

1 CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM IS STRIFE - SOLUTION IS CHRIST!

1 Corinthians 1:1 - 17

COMPLIMENTARY APPROACH

1) This man, whose pre-Christian name was "Saul," is said to have taken the name of one of the first of his converts - Sergius Paulus. At the very least, when on his first missionary journey, having sailed from Seleucia to Cyprus, this civil authority (Proconsul) desired to hear the word of God. Paul was an apostle by divine calling (see also Romans 1:1 and Galatians 1:15). It was not Paul's choice, but the will of God for him to be "one sent with a message" (the meaning of "apostle"). When he wrote this letter to the assembly at Corinth, Sosthenes was with him.

2) So much is here about the church - the name means "called out," clearly that is from the world. It is a local assembly, the geography being "in Corinth." "Sanctified" means made holy, set apart to God, and we are so in Christ. Now we may be "called" holy, and not us only, but also all who share with us faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything that calls itself a "church" is not necessarily legitimate. The real church belongs to God and exists in and because of Christ.

3) Here the Apostle blends Gentile and Jewish greetings - grace is God's unmerited favor, and it is the fountain of all good things. Peace is the crown of all blessings, and it comes only to those who are justified (declared righteous) by faith in Jesus Christ. These crown jewels of virtue have their source in God and are received through Christ.

4) Interesting, isn't it, that this most troubled of Paul's churches was still addressed as saints, well-spoken-of for their giftedness, and now God was thanked for the grace He extended to them. Even the most mischievous child is still in the family. There is almost always something good that can be found and complimented in God's children.

COMPLETE ASSEMBLY

5) As the vine sends nourishment through and to the branches, enriching them in growth, so our Vine, the Lord Jesus, enriches us through the work of the Holy Spirit. How blessed is an assembly when God has placed in it not only the **knowledge** of the truth, but people with the ability to **speak it forth** - one without the other is less valuable.

6) The presence of gifts in the church at Corinth was a confirmation that the Lord was there and working in them through the Holy Spirit. Before the Bible was completed, and while the gospel was still going to the Jewish nation, even the sign gifts were there as credentials of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the approval of God on the gospel.

7), 8) Here is a practical relating of future events, anticipated because of prophecy, to present activity. Prophetic truth is not just "pie in the sky by and by." It is an impetus for proper living in the "nasty now and now!" The anticipated things are the day of our Lord Jesus Christ and His revelation to this world. Eagerness characterizes those who look and wait for Christ. It is not just a passing knowledge that he is coming, but a burning desire to see Him when he comes. The present helps are the abundance of gifts Christ has given to the church by the Spirit and the strength that they bring. God's work in us can make us "blameless" (without reproach) when Jesus comes.

9) Here begins the transition from describing the blessed estate of the Corinthians to dealing with the problem at hand - that of schism in the church. This God Who will preserve them blameless is faithful, and He has called them into the fellowship of His Son. People in fellowship with the same Person should be in fellowship with each other.

In Psalm 133:1 David wrote, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Unity should describe the church of Jesus Christ. It is the natural outgrowth of the same Spirit dwelling in us, producing love in each of us for one another. This is not "unanimity," where everyone thinks alike. It is not a homogenous situation in which people are all very similar to one another. Unity is the Holy Spirit produced agreement and cooperation in God's work and worship among very different people with a multitude of gifts. Unity is not the absence of conflict; it is the willingness of people who may agreeably disagree to work together. A man may express a differing opinion on an issue, but for unity to prevail he must play "team ball" once a direction has been decided. Another point should be made here, and that is that when a body of people have assembled together as a church for worship and work, they generally are going to agree on church doctrine and polity (that is how a church is to be governed and operate). This is why we have different denominations and different churches within denominations. There is a real ethical issue when a person of differing persuasion enters and tries to change things to be the way he prefers them. That person needs to do one of two things - 1) subdue his differences and keep them to himself, or 2) find a place to worship and serve that shares his opinions. This is equally true of pastors as it is of parishioners. Honesty up front will help preserve unity.

