SEMĂNĂTORUL (THE SOWER)

The Journal of Ministry and Biblical Research

Volume 4, Number 1

Articles published by the Faculty of Theology
in Emanuel University of Oradea, and
International Contributors, October 2023.

GENERAL CO-EDITORS
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Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania
2023

Semănătorul (The Sower)
Volume 4. Number. 1 (2023): 77-113
DOI: https://doi.org/10.58892/TS.swr4140

THE ABA' STRUCTURE OF PAUL'S ARGUMENTATION IN 1 CORINTHIANS. LOVE AS A UNIFYING THEME

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ABSTRACT: It is well known that the letter of 1 Corinthians is peculiar in the sense that it deals with several issues in the Corinthian church, apparently unrelated to each other, except that all the problems were found in the same church. While the purpose for which Paul wrote the letter was that of creating unity, the way he seeks to motivate towards unity is by calling for self-sacrifice, restraining one's liberty, giving up one's rights, ultimately by calling the believers to love. This becomes clear by noting the structure of Paul's argument in dealing with each individual issue in the letter. The sandwich (ABA') structure reveals that at the heart of each of Paul's arguments is a call to self-sacrifice. This is strengthened by noting that Paul begins and ends his epistle with the two most significant redemptive events—the cross and the resurrection.

KEY WORDS: Corinthians, sandwich structure, ABA' structure, love, gospel, cross, unity, theme

Introduction

The first letter to the Corinthians is peculiar in the way it is structured, at least in comparison with Paul's other letters in the New Testament. First Corinthians is certainly an epistle, just like the other New Testament

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epistles, preserving its epistolary introduction and conclusion. However, in distinction from the other epistles, Paul does not respond to one single issue in the church to whom he is addressing the letter, but to several. Moreover, the way he responds to these issues is peculiar.

The purpose of this article is to analyze succinctly each topic that Paul is addressing in his first letter to the Corinthians, and the way he is constructing his argument and defending his perspective on each issue. What will become obvious, we hope, is that each individual topic is discussed following a precise structure, a structure that may be called a "sandwich" structure or ABA' pattern.[2] We will contend that Paul organizes each topic by placing at the beginning and end of each issue details about the particular issue, while in the middle he provides a background against which to view each specific issue. This background provides the solution to that specific problem. It can be maintained that the solution to each problem, though cast in different ways (e.g., theology, personal example, argument from Scripture, tradition of Jesus), is basically the same: a call to love and self-sacrifice as an embodiment of the gospel. The coherence of the letter is given not only by the purpose for which Paul writes—unity, but also by the solution he proposes—love, seen in the arrangement and the argument of each topic.

Such a study is primarily important for aiding the reader and interpreter to better grasp the meaning of Paul's argumentation. It may also help to counter the view of some theologians that postulate the presence of alleged Pauline interpolations in the epistle or digressions from

2 This is not to say that 1 Corinthians is unique in this, only that such patterns are followed with consistency in 1 Corinthians and is seen at the thematic level more than just at the sentence/phrase level. This type of chiastic structure of each topic is not a new idea, but what differentiates our proposal from all the other ones that present an ABA' structure is the fact that each topic is structured according to this pattern and that the middle section in each of these structures provides the solution to each issue and to the major issue of factionalism confronted by Paul in the letter overall. For an argument for the chiastic structure of chap. 5-7, 8-10, and 12-14, see R.F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Sacra Pagina 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 14-16.

the topic that supposedly bring in irrelevant material.[3] Such a theory is based on the argument that the middle section of the ABA' structure does not really belong there, since there are supposedly obvious lexical and thematic differences between that section and the surrounding context. Indeed, *prima facie,* one may conclude that such a postulation is correct, but upon a closer analysis, we hope to show the coherence of Paul's argumentation, namely that the middle part of each of the topics that Paul tackles in his epistle is strategically and logically placed within the argument, in order to provide the solution to the problem of dissensions characteristic of every issue. Gordon Fee rightly argues that "these theories miss a basic form of argumentation in this letter, the 'A-B-A' pattern."[4] Lastly, this study may provide an alternative to those who see no structure and coherence between the issues treated in the letter. We believe, with others, that the purpose of the letter is to encourage unity and that is seen at the level of argumentation within each topic. But what gives coherence to all individual issues is the solution Paul proposes and is common to all of them: love and self-sacrifice. This emphasis on love will be seen in several aspects of the letter. First, the content of the middle section of each chiastic structure, when stripped of its contextual details, is at its core a message of self-sacrifice. Second, the climax of the letter is a call to love, as seen in chap. 13. Third, at the end of the letter Paul encourages a demonstration of self-sacrifice by participation in the collection for the Jerusalem brethren. Lastly, Paul decides to treat the issues in the church between two major theological poles: the cross (chapter 1) and

3 See, e.g., William O. Walker, Jr. "1 Corinthians 2.6-16: A Non-Pauline Interpolation?" *JSNT* 47 (1992): 75–94. J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," *CBQ* 48 (1986) 81–94. According to this theory there are either Pauline or non-Pauline interpolations. For the idea of digression see, e.g., Wilhelm Wuellner, "Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant* (William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken, eds.; ThH, 53; Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 177–88.

4 Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 16.

the resurrection (chapter 15). Thus, in a way, even the macro structure of the epistle seems to suggest that the path to resolution begins with self-sacrifice, the supreme model being Christ.

In order to prove all this, we will proceed in the following way. First, we will present several proposals for the structure of the letter, focusing primarily on those that come close to our own. Second, we will discuss each topic of the letter and show their ABA' structure. Third, we will seek to point to love and self-sacrifice as the common ground between all the solutions advanced by Paul in the middle section of each topic. Lastly, we will show how this solution for unity is embodied in the gospel, demonstrated by Christ, and evidenced in the macro-structure of Paul's epistle that begins with the cross and ends with the resurrection.

Proposals for the Macro-Structure of 1 Corinthians

There is no consensus on the structure of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. The proposals range from no structure, to a basic structure, and finally, to a more complex and coherent structure.[5]

No structure

Jerome Murphy O'Connor speaks for those who see the letter as a composite document. In his view, "[t]he salient feature of 1 Corinthians is the absence of any detectable logic in the arrangement of its contents."[6]

5 For a listing of most proposals of structures of 1 Corinthians, but organized differently than how we proceed, see Matthew R. Malcolm, "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship" *Currents in Biblical Research* 14.2 (2016): 256-69; Andrew David Naselli, "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians" *Presbyterion* 44.1 (2018): 98-114. We do not discuss here the argument for the non-integrity of the epistle and the theory of a redactor. For a presentation and refutation of such a view, see, e.g., J.C. Hurd, "Good News and the Integrity of 1 Corinthians," in L.A. Jervis and P. Richardson (eds.), *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker* (JSNTSupp 108; Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 38-62.

