

Assault of the Paramours: Why Paul Quotes Menander in 1 Cor 15:33; Harmony, 1 Cor 6:15: Plato & James Nickel: Order in Music, Sound, & Light; Oscilloscopes

1 Corinthians 15:33 - Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”

- 13) Interestingly, Paul quotes a line from Menander, a third-century B.C. Athenian comedic dramatist. Paul’s primary audience is made up of Corinthians who would be quite familiar with one of their major playwrights.

Arnott, William G. “Menander.” In *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth (eds.). 3d ed. rev. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 956:

Menander (Μένανδρος, *Menandros*, ? 344/3-c.292 B.C.), the leading writer of New Comedy. He wrote over 100 plays ... nearly 100 titles are known. Menander’s plays were lost in the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. as a result of Arab incursions and Byzantine neglect, but in modern times many papyri have been discovered, attesting great popularity in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. These include one virtually complete play, *Dyskolos* [δύσκολος, *duskolos*: “hard to please, discontented, peevish” (Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 458] (“Old Cantankerous”), and a large enough portion of six others to permit some literary judgment. There are smaller important fragments of (ten others) and of several still unidentified plays.

In addition ancient authors have preserved over 900 quotations, ranging from a single word to sixteen lines. Some are witty, some impressively moving, some sententious, but the lack of dramatic context normally prevents evaluation of serious or ironic intent. There also exist several collections of one-line maxims (μονόστιχοι, *monostichoi*) attributed to Menander.

- 14) Sententious means a pithy aphorism or moral maxim, one of which is lifted by Paul from Menander’s play, *Thais* (Θαῖς, *The Bandage*). This is one of over 100 plays that according to Arnott’s article were extant into the eighth century A.D. and therefore in circulation, well known, and probably even being performed in first-century Corinth.
- 15) Sometimes for those in reversionism, if a doctrinal point can be made by drawing from the current parlance of the native culture it has more impact than if quoted from the writings of a “foreign religion.”
- 16) Paul could have quoted the first verse of the first song written by the Hebrew King David way back in the tenth century B.C.:

Psalms 1:1 - How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of the sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

- 17) Or he could have quoted David’s son, King Solomon of Israel, from the same period:

Proverbs 13:20 - He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

- 18) Still again, the Apostle could have reiterated what he had just written a few chapters before in:

1 Corinthians 5:11 - I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler [λοιδορος, *loidoros*: **false charges calculated to harm another’s reputation**], or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

- 19) All three of these quotes are from Jews who come from a different society, culture, and background. The Corinthian church is made up mostly of Greeks and those familiar with Greek culture.
- 20) Paul's congregation had a problem separating themselves from the progressive Zeitgeist and carnal activities of cosmopolitan Corinth.
- 21) As he approaches the end of the book, he decides to teach the divine principle of separation from the writings of one of the popular playwrights of the day:

1 Corinthians 15:33 - Do not be deceived: "Bad company [evil associates] corrupts good morals [norms and standards]."

44. And so with this Hebrew-Greek maxim we complete the verse. Here's the expanded translation:

2 Corinthians 6:14 - Do not be bound together [ἑτεροζυγέω, heterozugeō: "to march in line with another of a different kind"] with cosmic paramours; **[1]** for what participation does Christian integrity have in common with one opposed to the truth? None! **[2]** What fellowship has light with darkness? None!

2 Corinthians 6:15 - Or **[3]** what harmony has Christ with Belial, or **[4]** what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

1. The key word in the third illustration is the word "harmony," the nominative singular of:
συμφωνησις, *sumphōnēsis* - "harmony"
2. The literal meaning of *sumphōnēsis* is the "harmonious sound of many instruments" and is the source of our English word "symphony." It came to define those who are in agreement, at harmony, or in concord with each other. All infer "harmony of thought" based on this principle noted from Plato in:

Friedrich, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 9:306:

Like the strings of an instrument the wise man tunes the rational and sensory powers of the soul according to the measure of understanding and brings feelings and desires into harmony with the commands of the *logos*.