CAREFUL APPEAL

10) Without mincing words, Paul gets right to the point - "I want you to agree with one another, to get along." The fact that they are "brothers" gives them one basis for cooperation. He also appeals to the unifying name of the Lord Jesus Christ, shared by all of them alike. There shouldn't be divisions (our word "schisms") in Christ's body, and so I appeal to you on His behalf that you work at having minds alike and purposes alike. The diversity of gifts should have produced harmony - the body certainly needs each one! In fact, the diversity of gifts present and functioning should be another boost to unity in the church. Notice also Ephesians 4:3, 13; Philippians 2:2.

11) There is a real difference in spreading rumors and sharing a need to get something done about a problem. Clearly those who told Paul of the disharmony at Corinth were not gossip-mongers, but rather concerned members of the body. It appears they gave him permission to use their names in the challenge to fix the problem. If you are going to level a charge on the basis of shared data, it is essential to use the name of the sharer. The quarreling, contention, strife, and

debate at Corinth were symptomatic of the absence of unity.

12) He describes the problem in terms of men following men, claiming to be in certain "camps" named for the one they were following. Of course, Paul was the great missionary apostle, highly esteemed among the churches. Apollos (see Acts 18:24-28) was described by Luke as eloquent, mighty, fervent, diligent. Peter, of course, was a member of Christ's inner circle of apostles and the Pentecostal preacher. Some piously chose to be in the "Christ sect." None of these (nor any other godly man) would want people to follow them in a divisive way.

CONVINCING ARGUMENT

13) The Apostle is addressing a body, a group of believers who have a common Head, even Jesus Christ. He asks the obvious - "Is Christ divided?" How can men claim to follow Christ and yet not be traveling together in the same direction on the same road? Then he makes a veiled challenge that men should not follow himself by saying, "Was Paul crucified for You?" The grammar of this question demands a negative answer - "No! Paul was not crucified for you!" Certainly we should not follow any less than the Lord Jesus Christ, Who did die for us!

14), 15), 16) Having mentioned baptism in vs 13, Paul now digresses briefly on the subject. His main points are 1) no one was baptized in his (Paul's) name, and 2) he was even glad that he baptized very few himself. He mentioned some names that would be familiar to his readers there in Corinth, but only two individuals and one family. While baptism was commanded as a part of the Great Commission, it was common for the leader to delegate the baptismal work to an associate (Jesus, John 4:1,2 and Peter, Acts 10:48). In his discussion, Paul's memory faded, then returned, then faded again - Oh how much better that makes me feel about my own memory - and especially as these senior years come on me! The Holy Spirit's work in inspiration made a man's writing infallible, but it did not make the writer omniscient. He mentioned the few he had baptized, not to give them reason to glory, but to make the point that it was not he who was important, but Jesus! Christ is so important we must believe in Him to be saved, and we are baptized in **His** name, not the name of some earthly leader. If we can focus on Him as we should, so much of our pettiness and strife will evaporate in the air of sweetness and love. The more we all are drawn to the Lord Jesus, the more we will be drawn together!

17) Verse 17 is a bridge between two sections of thought. One of unity versus division, a second of heaven's wisdom versus earthly wisdom. It was certainly not Paul's intent here (if one is able to judge intent) to de-emphasize baptism, to make it sound as though it were unimportant. Rather he is doing two things: 1) de-emphasizing himself and any claim someone might make because they were "baptized by Paul," and 2) placing the primary importance where it belongs, not on the symbolic rite of baptism, but on the gospel. To summarize, the apostle is telling us that we should put no stock in men. It is not important who baptized you, but that you trusted Christ and obeyed Him in the matter of baptism. Paul's ministry was to share the gospel, not to dazzle men with flowery words, but to shake them into the kingdom of God by the power of the message of the cross (a power resident only in the Holy Spirit- applied gospel. He bids us join ranks together and follow Christ as one!