6 J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

More recently, Andrew David Naselli, after surveying different proposals for the structure of the epistle, concludes that "it is best to string out the issues in one long list" with no thematic grouping.[7]

A basic structure

Most students of the epistle, however, will recognize a basic organizational factor of the issues treated by Paul, namely issues of which he has heard and issues of which the Corinthians have inquired in the letter they sent to Paul. Following this division of issues, traditionally, commentators have divided the epistle in two broad parts: chap.1-6 and chap.7-15.[8] In the first six chapters Paul responds to oral reports (most likely from the Chloe's; cf., 1:11). From chapter seven to chapter sixteen, Paul answers questions that the Corinthians had raised by way of a letter that they sent to Paul through some messengers (possibly Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus; cf. 16:17).[9] In this second part of the letter, the treatment of most topics is introduced by the phrase *peri de*—"Now concerning/about."[10] Most commentators, however, will rightly recognize a certain

1996), 253.

7 See, e.g., Naselli, "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians," 106. Nevertheless, he qualifies his conclusions by adding that "the order in which Paul addresses the ten issues in 1 Corinthians matters. There is a logic of progression to his order, especially by ending with the resurrection," 107. For a list of authors who argue for no unifying theme and coherence of the epistle, see Malcolm, "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship" 257.

8 See Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 29–30; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, viii–xi. See the presentation by Naselli, "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians," 102-3.

9 See, *inter alia*, William F. Orr and James A. Walther, *First Corinthians* (AB, 32; New York: Doubleday, 1976), 120–22.

10 Not all topics are introduced in this way and the presence of each phrase does not necessarily introduce a new topic. For instance, Paul's mention of Apollos in 16:11 is introduced by the same phrase, but it is questionable whether this means that the Corinthians requested that Apollos visit them again and thus Paul responds to their question. See David E. Garland, *1*

flexibility and alternation in Paul's responses to oral reports and written letter.[11]

A Coherent Structure

Beyond this basic structure of the letter, that includes a discussion of individual and unrelated topics, most commentators will see a certain level of coherence of related themes. What gives coherence to the letter, most argue, are certain themes that group the issues together in accordance with a supposed thesis statement.[12] Matthew Malcolm, in his review of the approaches to the structure of 1 Corinthians, notes three proposed unifying themes: holiness, unity, and the cross.[13]

Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, for instance, argue that Paul is concerned in 1 Corinthians with "purity in general, and two vices in particular" that dominate and give coherence to the letter: sexual immorality (4:18-7:40) and idolatry (8:1-14:40).[14] These issues, they argue, are in

Corinthians (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 761. See the pertinent study by Margaret Mitchell, 'Concerning *peri de* in 1 Corinthians', *NovT* 31 (1989): 229–56.

11 See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 21.

12 Malcolm "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship," 259.

13 Ibidem; he notes that the unifying themes proposed find their support in the thesis statement seen in different verses. He states: "Indeed, these three proposed thesis statements (1.10; 1.18; 1.30) reflect three themes that are often claimed to be central to the letter as a whole: the need for *unity* (e.g. Mitchell); the corrective of the *cross* (e.g. Gorman); and the call to *holiness* (e.g. Ciampa and Rosner)." For a list of proposals of different themes, see Naselli, "The Structure and Theological Message of 1 Corinthians," 104-6, though he rejects the idea of Paul intentionally grouping the issues thematically. He states: "it is not sufficiently evident that Paul intentionally groups the issues in a particular thematic way," 106.

14 Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 24. See also their article, "The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians: A Biblical/Jewish Approach" *NTS* 52.2 (2006): 205-18, esp. 208-9. For a similar argument, see E.J. Schnabel, *Der erste Brief des*

accordance with Paul's Jewish ethical concerns that begin from the thesis statement of the letter in 1:30 with its emphasis on holiness.

Margaret Mitchell argues convincingly that Paul's concern is to end factionalism and create unity, as seen in the thesis statement of 1:10, with its emphasis on unity[15] In order to achieve this purpose, she argues, Paul uses deliberative rhetoric.[16]

Lastly, Matthew Malcolm, together with other theologians, argues for Paul's *kerygma* of cross and resurrection being the unifying theme of the letter, especially at its macro-level, and seen in 1:18.[17]

These three proposals of unifying themes have their validity and support in the text of the epistle, but they should not be seen as competing, much less as being exclusive of each other, but rather as complementary, each emphasizing one aspect of the church in Corinth. For instance, holiness defines the church's identity, a peculiar *ekklesia*, an alternative to

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Paulus an die Korinther (HTA; Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2006), 47.

15 See Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1991).

16 Others follow her in using Greco-Roman rhetorical categories for analyzing the letter. See, e.g., Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995). *Contra*, see Roy E. Cimpa and Brian S. Rosner, "The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians; Matthew R. Malcolm, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians. The Impact of Paul's Gospel on his Macro-Rhetoric* (SNTSMS 155; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On page 6 he quotes Duane F. Watson in support: "Studies of Romans illustrate that linking a Pauline epistle to a particular rhetorical species [i.e. forensic, deliberative, or epideictic] is unwise and looking toward a Christian rhetoric may [be] a better solution." See D. F. Watson, "The Three Species of Rhetoric and the Study of the Pauline Epistles," in J. P. Sampley and P. Lampe (eds.), *Paul and Rhetoric* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 25–47; 47.

17 See his *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians*. In his article "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship," he also mentions M.J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

the pagan Roman society. The cross is what gives the church her identity and message, and impacts her behavior. Again, unity is an essential characteristic of a cruciform, holy community. These three themes intermix effectively in 1 Corinthians: the individual issues that Paul addresses in his letter were a matter of divisiveness and threatened to destroy the very peculiar identity of the church marked by the cross. Therefore, Paul seeks to bring about unity in the church, by appealing to the church's holiness and her cruciform orientation. Unity is the purpose of the letter, while holiness and *kerygma* are the opposite of factionalism.

What we propose in this article is the different unifying theme of the letter: love. This theme not only gives coherence to the letter, but it is also the solution to factionalism.

Proposals for the Micro-Structure of 1 Corinthians[18]

Beyond these proposed unifying themes at the macro-level of the letter that give coherence to the issues and have support in the text of the epistle, there is the question of coherence at the micro-level of the treatment of each issue. It is at this level that we think that more work can to be done. Our suggestion is that in addressing each issue, Paul uses the "sandwich structure" of the type ABA'.[19] This type of structure works in

18 We are aware that micro-level structure usually refers to components in a single sentence, but we are using the term micro-structure to refer to units of text, those units in 1 Corinthians that address specific issues, as we will show later. For a discussion of chiasm, see James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 181-82; Ian H. Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline letters* (JSNTSS 111; Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press, 1995), esp. chap. 1 for argument in favor of Paul's structuring his argument chiastically, based on first century rhetorical background; N. W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the NT: A Study in the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 139-96.