3. What Plato asserts is that one's soul is ordered when his emotions are in harmony with the mandates of God—*Logos*.
4. Plato has a lot to say in this regard and we can see how the circumstances that inspired his *Dialogues* are not uncommon today, thus confirming Solomon's observation in Ecclesiastes 1:9c, "There is nothing new under the sun."
5. Our excerpts from *The Dialogues of Plato* will be taken from:

Plato. *The Dialogues of Plato: Timaeus*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. In *Great Books of the Western World*. Ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 7:455:

[47] The sight in my opinion is the source of the greatest benefit to us, for had we never seen the stars, and the sun, and the heaven, none of the words which we have spoken about the universe would ever have been uttered. But now the sight of day and night, and the months and the revolutions of the years, have created number, and have given us a conception of time, and the power of enquiring about the nature of the universe. God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heaven, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence; and that we, learning them and partaking of the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries. The same may be affirmed of speech and hearing: they have been given ... to the same end and for a like reason. Moreover, so much of music as is adapted to the sound of the voice and to the sense of hearing is granted to us for the sake of harmony [συμφωνησις, *sumphōnēsis*]; and harmony, which has motions akin to the revolutions of our souls, is not ... given ... to irrational pleasure, which is deemed to be the purpose of it in our day, but as meant to correct any discord which may have arisen in the courses of the soul, and to be our ally in bringing her into harmony and agreement with herself; and rhythm too was given ... for the same reason, on account of the irregular and graceless ways which prevail among mankind generally, and to help us against them.

6. Plato was able to discern the order of the universe both celestially and terrestrially. He came to God-consciousness through the rational approach of Teleology, the doctrine that there is design in nature.

Thieme, R. B., Jr. *Heathenism*. 3d ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., 2001), 16-17:

The Teleological Argument. The observation of the structure of the universe indicates the need for a designer. Both microscopic and telescopic phenomena, from the structure of an atom to the configuration of galaxies, display order, design, arrangement, purpose, and adaptation that demand both a Creator and a Preserver (Col. 1:16-17).

7. Our examination of how *sumphōnēsis* was used among the Classical writers has taken us to Plato for an example. His conception of harmony includes not only music but the mathematics of music. That the order and precision of music demand harmony is discussed by:

Nickel, James. *Mathematics: Is God Silent?* Rev. ed. (Vallencito, Cal.: Ross House Books, 2001), 236-39:

The Wonders of God's Creation. Galileo Galilei \gal-e-lā' ō gal-ē-lā' ē\ spoke of the great "book of nature." The writing of this book is mathematical; the symbols are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures. He believed that it is impossible to comprehend a single word of this book unless one has the aid of mathematics. (p. 236)

Music, Trigonometry, and Wave Motion. At the creation, the "morning stars sang together" (Job 38:7) Music is universal and its structure is thoroughly mathematical. Whoever participates in music is really counting without being aware of counting. (p. 237)

Every note of the musical scale has an exact frequency; each note vibrates a certain number of times per second. For example, the frequency of middle C is about 261.6 cycles per second. Originally conceptualized by Pythagoras, the frequency doubles every octave and musical intervals depend upon simple arithmetical ratios. (pp. 237-38)

The human voice and musical sounds can be changed into electrical current through the medium of a microphone. If this microphone is connected to a special instrument, called an oscilloscope, (it will create a graph of the frequencies sung or played). (p. 238)

Sounds that are pleasing to the ear will display a graph that reflects an order and regularity. Every sound that is pleasing to the ear can be described mathematically as sinusoidal [sine wave] functions. The order and harmony of true music will create order and harmony in those who listen to it and play it. Those sounds that are not pleasing to the ear we call noise. Noise and dissonant music do not display regularity and cannot be described in terms of the mathematics of harmony. The disorder of noise, and much of the popular "rock music" of today could be proved mathematically to be noise, will create disorder in those who listen to it and play it. (pp. 238-39)

(Sine waves) not only perfectly describe sound waves, but they also completely describe the distinct, wavelike motion of visible light and in fact, the entire electromagnetic spectrum. Who is the originator of light? God.

Any wavelike, or regular motion—e.g., the path of meandering rivers, ocean tides, the crest and trough of ocean waves, and the majestic rotation of galaxies—can be described mathematically in terms of trigonometric functions. (p. 239)

8. Plato, Paul, and Nickel agree. The Creation is divinely designed in a status quo of harmony. For man to have harmony with God and harmony with his fellowman he must synchronize his soul with the harmony of God.
9. To be unequally yoked with someone out of tune with the harmony of God is to make a decision that ignores the harmony of divine design: right man-right woman. Plato referred to such decision-making as the “greatest ignorance.”