WE MUST RENOUNCE THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD IN FAVOR OF GOD'S TRUE WISDOM (18 - 31)

GOD'S WISDOM DECLARES THE WORLD'S WISDOM TO BE FOLLY

18) The Apostle sets forth a two-fold response to cross-preaching: 1) some see it as foolishness, while others 2) view there the power of God to save sinners. Lost men see the preaching of the cross as foolishness - saved men recognize its power. The word translated "power" is that familiar one, *dunamis* (δύναμις), that yields our English word "dynamite." When the gospel of Jesus is preached, there can be an explosive power to bring people to salvation. This "message" (*logos* - λόγος) is about Jesus - this is the expression used in John 1:1 to introduce us to Jesus! *"In the beginning was the Word* (λόγος). Jesus is the watershed doctrine in Scripture - people rise or fall in Him. The cross carried many associations - guilt, shame, rejection, curse, vileness - and redemption!

19) Some of Paul's readers were very likely Jewish, as persecution and other forces had driven many Jews into Gentile lands; this is called the *"diaspora."* They would recognize a certain authority in the Hebrew Scriptures, which had declared that God will negate human wisdom and intelligence (Isaiah 29:14). This very simple gospel was the focal point of God's plan for saving people from their sins. This plan requires faith, not man's prowess or wisdom.

20) Psalm 1 declared that the wicked could not stand (maintain themselves) in the judgment. When God calls men into account, none can stand before Him without Jesus - not those who claim worldly wisdom, nor those who write down man's best thoughts, not even those gifted in oratory to debate these issues. God reverses things - it is not the cross that is foolish; it is rather the things to which man might cling hoping for heaven. The things men value so highly - intellect, ritual, debate, God sets these aside as foolish. God laughs at man's puny, pretended might. This is seen in the opening four verses of Psalm 2 - *"He that sits in the heavens shall laugh..."*

GOD'S WISDOM IS TO SAVE MEN THROUGH THE GOSPEL

21) God can't be known by the world's wisdom; those who believe are saved (delivered from sin and its consequences) through what some call a "foolish" message. The Jesus of the cross is the only way to God - as "foolish" as it may seem. God rejects the world's wisdom and saves him who believes in Christ.

22) It is historically true that the Jewish people want to see miracles in order to believe. Each of the three waves of miracles in the Bible are related to the Jewish need for "signs." God gave them so many sign miracles through 1) Moses and Joshua, 2) Elijah and Elisha, and 3) Jesus and the Apostles. Yet there were never enough signs to produce lasting faith. The Greeks sought rather after wisdom: like that of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, and others, yet there was never

enough (earthly) wisdom to produce faith in their hearts! We learn in Romans that *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* (10:17).

23) The gospel of God's crucified Son was a stumbling block to the Jews, and it was foolishness to Gentiles. This "Old Rugged Cross," as we call it, was too simple for the miracle-minded Jews, so they stumble over it. The doctrine of substitution, that Jesus died in our place, is too simple for the philosophical Greeks; so they cry "foolish! foolish!"

24) Those who are called by God see things differently. They recognize the cross of Jesus as God's power and God's wisdom. Believers, be they Jews or be they Gentiles, recognize the value (in power and wisdom) of the cross. Answering God's call in faith changes everything for a person - especially how they view the cross!

25) God's "foolishness" is wiser than man's wisdom; His "weakness" is much stronger than man's strength. The superiority of God's wisdom and power over man's is declared. His wisdom and power change lives, homes, destinies. We have seen it so many times over the decades, even in our own lives! The gospel may look foolish to some, but to others it rescues them from the ravaging clutches of sin! The story of Jesus may look weak and powerless to doubters, but to those who believe it is the dynamite of God to blow their sin away and ready them for heaven!

GOD'S WISDOM SHUNS THE MIGHTY, FAVORS THE WEAK, TO BRING GLORY TO HIMSELF

26) When looking over the roster of believers in Jesus down through the ages, it is clear that the majority of those "called" are not (by the world's standard) wise, influential, noble-born. A glance around church at Corinth showed how few "big shots" were called. Moses was a shepherd on the backside of the desert. Amos was a fruit-picker. There were several "fisherman-become-apostles." And our Head, our Savior was a Builder, a construction Worker! Yet when people of note in the world come to Christ, we are glad Paul said "not many" rather than "not any."