19 This type of structure has different names: concentric patterns, pivot or ring formations, chiasm, inverted parallelism. Stanley E. Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed, 'Philippians as a Macro-Chiasm and Its Exegetical Significance', *NTS* 44 (1998), 213-31, argue that identification of 'macro-chiasms' as devices of com-

1 Corinthians by Paul initially presenting an issue, then moving on to a central or pivot point, and then repeating the issue from a new perspective. In this structure, the middle segment provides a complementary perspective on the issue at hand, functioning as the solution.

Matthew Malcolm argues for such a construction of the argument and in doing so, quotes John Chrysostom: "For this also is customary for him: not only to develop the issue at hand, but also to depart from there to correct whatever seems to him to be related, and then to return to the earlier topic so that he might not seem to have abandoned his theme."[20] John Hurd also speaks of a pattern that we can identify in Paul: "It seems to be characteristic of Paul that he will present an argument, then bring in a new theme, and finally re-argue the original topic in a new way. I call it Paul's 'sonata' form."[21]

Several authors have argued for such a structure at different places

position for whole works, such as Philippians, is a modern construct. They do not reject the idea of 'micro-chiasm' limited to several verses, and question the 'intermediate length-chiasm' as argued for by Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*, chap.1.

20 Homily 37 on 1 Corinthians; PG 61.318, quoted in *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians*, 88.

21 Hurd, "Good News and the Integrity of 1 Corinthians," 61. He argues that this is a common feature of Paul's argumentation in his letters, especially in 1 Thessalonians.

and levels in the epistle.[22] We will note here several proposals.[23] Kenneth Bailey has the following chiastic outline:[24]

I. The Cross and Christian Unity 1:5–4:16
II. Men and Women in the Human Family 4:17–7:40
III. Food Offered to Idols (Christian and pagan) 8:1–11:1
IV. Men and Women in Worship 11:2–14:40
V. The Resurrection 15

From this chiastic structure of the letter, Bailey concludes that there are three ideas that Paul communicates: the cross and the resurrection, men and women in the family and in worship, and Christians living among pagans. Besides this type of ABCB'A' structure of the entire letter, Bailey identifies chiasm at the level of sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. But such a sophisticated composition is bound to be lost to the hearer. However, his observation that "Biblical 'ring composition' usually

22 For an introduction and defense of studying 1 Corinthians from this perspective, see Timothy Milinovich, *Beyond What Is Written: The Performative Structure of 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), esp. cap.1. His proposal of ring formations in 1 Corinthians is based on the oral performative function of the letter and it parallels the oral culture of late Western antiquity. For the Hebrew literary background of inverted parallelism used by Paul in 1 Corinthians, see Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes. Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011). Many authors recognize this pattern in 1 Corinthians, but only few seek to show unity from such a structure formed around supposed digression in the middle section. See, Collins, *First Corinthians*, 14-25, 306; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 15-16; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 367.

23 Though John Hurd argues for this type of structure in argumentation in 1 Corinthians, he suggests that such a structure is proper for the study of chap. 8-10 and 12-14. He uses this structure in order to disprove any partition theories; "Good News and the Integrity of 1 Corinthians," 61.

24 Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, 26.

places the climax in the center, not at the end" is valuable to our argument.[25]

Matthew Malcolm, who reacts to Bailey's "sophisticated use of ring composition throughout 1 Corinthians"[26] identifies four major issues that Paul addresses in a chiastic pattern:[27]

5:1–13: Sexual immorality (the refusal to judge)
  6:1–11: Greedy exploitation (an apparent inability to judge)
6:12–7:40: Sexual immorality, the body, marriage

8:1–13: Meat offered to idols (using rights to endanger weaker brothers and sisters)
  9:1–27: Paul's example/mock defence (foregoing rights for others and self)
10:1–11:1: Meat offered to idols (foregoing rights for self and others)

11:2–16: I praise you for keeping the traditions I passed on (public worship)
  11:17–22: I do *not* praise you (in both v17 and v22)
11:23–34: I passed on to you what I also received (Lord's Supper)

12:1–31: Gifts within the body (mutual interdependence)
  12:31–13:13: Love
14:1–40: Gifts (for ordered edification of the whole)

A similar presentation of a chiastic structure for each topic may be found in Timothy Milinovich. Though he proposes multi-layered chiasms throughout the letter, he divides the letter only into three main sections/issues:[28]

25 Ibid., 51.

26 Malcolm, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians*, 90.

27 Ibid., 88.

28 *Beyond What Is Written*, 5-8. Here we will present a simplified version,

A: 1.1–4.21: internal issues
α 1.1-17: divisions in the church
β 1.18–3.3: 'foolishness' and wisdom of the cross
α′ 3.4–4.21: Paul, Apollos, and temple

B: 5.1–11.1: external issues
α 5.1–6.20: sexual immorality and justice
β 7.1-40: marriage and outsiders
α′ 8.1–11.1: eating disorder

A′: 11.2–16.24: internal issues
α 11.2–14.40: proper order and unity in worship
β 15.1-58: resurrection of Christ and elect
α′ 16.1-24: Paul's return to a unified church

From these three examples, one can see that there is ample justification for seeing the unity and coherence of the first Corinthian letter by invoking an ABA' structure, not only at the macro-level but also at the level of individual units, which address individual issues in the church. Matthew Malcolm, in his review of different proposals, concludes that "there is broad agreement that a notable feature of the arrangement of the epistle (whether through redaction, rhetoric, or ring composition) is the use of simple ABA' patterning for broad units (most notably, 8-10; 12-14)."[29] Therefore, it is our view that such a structure for each individual issue should be pursued in the study of 1 Corinthians in order to show its unity. The disagreement among the proposals of ABA' patterning within the epistle lies at the level of identifying the topics addressed and structured according to this pattern. Thus, in this next section, we will identify

following Malcolm, "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship," 264, table 8.

29 Malcolm, "The Structure and Theme of First Corinthians in Recent Scholarship" 267.

the topics and then show their chiastic structure and the role played by the middle part.

The ABA' Structure of the Argument of Each Topic

The major topics in 1 Corinthians over which there were divisions in the church are as follows:[30]

1:12–4:21 Dissensions around leadership
5:1–6:20 Sexual Sin
7:1–40 Marriage
8:1–11:1 Food Sacrificed to Idols
11:2–16 Head Covering in Worship
11:17–34 Common Meals
12:1–14:40 Spiritual Gifts
15:1–58 Resurrection

In the following section we will briefly look at the argument for each individual topic in order to note the sandwich structure.

Dissensions 1:12–4:21[31]

In verse 10 of chapter 1 Paul launches into discussing the first topic, i.e., dissensions over church leadership. Interestingly, he only introduces the

30 For these divisions and issues see Garland, *1 Corinthians, vii-viii.* We have not included here the topic of collection (16:1–4), which is introduced with the phrase *peri de,* like the other issues, since we believe that this may play an important role in Paul's overall argument for unity in the letter, as we shall see later, besides the fact that Paul was trying to bring clarity to the issue of collection that the Corinthians were confused and possibly divisive.

