the third day (Matt 16:21) after the temple veil and his body are torn at the same moment (Matt 27:50–51). John understands that Jesus’s body is the temple he will rebuild in three days (John 2:19) only after the resurrection (2:21–22). And following immediately on the heels of Jesus’s resurrection and ascension, the church is filled with the fiery presence of the Spirit (Acts 2, recalling Exodus 19 and 40, and Isaiah 2 and 4).

All this flows into considering 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 where Paul declares that Jesus’s death and resurrection on the third day both accord with Scripture. No small coincidence that he says this as prelude to the lengthier explication of the resurrection of Christ in the book where he has already twice called the church the temple of God (3:16–17; 6:19) “together with all those in all places who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2). The point for the Corinthians is that when Jesus Christ was raised on the third day—summing up and surpassing all previous types—he commences with building the great eschatological temple through the Spirit: the church. In accord with the shape and expectations of redemptive history (i.e., *κατὰ τὰς γραφάς*, 1 Cor 15:3–4), the post-resurrection Spirit-indwelt church is the one eschatological temple enveloping all creation.

In the history of redemption there is one garden-sanctuary, one mountain of the Lord, one tabernacle, one Holy Land, one temple, one place that will be lifted up above all others. There simply is no line of thinking anywhere in the Bible

⁸⁹ Dempster, “From Slight Peg,” 387.

⁹⁰ Dempster, “From Slight Peg,” 389.

⁹¹ See Josh 2:16, 22; 3:1–3; 2 Sam 24; 2 Kgs 20:1–8; Isa 25; Ezek 37; 40–48; Hos 6:1–3; Ezra 8:15, 32–33; 1 Chr 21–22.

wherein God would have more than one earthly abode. In the latter days Jesus Christ is the meeting place between God and man, the link between heaven and earth. The church's union with Christ therefore creates solidarity not only with him, but necessarily also with each other wherein individuals incorporated into the one body of Christ constitute the one temple of the living God. After the third-day resurrection of the Messiah, the Davidic temple-builder has created one singular divine sanctuary, ever-growing and ever-expanding over the face of the earth. That is what the universal church is with individual congregations in theological solidarity with each other.⁹²

IV. CONCLUSION

Grammar is a social convention, not a set of rules. Yet, while grammar cannot lock down meaning, it does at least give the author the opportunity to be clear and can direct the reader on particular interpretive paths. At that point context takes over, both literary and historical. And with biblical literature a third context takes its seat at the hermeneutical table as well: redemptive-historical context. We have argued that the idea of temple is theologically determined for both Greeks and Jews and that such ideas are set at odds. Greeks understood that there are multiple gods and so the creation is littered with multiple altars, shrines, idols, and temples. The Jewish mindset, however, precludes such holy places because they are endemic to a polytheistic system. There is but one God, and so there can be only one legitimate temple. Between these two theological poles we find Paul calling the church the temple of God in 1 Corinthians 3:16–17, 2 Corinthians 6:16, and Ephesians 2:19–21 (as do Peter and the evangelists). Such a historical context speaks powerfully to the likelihood that in 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul again teaches that the one body of Christ is the temple of God. This is in line with the basic grammar of 6:19–20, and more significantly, it coheres with Paul's use of temple, body, and Spirit language to promote unity throughout the rest of the book. Redemptive-historically, this must be so. For the Creator and covenant God has always inhabited one sacred abode among his people. Could 1 Corinthians 6:19 admit the only alien idea among all this? Would Paul tap a Greek well to draw out Jewish-Christian water? Would he subvert his own emphasis on temple-unity from only three chapters earlier? Would he release an exotic bird into the ecosystem of canonical teachings? We doubt it. But a corporate understanding of the body of Christ as the temple in 1 Corinthians 6:19 taps the Jewish reservoir of temple imagery, redoubles Paul's emphasis on unity, and finds a natural home in the environs of biblical theology.

Christian anthropology is a derivative of theology. This is why to drive his points home about unity and sexual purity Paul broaches the powerful image of the temple-community with the query, "Do you all not know...?" in both 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19. Paul would change their way of thinking principally about themselves. In so doing he clearly means to express an "oscillation of thought between

⁹² Relatedly, Christians serve as priests within the one temple of God. David S. Schrock, *The Royal Priesthood and the Glory of God*, SSBT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 141–71.

the community and the individual.”⁹³ It would not do the oscillation justice, however, to read one pericope as communal and another as individual. It is not a movement between two alternatives, but a dynamic relationship. Paul invites the Corinthians, along with all saints everywhere, to ponder the captivating truth that the redeemed are one temple together in Christ Jesus.

This does not negate the call to personal piety, but heightens it. For each member of the body—each stone in the temple—plays a critical role in its makeup to where their actions do not affect others in generic ways but impact the sanctity of the whole.⁹⁴ Each person’s sexual sin pollutes not only that person but, far worse to Paul, implicates the entire body of Christ—and therefore Christ himself—in idolatry! This thought alone should awaken believers to the devastation of personal sexual sins. And conversely, this corporate solidarity provides a deeply constructive motivation for sexual purity because it promotes the health and holiness of the entire sacred abode of God. It is one thing to tell believers their sins are harming themselves; it is another to set such sins in a wider ecclesial theology.

Simply put, the idea of multiple temples is a theological impossibility. The answer to Paul’s question “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor 1:13) is decidedly *no*! Christ alone is the temple and union with him by the one Spirit is what makes his people into one collective temple. As Christians grow in this knowledge, they will also mature in both their sexual purity and corporate unity.⁹⁵

⁹³ McKelvey, *New Temple*, 102.

⁹⁴ Liu recognizes that while sexual sins are committed by individuals, they “mutilate” the body of Christ of which that individual is a member, causing a “severe defilement to the temple-community” (*Temple Purity*, 146); see also Suh, *Power and Peril*, 208–11.

⁹⁵ Special thanks to Roger Williams for fruitful pushback and feedback, Jonathan Zavodney for research and bibliographical help, and Alfie Mosse and Keith Yoder for deft grammatical insights.