27), 28) God chose things that the world considered "foolish and weak" to shame their own "wise and strong" things. As in the aged, weak Abraham and Sarah, who at 100 and 90 gave birth to Isaac, the child of promise. As in the unknown man Gideon, hiding just to thresh his grain, to defeat the Midianites. He used the shepherds Moses and David, two of the Hebrew Scriptures' brightest stars, to "shepherd" His people Israel. By the despised death of One from a lowly social class of a looked-down-upon race, God provided salvation for all who will believe. God chose lowly, despised, unrecognized, to bring to nothing the recognized things. God brought forgiveness, redemption, life, joy, peace, etc., through means that many still consider weak and foolish. If you will embrace Jesus by faith, they will become to you strength and wisdom!

29) Why did God choose to use the little things to accomplish great things for His work? His purposes included this - that no one may boast before Him. The despised cross of shame became the instrument of redemption in order that all the glory for the outcome might belong to God. This reminds of Ephesians 2:9 - *"not by works lest anyone should boast."*

30) Our position of being "in Christ" - united to Christ, we receive 1- wisdom, 2- righteousness, 3 - holiness, 4 - redemption, all from God. There is no true wisdom apart from the knowledge of God. Righteousness that God accepts comes only from Him. We can only be "set apart to God" (sanctified) by His work in us. It was the cross-work of Jesus that purchased our freedom (this word for redemption). The Father and the Son are the co-Sources and Channel of these four-fold blessings. Union with Christ produces better things than can be had outside Him. Of course, though not mentioned here, it is the Spirit Who applies these things to our lives.

31) As in verse 19, Paul refers here to the Hebrew Scriptures for authority - this time Jeremiah 9:23, 24. He draws the conclusion that all glorifying and boasting are turned toward the Lord. 1 Corinthians 10:31 has a similar tone: *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*

CHAPTER 2

WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE

ARRIVAL OF THE APOSTLE

1) Now comes a little personal explanation, some would say, defense. The Greek word would be "apologia," from which derives our word "apologetics," the science of defending the faith. Paul reminds the Corinthians that his preaching to them was not the flowery use of big words. His power was not that of great oratory, but it was from the Holy Spirit. The word "testimony" should be "mystery," a newly revealed truth.

2) Paul was doubtless the greatest intellect of his day, a man of letters, multi-lingual, and with an unequaled understanding of God's mysteries; yet he chooses to keep the presentation of spiritual truth in simple terms - Christ crucified! What an example and challenge for those of us who share God's Word today. We must always endeavor to put the cookies on a shelf where all can reach them.

3) The demeanor of Paul when in Corinth reflected his utter dependence on the Spirit for strength. He literally shook in fear and weakness, knowing that if any good thing would come of his ministry, it would be because God worked through him. He was not brash, authoritarian, arrogant, or proud. *"Blessed are the meek"* clearly fits Paul's ministry here.

PREACHING WITH POWER

4), 5) Here Paul separates between two types of subject matter and two types of declarations - the message and the announcing of the message. A man may by clever arguments persuade the mind of another man, but it takes the power of the Spirit of God to persuade and change a heart. It is not just "convincing" that is needed; men need "conviction" if they are to be saved. Conviction comes only by the work of the Holy Spirit. Could men by wisdom win other men, then their faith would be placed, or misplaced, in the men they followed. This places us in deep dependence on prayer that God might be pleased to use us, and it rules out pride in ministry.