31 For a detailed discussion of this section of the epistle see Corin Mihăilă, *The Paul-Apollos Relationship and Paul's Stance Toward Greco-Roman Rhetoric: An Exegetical and Socio-Historical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4* (LNT 402, London and NY: T&T Clark International, 2009), chapter 1; also Corin Mihăilă, "The Number and Nature of Parties in 1 Corinthians 1-4" *Perichoresis* 17:2s (2019): 41-50.

problem, for, beginning with 1:18 through to the end of chapter 2, he mentions nothing about the problem, only to pick it up again at the beginning of chapter 3.

A careful reading of 1:10–17 and 3:5–4:21 will show that the root-cause of the dissensions in the Corinthian church was a distorted view of Christian leadership. The Corinthians tended to set one teacher against another, based on the world's set of values identified as wisdom (cf. 3:1–4, 3:18–23, and 4:1–5). Thus, Paul seeks to correct such a view of teachers (3:5–17), by challenging the Corinthians to change their way of thinking.

It is at this point that Paul's argument in 1:18–2:16 on wisdom fits in. Though apparently a disconnected theme from the problem of dissensions, it actually forms the theological solution. The Corinthians valued worldly wisdom, which in fact was foolishness from God's perspective. Particularly concerning the evaluation of teachers, the Corinthians appreciated *sophia logou* ("wisdom of words"), that is, eloquent speech, or rhetoric.[32] Thus, in 1:18–2:16 Paul sets out to prove the inadequacy of worldly wisdom to attain to salvation (1:18–25) as evidenced in the election of the Corinthians (1:26–31), and therefore to prove the inappropriateness of "wisdom of words" in the proclamation of the good news of salvation (2:1–5). Paul shows that God operates with a different wisdom, a wisdom hidden and unacceptable to the world (2:6–16).

For Paul, then, the solution to the problem of dissensions was an adaptation to the values proclaimed by the cross, which destroys the wisdom of the world esteemed by the Corinthians, and points to the true wisdom, i.e., of God. Thus, rather than being the digression of an absent-minded preacher, the heart of the argument (1:18–2:16) provides the theological

32 For the rhetorical background, see, e.g., W. Bruce Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 2002), the second part; Duane Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS, 79, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); also his *Paul's Theology of Preaching. The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015).

motivation for changing the way one views the Christian teachers. If the Corinthians should learn to evaluate their teachers using the system of values represented by the cross, then the dissensions will disappear, since the worldly criteria of evaluating leadership will disappear. The result will be seeing them as mere servants of God, whose judge is God himself, and not as personalities who can be named as a means of boasting against each other in order to enhance their own status and honor.

Sexual Sin 5:1–6:20[33]

Another issue that was destroying the church from within was sexual sin. This topic is discussed again in a sandwich structure. In 5:1–13 we are introduced to the specific problem within the church, i.e., incest, a sin that was not tolerated even among the pagans. Here Paul seeks to convince the Corinthian Christians to take action and excommunicate the sinner and cut any relations with him. He returns to the topic of sexual sin, i.e., visiting prostitutes, in 6:12–20, where he offers a biblical theology of the Christian's human body. Here he argues that the human body, bought by Christ through his sacrifice, should serve to glorify God and not the desires of the flesh.

It is interesting to notice that the middle section of the unit (i.e., 6:1–11) says hardly anything about sexual sin. Its main topic is taking a fellow brother to a secular court, more precisely, civil litigations between brothers. In discussing this topic, Paul argues that the alternative to such inappropriate practice is self-sacrifice, or giving up one's rights, or not doing what is normally appropriate to do (according to the cultural values), in cases in which one has been wronged by another brother (6:7).

What is then the connection between these two main topics: sexual sin and civil litigations? We are dealing here again with the sandwich structure in which the middle part is apparently unrelated to the main

33 For a detailed discussion of this section see Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1Corinthians 1–6* (AGJU 18, Leiden: Brill, 1993).

topic, when in fact it plays an important part in the argument for taking action against sexual sin.[34]

We believe that the underlying problem that Paul points to is the fact that the Corinthians have made an unacceptable confusion between the things they should tolerate within the church and what they should not, what they should take action against and what they shouldn't. Thus, in 6:1–8 Paul is pointing out to the Corinthians that they have been intolerant concerning an issue in which they should have been tolerant with each other, namely civil rights. Therefore, Paul warns them that such an attitude will not go unpunished by God in the end, together with other sins, including sexual sin (6:9–11). It is against this background, that the Corinthians should see their unacceptably tolerant attitude with the more serious sin of adultery. In this case they should have been judging the sinner and excommunicating him from the assembly. They should have been intolerant and not have let it go unpunished, whereas in the case of a civil wrong done they should have been tolerant and let it go unpunished.

Thus, the Corinthians lacked the ability to judge correctly, because of their distorted view of relationships, influenced by the Roman pagan culture and values. The solution was again the overturning of the worldly system of values, this time in terms of relationships and adopting the values of the kingdom of God. The Corinthians are called to judge things according to God's criteria for judging relationships. It is one thing to tolerate a wrong done against one's own person, but a completely different thing to tolerate a sin committed against one's own body, and against God and his church. The Corinthians should have tolerated the former but not the later, but they have done the opposite.

Marriage 7:1–40

In chapter 7 Paul discusses the issue of marital relationships, in a way not unrelated to the previous topic, at least not in the first part of the chap-

34 See Collins, *First Corinthians*, 225, who argues for an ABA' chiastic pattern. *Contra* Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 151.

ter where Paul commands Christians to fulfill their sexual duties toward their marriage partners (7:1–6). Thus Paul builds on the previous chapter and clarifies that sexual relationships are not only legitimate solely within marriage, but are also a duty within marriage. However, within this chapter, Paul discusses Christians in different marital status and what they should do. In each case Paul gives one advice, but then presents an exception. In the case of two married Christians (7:1–6), Paul commands them to fulfill their marital duties, except when they agree mutually to not be intimate in order to dedicate themselves for a time of fasting and prayer. After a few verses (7:10–11), Paul takes up again the topic of Christian marriage, commanding against divorce and encouraging reconciliation. To singles (7:7–9), whether by choice or as a result of the death of the partner, Paul recommends that they remain single, unless their fleshly passions cannot be kept under control. In the case of a mixed marriage, of a believer with an unbeliever (7:12–16), a mixture most likely resulting from the conversion of one partner to Christianity after marriage, Paul again suggests (though later commands, cf. 7:39) that they remain in the marriage, unless the unbelieving partner wants a divorce, then the believer is not bound. Lastly and somewhat picking up from the earlier verses, concerning virgins (7:25–40), Paul advises that they remain unmarried in order to dedicate themselves fully to the service of the Lord, though they will do no wrong if they desire to marry.