MYSTERY MADE MANIFEST

- 6) Some folks look at a passage like this and think that Paul meant loud, unprepared, spontaneous, preaching. Such thinking looks down upon intellect, studiousness, careful hard work in sermon and lesson preparation, and gives a bad name to the gospel. Quite in contrast, Paul declares that there is wisdom here, just not the wisdom of this world. God's is a wisdom from heaven, and it always clashes with so-called "worldly wisdom."
- 7) The wisdom Paul speaks of here was a secret hidden with God from all time. It is the wisdom that has now been revealed in Christ - that God uses lowly things, broken things, despised things, to bring honor to Himself and help to mankind. This wisdom also brings glory to God's lowly creatures, a thing He planned in eternity past.
- 8) In the age to come Christ shall be Ruler over men, and we shall reign with Him. In this age, however, others rule, and they do not comprehend God's wisdom. They prioritize the material over the spiritual, the temporal over the eternal. And in that folly, they crucified Christ, the Lord - the One with authority! They didn't know Who He was!
- 9), 10) Once again the Apostle refers to the Hebrew Scriptures. Verse 9 contains a much misunderstood and misapplied statement. It is often taken to mean that no one knows what good things God has in store for His own, we'll just have to wait until we get to heaven to find out. But look at the opening words of vs 10: "God has revealed it to us..." The idea seems rather to be this, "Man cannot by his senses ('eyes...seen...ears...heard') or his reasoning ("mind conceived") find out spiritual truth, in this case prophetic truth." He can, however, if he has a spiritual nature, learn from the Holy Spirit many and wonderful things about his future. No doubt some things are yet to be known, but that is not what this passage is saying. It simply points out that it takes a "spiritual receiver" to grasp spiritual truth. Believers get it; the unregenerate don't.
- 11) As surely as a man's thoughts within him are private, known only by his own spirit, unknowable unless he reveals them, even so the things of God's mind are unknown to us unless He by His Spirit makes them known to us. And He has done that in His Word! What a treasure we have in the Bible, and we too often take it for granted. If only we believers would spend more time in the blessed Book! How different our lives would be!
- 12) Sometimes I feel like people of this world are speaking in a language I do not understand, even when they speak in my native tongue! We believers are out of touch with this world, for its spirit is not ours. At salvation, we were baptized by Jesus in the Spirit and received the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He it is Who interprets God's Word (of which He is the Author) to us. We can indeed only understand what God has in store for us by the illumination of the Spirit!
- 13) Back to the matter of preaching, Paul's preaching - he says that He receives things from God's Spirit and teaches them. The source of his declarations is different from man's source (God's Spirit *versus* man's wisdom); the vocabulary is different (spiritual words *versus* flowery rhetoric). Bible truth is spiritual understanding communicated in a spiritual vocabulary. You have to have a relationship with the Author to understand the Book!

DULLNESS and DISCERNMENT

- 14) In this context, Paul speaks of natural, spiritual, and carnal men. The first one, the "natural man," cannot grasp spiritual truth because he has no spiritual nature; the next one, the "spiritual man," is concerned with spiritual things, and he discerns them carefully. The last one, the "carnal man," is a miserable creature indeed who can enjoy neither this world (for he is saved) nor that to come (because he is out of step with God). He is "too saved to enjoy sin," and he is "too sinful to enjoy his salvation."
- 15) We often take Christ's "judge not" (Matthew 7) too far. We become undiscerning, and by default and silence cooperate with and give tacit approval to the sinful behavior of other believers, for fear of being accused of "judging." Paul declares clearly that the spiritual man "judges" all things. He is able to make wise judgments (discernment, not condemnation) because he knows the Word of God, and he is led by the Holy Spirit. Church discipline for the sinning believer requires this delicate balance of truth. We must sometimes judge, but we must never condemn. Discipline is to recover, not destroy.
- 16) Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13 here to show the limit of our understanding, which is far below God's, not fully understanding Him, and certainly not instructing Him. But we can have the mind of Christ, that is, we may have His attitude of humility, putting others before self. This was a thing sorely needed by the egocentric Corinthian assembly. Jesus condemned sin, but He also lovingly called the sinner to purity of life: "*Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.*"

CHAPTER 3 **THE GREAT ACCOUNTING** **BLIGHT OF DIVISION**

- 1) Paul is addressing believers here, and he refers to them as "brothers." This means people "born of the same womb," Christians. He would love to speak to them as people who were driven by their spirits, but he could not. They were driven by their "flesh," that is the appetites of the old nature. "Worldly" would be better translated "carnal." Because they were carnal, they were not growing in the Spirit, rather remaining immature, they were what we call "babes in Christ."
- 2) The living need to eat. Those alive in Christ need spiritual food, and Paul wanted to feed the Corinthian Christians. It saddened him that he had to keep nursing these spiritual babies. When he wanted to feed them spiritual meat, he had to give them baby formula. It is like reading *Dick and Jane* instead of *War and Peace*. They were immature.
- 3) For a second and third time, Paul uses an adjective to describe them that should only be used of the lost, unsaved

people. It is "carnal," or "fleshly." This carnality evidences itself in the divisive character of the Corinthian church. Walking as men (suggesting "lost" men), they let a "party-spirit" develop in the church. Sects were being formed, as men followed men, rather than following Christ. This spirit shows up when men enter into strife.