In the middle of discussing different marital status, Paul includes a short discussion of two different topics, i.e., circumcision and slavery, apparently unrelated to the topic of marriage (7:17–24).[35] Anthony Thiselton notes that: "This verse [20] constitutes the pivotal centre of the roughly chiasm structure which begins and ends with remaining in

35 For the idea that this chapter has the structure of a "club sandwich" see Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville: Knox, 1997), 122. For an excellent summary and explanation of the connection see Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 298–301. Here Garland also anticipates the sandwich structure of chapters 12–14. See also Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 271; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 254, 274, 276.

the situation in which one was called to faith (vv. 17 and 24)."[36] What connects together these two particular topics with the central segment is Paul's advice of remaining in the social status in which one was found, when God saved him/her. In both cases Paul commands that Christians remain in their pre-conversion social condition, except if they are given the opportunity to come out of it. The reason Paul gives here is that social condition has no affect on the Christian service. A Christian is not to seek to release himself/herself from a particular condition, thinking that they will be able to serve God better. No, Paul says, the social condition is neutral. What is important is that Christians remain with God in whatever social condition they find themselves.

The connection between this middle section and the surrounding context is more obvious than in the previous two topics. Paul's advice concerning marriage relationships is that they remain in the social marital status in which they are, whether unmarried or married to believers or nonbelievers. This middle section adds one injunction to the believer who maintains his marital status: to remain with God (7:24). In other words, maintaining one's marital status is not a virtue in itself and neither is changing one's marital status. Sacrifice in order to remain single or to remain married even in a mixed marriage, is not a virtue in itself. What counts is that whatever one decides within the boundaries of God's Word concerning marital status, he/she may continue with God.

Thus, without the middle section of chapter 7, the readers may be inclined to think that a certain marital status is better, more desirable, than another, or that the decision to remain or not remain in that condition may be based on the sexual desires of the flesh or lack thereof. Paul in this middle section adds, or at least emphasizes, that the decision ultimately is not an issue of social condition, but a matter of being with God; not remaining or uniting with someone, but remaining with God.

36 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 552.

Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1–11:1)[37]

The next issue that was causing dissensions in the Corinthian church which Paul now addresses in this letter is the issue of food sacrificed to idols. The question in the church was whether a Christian should eat meat that was used in pagan temples ceremonies. Such meat, or the excess of it, was then sold in the market or served in the restaurants, most of them being adjacent to these temples. The division in the church was on the issue of eating such meat. On the one hand, there were those who correctly argued that idols are nothing and therefore meat sacrificed to idols is just meat. These were the ones who had correct knowledge and used their liberty in Christ. On the other hand, there were those with a weaker conscience, who only recently came out from an environment and lifestyle closely connected with idolatry and pagan temples, for whom any connection of a believer with the previous pagan lifestyle was inconceivable. Thus, in 8:1–13, Paul specifically writes to those with a correct theology and understanding of spiritual realities to consider this truth: love and care for the brother/sister and his/her convictions is more important than personal liberty of conscience. Therefore, for the sake of the weak conscience of a brother, one should be willing to set aside his Christian liberty in Christ. Paul picks up this issue of food sacrificed to idols in 10:14–11:1, where he advances his discussion by adding two further aspects. First, Paul seeks to convince the Corinthians that any association with temple worship, even just as spectators, is actually involvement in idolatry (10:14–22). There is no such thing as mere spectators or neutral participants; association is active participation. Second, Paul discusses another possible situation in which a Christian may find himself/herself: participation at a nonbeliever's table in his home where the believer is made aware that they are being served food sacrificed to idols (10:23–30).

37 On the 'A-B-A' form of argumentation especially in chap. 8-10 and 12-14, see J. Collins, "Chiasmus, the 'ABA' Pattern and the Text of Paul," in *Studia Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus* (Rome, 1963) 2:575-84. Cf. also Cordon Fee, *1 Corinthians,* 16. See also Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 191; Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians,* 367; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 244, 378, 385.

In this case, Paul commands the believer not to eat such food for the sake of the nonbeliever's conscience.

If meat sacrificed to idols is the main issue that the Corinthians were divisive about and asked for Paul's clarification, what is the purpose of the middle section, i.e., 9:1–10:13? Here Paul again seems to discuss a topic apparently unrelated to the main issue.[38] In this middle section, Paul talks about his right to be paid as an apostle as well as his decision to forgo such right for the sake of the gospel (9:1–14).[39] He sought to set aside anything that could have been a hindrance to his or anothers' salvation (9:15–23). This leads him to speak about certain limitations that he has willingly set to his own freedom in order to attain final salvation (9:24–27). The lack of discipline, he argues, has proven disastrous for Israel of old (10:1–13). Thus, the main idea of the middle section is self-sacrifice, without which one may not attain final salvation.

We begin, then, to see more clearly the connection between the main issue of meat sacrificed to idols and the issue of remuneration for Christian service that is developed further into the issue of self discipline. The connection has to do with limiting one's Christian freedom and giving up one's rights for the sake of others, whether believers or nonbelievers. Thus, the middle section of the sandwich structure provides the reason why a believer should not eat from meat sacrificed to idols, by presenting the positive example of his own practice related to his right to be paid as an apostle and the negative example of Israel in the wilderness. Thus, Paul ends this section by calling the Corinthians to follow his own example (11:1).

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38 See Hays, *First Corinthians*, 148.

39 For the reasons of Paul's refusal of financial support in Corinth, in terms of patronage, see P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (WUNT 2; Tubingen: Mohr, 198)7, esp. chs. 1 and 2; John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTSup, 75; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), esp. chs 2 and 3; and Ronald F. Hock, "Paul's Tentmaking and the Problem of His Social Class," *JBL* 97 (1978): 555–64.

Head Covering 11:2–16

In the next large section of the letter, Paul discusses issues related to public gatherings of the Christian Corinthians for worship (11:2–14:40). The first issue within this larger paragraph that led to dissensions in the church was the issue of the head covering of women in worship. This issue again is addressed in an ABA' structure. Without going into the details of the text and the meaning of individual terms (e.g., head and covering) or the relevance for today, we notice that Paul commands the Christian woman to cover her head in worship (11:2–7 and 11:13–16). There are several reasons that Paul brings forth in these verses to support his stance, but the prominent argument is that from nature/culture. In a culture that valued honor and avoided shame, Paul seeks to convince the Corinthians to follow the cultural norms of the day, which meant that the woman should cover her head in worship.

The middle section (11:8–12) deals with how God ordained the roles of men and women in creation. The main idea is that it was God's design by creation that women should bring honor to their husbands.[40] Paul Gardner argues that in this section of the letter, "Paul addresses a matter in which 'rights' need to be examined in the light of care, respect, and love for one another…Paul is urging them [women] to curtail what may appear to be a 'freedom' or a 'right' in a similar way to that which he has described in chapter 9…"[41] In other words, the solution to the issue Paul addresses in this section is giving up one's rights, a form of love and self-sacrifice.

The connection with the issue of head covering then becomes obvious: the middle section provides the argument for the practice of head covering. Culturally speaking, a married woman, who did not cover her head in Paul's day, brought shame to her husband, since she was behaving as an adulterous woman would. The middle section picks up on the idea of shame and shows from creation that God had purposed from the

40 See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 510, for the chiastic structure of these verses, with the central assertion being 11:10.

41 Paul D. Gardner, *1 Corinthians* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 492.

beginning that the woman bring glory and not shame to her husband in all that she does. Giving honor to one's husband is a form of self-sacrifice. Thus, without the middle section, we are left with a cultural practice, which does not have much weight, since we have already seen that the gospel overturns the values of the world. Without a theological support and criteria to evaluate, we are left to ourselves to pick and choose from societal values, with the risk of becoming a divisive church and a worldly church, each believer doing what he/she thinks is best in his/her own mind. A cultural value, however, which finds its support in Scripture (i.e., creation), must be preserved in the Christian church. As to a particular practice, the question remains whether it supports the biblical values.

Common Meals 11:17–34[42]

The next practical topic dealing with divisions with the Christian gathering has to do with how the Corinthians were behaving in the context of common meals. It is well known that in the early church, when Christians were coming together for worship, they also had a meal together and, in that context, they also partook of the Lord's Supper. In the Corinthian church, however, things degenerated. From a meal that was supposed to show unity, sharing, and love among believers, their behavior exacerbated the gap between the rich and the poor (11:17–22).[43] Thus, Paul's command is that be considerate toward one another at these meals (11:33–34).

In the middle section of his argument (11:23–26 and 11:27-32),[44] Paul brings in the tradition of Jesus of when he passed on to his disciples the

42 See, e.g., *1 Corinthians*, 437, for the ABA' structure of this section.

43 For the conflict between the "have" and the "have-nots" at the Lord's Supper see, *inter alia*, Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity. Essays on Corinth by Gerd Theissen*, ed. and trans. John H. Schutz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 96–151; Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1993, 67–68.

44 See Fee, *1 Corinthians* 590, for the chiastic structure ABB'A', with 11:23-26 explaining the problem and 11:27-32 providing the answer.

practice of the Lord's Supper as a command for all future generations of believers to observe. Though Paul mentions the Lord's Supper in the context of the common meals (11:20), the connection between the tradition of Jesus and the Corinthians' common meals is not at once obvious. What does proclamation of Christ's death have to do with the division between the rich and the poor?

We believe that Paul brings into focus the tradition of Jesus, because the Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's sacrifice for our sake. What the rich Corinthians were doing in their neglect of the poor, was a contradiction of the spirit of the Lord's Supper, i.e., thinking of others and putting others' needs above our own. Thus, at their common meals, the Corinthians were acting in accord with the values of the society at large that led them to confusing the body of Christ (11:29, i.e., the church) from secular associations, where social and economic status mattered. The tradition of Jesus, then, has the purpose of bringing to their attention the essential factor of self-sacrifice in their relations with one another, especially as they gathered for worship.

Spiritual Gifts 12:1–14:40[45]

As it has already been noted, the Corinthian church was a divided church, whether it had to do with rhetorical prowess of teachers, sexual morality, marital status, pagan practices, gender roles, or social/economic status. One other thing divided the church: their view of spiritual gifts and spirituality. It seems that at least some among the Corinthian believers elevated certain gifts above the others and therefore argued for different levels of spirituality, depending on what spiritual gifts one possessed. From the text, it becomes obvious that the gifts that the Corinthians valued were the more "supernatural" or "extraordinary" ones, more specifically that of speaking in tongues. Basically, their argument was that only those who possessed such a gift were truly spiritual, the others were at best inferior Christians. Paul sets out to straighten up such a false understanding in

45 Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 392, states about this section of the letter: "chapters 12-14 are clearly arranged in a chiastic pattern;" see also 441-43.

chapters 12 and 14. In 12:1–31 Paul emphasizes that all saved believers are spiritual, in the sense that all who proclaim Jesus as Lord have the Spirit of God in them, that there is a variety of spiritual gifts, all given by the same Spirit of God, and that their purpose is ultimately for the spiritual edification of the church. From this more general dealing with spiritual gifts, in 14:1–40, Paul moves on to the thorny issue of speaking in tongues. Here Paul shows the superiority of prophecy over tongues and then sets some practical rules in the use of tongues in worship.

The middle section of Paul's argument concerning spiritual gifts deals with the topic of love (chap.13).[46] Ciampa and Rosner contend: "Chapter 13, at the heart of the chiastic structure, is also at the heart of Paul's ethical thrust throughout this letter."[47] The connection of this central segment with the two outer ones is obvious: all spiritual gifts must be exercised in love. Love is important because its main characteristic is seeking the best (spiritual) interest of one's fellow believer. Since spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of the edification of others, and not for self-edification, and love seeks the best interest of others, the exercise of spiritual gifts must always be done in love. Thus, Paul cannot conceive addressing the issue of spiritual gifts without emphasizing love. That is the reason why Paul chooses to use this sandwich structure in discussing spiritual things, in order to put them in perspective, the middle section on love being the background against which the Corinthians are to think of spiritual gifts.

46 See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 559-60, for the chiastic structure and chap. 13 as the central assertion.

47 Ciampa and Rosner, *1 Corinthians,* 561. A similar statement is found in Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 484: "Paul's placing love at the heart of a rhetorical digression within a macro-chiasm that speaks of the life of the church indicates that for him the primary locus of love is the common life of the church. It is love that makes the life of the church possible."

Resurrection 15:1–58[48]

The last main cause of dissension among the Corinthians was the view of the resurrection of the dead. It seems that some were denying a final bodily resurrection of the believer. In order to demonstrate the truth of bodily resurrection, Paul starts off with a commonly accepted belief, that of the bodily resurrection of Christ. After proving the historical reality of Christ's bodily resurrection (15:1–11), he moves on to its logical necessity (15:12–19), thus showing that there is an undeniable connection between Christ's resurrection and the believer's resurrection; one cannot logically believe one to be true without believing the other as well. He builds on this argument, bringing in the theological/eschatological argument (15:20–28) of the need for God to subject all things under his feet, through Christ, including the last enemy, which is death. He finishes off with the ethical implications of the resurrection, arguing that the resurrection gives meaning to the practice of baptism, suffering, and morality (15:29–34). Thus, in this first section on the resurrection, Paul deals more generally with the need to believe in the final resurrection. Once he establishes that as a necessity, he finally moves on to what may seem to be the Corinthians' bewilderment: the earthly physical body cannot resurrect.

In what follows (15:35–58), Paul seeks to show how the truth of the resurrection is compatible with the truth of bodily resurrection.[49] He proves the possibility of bodily resurrection by providing examples from botany, zoology, and astrology, seeking to show both the continuity and discontinuity between the earthly physical body and the glorious resurrection body. Thus, though at the resurrection a radical transformation occurs, that does not deny bodily existence in glory, that is, some kind of continuity.