4) There were more than just two parties in the church at Corinth - 1:12 suggests at least four. He here illustrates with the mention of two, perhaps because they were the most prominent. The existence of a "party-spirit" in the church shows that they are living as mere men, not as men redeemed, walking in and led by the Holy Spirit.

BLESSING OF DIVERSITY

5) Here is one of the many places in the New Testament that the word "deacon" is used not in the sense of the office, but rather of service in general. Paul and Apollos were not "deacons" in a local church, but the word is used of them. It means that they were busy serving the Lord by serving His people. Their service resulted in the salvation of souls through faith in Christ; it also included the growth of believers who learned from them the doctrines of the faith.

6) Here Paul and Apollos are seen as servants with different gifts. Each has its place, but all are just parts of God's plan by which He brings forth fruit in men's lives. Neither Paul nor Apollos could save; only God can do that. If a man is "my convert," he is as lost as he was before the "conversion." If He is God's convert, then he is saved!

7) Men, therefore, should not divide up into sects following other men; they should unite into one body following God, for it is not the planter nor the one who waters who are important. Only God can make things grow, so let us follow Him. We do not thank a scalpel for successful, life-saving surgery. We do not praise the hammer and saw for our new home.

Corinthians should praise God alone, not Paul, Apollos, or Peter, these are only servants.

8) Paul and Apollos were united in their service for Christ. Each had his own gift; both were necessary for the work of the Lord to prosper. If they are one, why should not the Corinthian believers set aside their petty differences and be one, as well? The ministers had a common purpose, and so did the believers there at Corinth. The purpose of glorifying the risen Christ and reaching people for Him would be best served by unity in the church.

9) Verse 8 had mentioned the concept of **compensation** for labor. Here Paul mentions the **companions** in labor - that we are in the yoke not only with each other, but with God Himself! He adds two metaphors to illustrate labor for Christ - a farm and a building. We grow living things on a farm; we construct a building. The church is both.

BUILDING WITHOUT DEFECTS

10) Three things he declares: 1) laying the foundation as the expert builder (our word "architect") was by God's grace; 2) others (like Apollos) build on the foundation; 3) as we build further, we must take great care. There is a heavenly Building Inspector Whom we must please. More now about the foundation and how to properly build.

11) The church has just (verse 9) been likened to a building; it has but one foundation - Jesus Christ. Proper building for the Lord calls for this and only this foundation. Everywhere we go fulfilling the great commission, we must begin at the beginning, Jesus. Any other foundation leads to a faulty edifice. *"You cannot think right in the rest unless you think right in Him"* (Dr. Walter Hughes, Canadian Evangelist).

12), 13) Romans 8:1 says *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus."* For the Christian, judgment for life or death, heaven or hell, is already past. There remains only the judgment seat of Christ where our works for Him will be scrutinized for reward or loss. Paul employs the metaphor of fire for that judgment, and the image of a building is still before us. We must build with gold, silver, and precious stones - materials that will stand the test of time and the fires of Christ's scrutiny. These materials could refer to the motives with which we serve, our compliance with the truth of God's Word, doing God's work in God's way for God's glory. Wood, hay, and straw suggest wrong building and will be consumed in the fires of the judgment seat of Christ.

14), 15) Again we see emphasized that this is not a judgment for determination of destiny, but a calling into account for reward or loss for the believer in Christ Jesus. The image takes on multiple possibilities. One is a building inspection after the building is done - set a match to it and see what is left when the fire goes out. The other is of a person whose life in heaven is assured by faith in Christ, but whose entrance there is not abundant because of a poor quality of life lived here. May our building stand the test and our entrance be abundant.

BOASTING SHOULD BE IN DEITY, NOT IN HUMANITY

16) The pronouns ("you") are plural; Paul is asking the church if they don't understand that each of them individually and all of them corporately are a temple of the Holy Spirit? In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Temple was the place where God was manifestly dwelling. Today it is in the hearts and lives of believers that He dwells in this world. 1 Corinthians 6:19 is the classic text on this truth. Until the cross and Pentecost, there was one Temple with many sacrifices; from then til now, it is one sacrifice (that of Jesus), and many temples (all believers in Christ).

17) Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Him? Whoever touches Christ's church touches Him, and he will suffer for it. As Israel was the "apple of God's eye" (Zechariah 2:8), so the church is the body of which Christ is the head; you cannot touch it without offending Him. The church is holy (remember that he is writing to Corinth, in many ways a spiritual cesspool, but He calls them holy). God sees them this way in Jesus. Anyone who attempts to corrupt this holy body will pay an awful price (16).

18), 19), 20) Paul now contrasts two "wisdoms" - one is falsely-so-called, but the Greeks were fond of their reputation for wisdom. Sadly, it was a worldly wisdom, and when compared to God's true wisdom, it was seen for what it was - "foolishness." He speaks of the wisdom of the age and the wisdom of the *kosmos* ("world system"). Better to be a fool in the world's eyes and to be wise in God's sight. The words "fool" and "folly" each come from a Greek word that gives us

our word "moron." The word rendered "craftiness" is never used in a good light in Scripture, once (2 Corinthians 11:3) even referring to Satan's "craftiness" in deceiving Eve. Again, it is used of the "craftiness, trickery" of spies sent by the scribes and chief priests to attempt to trap Jesus in His words (Luke 20:23). The thoughts of the wise of this world are known to the Lord, and they are futile, empty, deceitful, and pointless.

21), 22), 23) These carnal Corinthians had boasted in their allegiance to certain spiritual leaders, none of whom wished a following. "Why choose only one? They are all yours - Paul, Apollos, Cephas." And beyond that, God made this world for us, so all in it is ours. But boasting is precluded, because while we possess all things, we are possessed by Christ, and He, by God. So it all comes back to God, doesn't it? It's not about us, or about our party-leaders; it is always about God. This is a God-centered universe, and His should be a God-centered church.

CHAPTER 4

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

IDEAL PERSPECTIVE

1) The issue here is how ministers of the gospel are viewed. There is the danger of the heights - putting people on a pedestal - and the danger of the depths - disparaging them as lower than others in society. The two perspectives Paul gives here are: gospel ministers are 1) underlings, galley slaves, assistants to Christ; 2) stewards - men placed in charge of a trust, with a responsibility to dispense it in a way so as to bring an increase by its use. So neither praise or pity are due - only faithfulness in the responsibility for good accounting in accountability.

2) There is coming a day when every child of God will be judged by the Lord Jesus Christ at what we call the "Bema Seat." When we stand before Christ (and we will each stand before Him), the main thing He will be concerned with in our stewardship is faithfulness. Not eloquence, gift, success, but faithfulness. May God make us faithful to the trust He has given us. The souls of men depend in some part upon our faithful sharing of the gospel.

IMMUNITY TO PREJUDICE

3), 4) The Corinthians had been guilty of dividing up into man-following groups, comparing their so-called heads. Paul had no interest at all in that kind of thing. No human court's estimation of him was what mattered then, nor now. He did not even keep a resume of his own accomplishments as some men do. While reputation has its place in the lives of the saints, it is not the main thing. Pleasing men will lead to service of an improper nature with an impure motive. Our main objective should be to please the Lord Jesus. Solomon had said (Proverbs 16:7), *"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."* Dr. McGee speaks of the three courts before which we must stand. The lower court is that of the opinion of others. The middle court is that of one's own conscience. The highest court is that of Christ's judgment. It is truly the only "supreme court."

5) This brings both dread and delight. To have one's motives laid bare, one's hidden things brought to light is fearful - yet challenging. Christ already knows them, and we should be working to keep them as pure as possible, anyway. There is a time for judgment, and it is not now. There is a Person to judge, and it is not us. The time is future, and the Judge is Christ. His judgment will be fair and just, and He will find something in each of us to praise.

6) Paul refers to himself and Apollos (who unwittingly were owners of two groups of contending followers) simply as servants, as are all ministers. His purpose was to remove himself from a pedestal to knock pride from his followers based on unbiblical estimation of ministers. To "not go beyond what is written" seems to mean that there is a Biblical standard for judgement, and we should not go aside and judge on the basis of personalities.