48 For a chiastic structure of the first argument of the chapter (15:12-34), see Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 527. For suggestions of other chiastic structures in the chapter, see Fee, *1 Corinthians,* 783; C. E. Hill, "Paul's Understanding of Christ's Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28," *NovT* 30 (1988): 301–2.

49 For an argument of the bodily resurrection of the believer, see Corin Mihăilă "The *Bodily* Resurrection of Jesus. An Argument beginning from First Corinthians 15" *Jurnal Teologic* vol.22, nr. 3 (2022): 9-31, esp. 26-30.

From this succinct presentation of the topic of resurrection, it does not seem that Paul organizes his argument in an ABA' structure. It seems rather that Paul builds his argument in a linear, logical fashion, adding one brick upon another. This is obviously true from the way we explained the flow of the argument. Therefore, we should be careful not to impose our desire for a certain pattern of argumentation on Paul's structure of argument. One thing, however, may be observed, that may give justice to seeing a sandwich structure, namely the placing of ethical injunctions in the middle of his theological argument for final resurrection (15:29–34).

Most often, in writing his epistles, Paul deals with ethical misbehavior by first reminding his readers of some theological truths that they all agree upon. Based on these theological convictions, Paul moves on to behavior and ethical injunctions. Here, however, Paul does not wait till the end to do that (though he ends the chapter with one verse of practical advice, cf. 15:58), but draws out the practical implications in the middle of his argument as an argument for belief in the resurrection. Thus, we see somewhat of a reversal of Paul's usual way of argumentation. Normally his argument goes like this: Why should we behave in a certain way? Answer: Because of our beliefs. In other words, we should behave in a certain way because of what we believe. This time, however, he seems to argue in a somewhat reverse way: Why should we believe this? Answer: Because otherwise our behavior is not justified. In other words, we should believe a certain teaching because of the way we behave. This may be represented in the following way:

Usual pattern of argumentation: belief →behavior
Pattern of argumentation in 1 Corinthians 15:
belief (15:1–28) →behavior (15:29–34) →belief (15:35–58)

If our observation is correct, then what we have in this chapter is also a sandwich structure. The middle section has the role of showing that belief in the resurrection is necessary in order to give value to self-sacrifice.

That is why Paul can end his discussion on resurrection with the injunction to work for God till exhaustion, since there is a resurrection.

The ABA' structure at the level of each topic can be represented in the following way:[50]

Chapters 1–4 -	Dissensions 1:10–17
	Wisdom 1:18–2:16
	Dissensions 3:1–4:21
Chapters 5–6 -	Sexual Immorality 5:1–13
	Civil Litigations 6:1–11
	Sexual Immorality 6:12–20
Chapter 7-	Marital Status 7:1–16
	Circumcision and Slavery 7:17–24
	Marital Status 7:25–40
Chapters 8–10 -	Meat Sacrificed to Idols 8:1–13
	Paul's and Israel's Examples 9:1–10:13
	Meat Sacrificed to Idols 10:14–11:1

50 After writing this article, we came across Ralph Bruce Terry's dissertation *An Analysis of Certain Features of Discourse in the New Testament Book of 1 Corinthians* (PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 1993), later published as *A Discourse Analysis of First Corinthians* (Summer Institute of Linguistics and The University of Texas at Arlington Publications in Linguistics 120; Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1995). We did not have access to the printed versions, only to the content posted on his website (https://bterry.com/dissertation/index.htm), accessed 08.12.2023. In chap. 3.2, table 4 (https://bterry.com/dissertation/3_4-theme.htm), he has a similar chiastic structure for chap. 1-4, 5-6, 7, 8-10, 12-14, and 15. See his article "Patterns of Discourse Structure in 1 Corinthians," *JOTT* 7.4 (1996): 1-32, especially 5-7, where you will find Table 1, the same as in his dissertation.

Chapter 11:2–16 -	Head Covering 11:2–7 Gender Roles by Creation 11:8–12 Head Covering 11:13–16
Chapter 11:17–34 -	Common Meals 11:17–22 Jesus Tradition of the Lord's Supper 11:23–32 Common Meals 11:33–34
Chapters 12–14 -	Spiritual Gifts 12:1–31 Love 13:1–13 Spiritual Gifts 14:1–40
Chapter 15	Resurrection 15:1–28 Behavior/Suffering/Morality 15:29–34 Resurrection 15:35–58

After this succinct presentation of issues in the letter, it seems adequate to state that Paul's way of arguing in 1 Corinthians is peculiar, following a certain sandwich pattern (ABA'). This ring structure of argumentation forces us to see Paul's coherence, sense, and logic in his argumentation. Moreover, we are also forced to admit that even in places where the coherence is less obvious and the pairing of two topics seems disjunctive (e.g., divisions with wisdom, sexual immorality with civil litigations), such coherence does exist, and we are not to dismiss it simply by postulating a theory of interpolation or digression. We are thus not dealing with an absent-minded writer, who starts off on a topic, forgets what he is talking about, only to remember the main topic and in the end to return to it, after chasing a rabbit trail. We are dealing with an author who is very precise in his organization of material and presentation of argument. Paul uses this type of structure, in which self-sacrifice is the middle segment, in order to provide the solution to factionalism around all the specific issues he addresses in the letter.

Further Observations

There are a couple of implications that can be drawn from this analysis. For instance, Paul's similar pattern of discussing each individual topic does not mean that the middle section is always the same, though a similarity seems to emerge. For instance, in arguing against dissensions, Paul basically uses a theological argument, based on the wisdom of the cross. In arguing against meat sacrificed to idols, he uses his personal example of giving up his rights as well as the negative example of Israel's lack of self-discipline. And in arguing against divisions between the rich and the poor at their common meals he appeals to the tradition of Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper.

Love as Solution to Factionalism

Nevertheless, something seems to be common to all the middle sections: the idea of self-sacrifice, of willingly giving up rights, of seeking the interest of others.

Chapters 1–4 In discussing the topic of dissensions, Paul ends up giving himself as an example of willingly renouncing rhetorical wisdom in proclamation (2:1–5).

Chapters 5–6 In discussing the topic of sexual immorality in combination of civil litigations, Paul advises the Corinthians to be willing to forgo their rights to ask for retribution when done wrong (6:7), reminding thus the Corinthian believers that their body belongs to Christ, and thus they do not have unlimited freedom as to what they can do with their bodies.

Chapter 7 When discussing the issue of marital status, Paul emphasizes the need to remain with God (7:24), which at times may imply giving up the right to change one's marital status, reminding them for instance, of the obligation one has in a marital relationship, limiting thus one's freedom.

Chapters 8–10 In discussing the issue of meat sacrificed to idols, Paul gives himself as an example of giving up one's liberty in Christ for the sake of others, by reminding them of his renunciation of remuneration for his Christian service (9:12, 15) and his self-discipline.

Chapter 11:2–16 In discussing the issue of head covering, Paul reminds the Corinthians of God's creation order, in which the woman is to bring honor to her husband, an example of self-sacrifice (11:9).

Chapter 11:17–34 In discussing the topic of common meals, Paul seeks to correct the Corinthians' misbehavior and division between the rich and the poor by reminding them of Christ putting others before himself, as seen in his self-sacrifice for others (11:24).

Chapters 12–14 In discussing the issue of spiritual gifts, Paul again gives himself as a hypothetical example of one who has spiritual gifts but lacks love (13:1–3), the context in which spiritual gifts are to be exercised, a context of seeking the benefit of the other at one's own expense.

Chapter 15 Finally, in discussing the theological issue of the bodily resurrection, Paul again discusses the issue of self-sacrifice and suffering as a reason for the belief in the resurrection (15:30–32).

One thus is led to recognize that what could correct the problems in the Corinthian church and bring unity is the presence of love, which always expresses itself in self-sacrifice and giving up one's rights.[51]

51 See e.g., Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 607, who states: "we urge that 11:2–16, 17–34 and chs. 12–14 share with chs. 8–10 an exposition of the themes of love and respect for "the other" in the light of biblical and shared theological traditions." Ralph Bruce Terry in his published dissertation *A Discourse Analysis of First Corinthians* states that the unifying theme of the letter is: "Obey Christ rather than following social customs," chap. 3.4, https://bterry.com/dissertation/3_4-theme.htm. See also „Patterns of Discourse Structure in 1 Corinthians,"10-11. Terry is correct in seeing the root cause behind faction-

Knowing that the thanksgiving section of a letter introduces major themes in the letter,[52] J. Murphy-O'Connor may be right in noting that the introductory thanksgiving is "remarkable for what it does not say": it says nothing about love.[53] The Corinthians were blessed with knowledge and speech, but they lacked love. And because they lacked love, they lacked unity in all the issues addressed in the letter. As a result, Paul writes this letter in order to encourage unity by emphasizing love and self-sacrifice.

That love is central in Paul's argumentation can be seen from the fact that Paul sets aside an entire chapter for its exposition (i.e., chap. 13). The centrality of love and its unifying effect on the Corinthian congregation was defended by Rudolf Bultmann. In response to Karl Barth, who argued that the climax of the letter is chap. 15,[54] Bultmann stated: "I said earlier that Barth's interpretation of chs. 12-14 is the climax of the book. That emphasis is no accident, but corresponds to the fact that chs. 12-14 constitute the climax of the letter if the unity of its contents is accepted."[55] Margaret Mitchell, likewise, argues that chap. 13 and its "encomium to love" is the antidote to factionalism, since in ancient literature, both with-

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alism as worldliness (i.e., following social customs in all the areas addressed in the letter), but the solution to factionalism that we believe Paul suggested was love. This theme of love, as we have seen, is described in different ways through the central segments of each chiastic structure, but, as we shall see, is also seen at the macro-level structure of the letter, the bookends of the letter, which mentions the cross and the resurrection, thus offering Christ as the supreme example of love and self-sacrifice.

52 See, e.g., Peter T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgiving in the Letters of Paul* (SNT 49, Leiden: Brill, 1977), 13–14.

53 J. Murphy-O'Connor's, *Paul the Letter Writer* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995), 62.

54 K. Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H.H. Stenning (New York: Revell, 1933; repr., New York: Arno, 1970). Cf. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 5, n.12.

55 Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, trans. L.P. Smith (New York/Evanston: Harper & Row, 1969), 79-80.

in the Greco-Roman world and Hellenistic Judaism, love and concord are associated.[56]

This argument about the essential problem in the Corinthian congregation (i.e., factionalism due to lack of love) is strengthened by the way Paul concludes this letter. In 16:14, Paul admonishes the Corinthians: "All you do, may it be done with love."[57] Then he reminds them of their need to love God (16:22) and of Paul's own love for them (16:24). The last issue Paul discusses in his letter is that of the relationship with other believers. First, he reminds them of the collection for the Jerusalem brethren (16:1-4). By participating in this collection, they would show practical love towards others. Then, he reminds them of Timothy's imminent visit and their duty to not despise him (16:10-11). And finally, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their duty to treasure those who minster among them (16:15-18).

The Cross as the Supreme Example of Self-sacrifice

That the issue of love expressed in different ways towards others seems to be the solution to all the problems of dissensions among the Corinthians, is also suggested by the macro structure of the letter. Paul discusses the individual topics between the two major redemptive events: the cross (chapter 1) and the resurrection (chapter 15) of Christ (and of the believer).[58] In other words, for Paul, the gospel should be the

56 Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 165-71; see also n.624 for references to the Apostolic Fathers who argue for love as the solution to factionalism. She also shows how the list that describes what love is and what is not in chap.13 "bears a one-to-one correspondence with Paul's description of Corinthian factional behavior," 170.

57 Ibid., 178, n.693, mentions Robertson-Plummer, 394, stating: "He is glancing back at the party-divisions, at the selfish disorder at the Lord's Super, and at their jealousy in the possession of special charismata, and is recalling xiii."

58 See also Hays, *First Corinthians*, 278, where he notes that "it is no accident that … these fundamental themes of the gospel story … stand like bookends—or sentinels—at the beginning and end of the body of his letter to the Corinthians. … All our theology and practice must find its place within the

main motivating factor in the cessation of factionalism.[59] If the church should experience unity, then the Corinthians need to follow Christ's example of self-sacrifice.

Conclusion

We have sought to show that Paul's dealing with various problems in the Corinthian church follows a particular pattern, a sandwich structure (ABA'). Thus, while the letter is composed of answers to individual issues, ultimately, the structure of each argument is similar. The common element between the way Paul addresses each issue is also his consistent call to the Corinthians to give up their rights, to restrict their freedom, to engage in all manifestations of love, a call that is present in the middle section of each individual chiastic structure. This unifying theme is also the climax of the letter and the fundamental characteristic of the gospel, which forms the bookends of the letter.

The solution of love that Paul offers to the problem of factionalism in the Corinthian church continues to be true for the modern church. If the churches are to experience a resolution to tensions within the church and a solution to their intra-church problems, the believers must learn and practice love. It is only through self-sacrifice and by looking after the interests of others that the unity of the church can be maintained, regardless of what the problems are. That is true, because at the root of each intra-church conflict lies self-seeking interests. If we could adopt Christ's path, i.e., death to self, then we will also experience the power of the resurrection. Bultmann was right: "Love is not an ethical ideal but

world framed by these truths."

59 See Malcolm, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians,* 2, who argues that „...the main body of the letter (1:10–15:38) proceeds from *cross* to *resurrection*." Thus, he proposes that "the macro-structure of the letter evidences the innovative compositional impact of Paul's *kerygma,*" 6.

an eschatological event."[60] He adds: "In that community [i.e., Christian community] the indescribable eschatological event becomes real, so far as love is really present in it… it becomes clear that the preaching of 'love' is preaching the resurrection of the dead."[61]

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60 Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, 78.

61 Ibid., 79.

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