7) Undue exaltation and unnecessary humiliation are extremes found in improper judging - that is evaluating and comparing ministers and ministries. Within the body of Christ, we have been given different gifts for service. God GAVE those GIFTS, so that none of us has anything of which to boast or disparage another. Let us be careful not to make the mistake of having our eyes on men instead of on Christ!

IMPACT OF PRIDE

8) Paul uses mild sarcasm in deriding their conceit - hoping to drive it from them. "You have it all - all you want! You are elevated to kings - leaving us behind!" Matthew Henry wrote, "Those do not commonly know themselves best who think best of themselves." Oh, that we were in Christ's kingdom, He adds, so we really might reign together, with Christ! Humility was an absent characteristic in Corinth, and the church was the less because of it.

9) Far from the idea of the apostles being socially prominent, or elevated in display, Paul pictures his place as one that is very low - like the trailing prisoners in a returning army's victory procession - waiting to face the lions. He saw his life as a theater for the universe - to angels as well as to men. In importance, the apostles were first; in their own estimation, last.

10) He returns to his sarcasm in overstatement. Pride is a vicious evil, and Paul uses hard words to point it out, hoping to purge it! We are fools, weak, held in contempt. In your boasting you are wise, strong, and honored by men. Will the Corinthians look in this mirror? Will we? How long will the cardinal sin of the universe, pride, work to our hurt and to the robbing of God of His glory? It brought Satan down; it caused Eve and Adam to fall. We must beware!

IMPROPER POSITION

11), 12), 13) It would be right for that special group called apostles to enjoy at the least some esteem, respect for their office and work. Yet the reality was different: they went without adequate support for their missionary work, leaving them hungry, thirsty, and ill-clad. Honor ought to be given to one who endured brutality, suffered homelessness, but Corinth gave him none. The missionary apostle and his troupe had to ply skills they owned to earn a living; they were ill-spoken of

but responded with blessing. Persecuted, they persevered. Men charged them with evil motives; by God's grace their response was one of kindness. It was evident that the world had a low opinion of these servants of God, considering them as waste - worthless and despised. We show our esteem in America by how we reward those who affect us. We pay the most to those who make us laugh and the least to the ones who try to bring us to God - to make us live! What is wrong with a culture that honors athletes and clowns above educators and ministers? The folly of Corinth is alive and well in our land today!

INSTRUCTIVE PATTERN

14), 15) Here Paul is saying, "There is a great contrast between our circumstances and yours. We are blasted, you are blessed. This I write, not to shame you, but to bring you down from your high horse. To get you to change your view of your leader. After all, who brought you to faith in Christ? It was I - your father in the faith. You may have many teachers in the faith, but only one who in Christ is your spiritual father. This singular relationship should garner some respect for me as a leader." He seems to be writing with "tongue in cheek," as we say.

16) Paul concludes the thought with a plea, an urging them to "mimic" him. In another place (11:1) he backs this up with his own imitation of Christ - the best Example (Christ) followed by the best of men (Paul). At least five other times Paul referred to himself as an example to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:17, 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2

Thessalonians 3:9). O, to be so like Jesus that we could point to our lives as examples for others to follow! This was not conceit on Paul's part, for he lived what he believed as well as any other man ever did live!

17) His present inability to come to Corinth had prompted Paul to send Timothy, his son in the faith, to "put them in mind" of his ways. So many would-be-teachers and so many wanna-be-guides, but their spiritual father sent his surrogate to set things straight. Paul had written to Philippi that Timothy was the only like-minded, caring person he could send. Here Timothy is called on again to bless Corinth. He was "faithful" in his character, and he was "beloved" by Paul for it.

INTENDED PLAN TO VISIT

18), 19), 20), 21) These closing verses are a not-so-veiled warning to some troublemakers in Corinth, men whom Paul calls "arrogant" (six of the seven New Testament uses of this word are written to the Corinthians - do you think there was a problem there with pride?). God willing, Paul would come, and when he comes, he will test those men. Is their strength in their own words, or is it in God's power? That's the acid test, and Paul would prove or disprove them by it. Whether he arrived with a spirit of censure ("a rod") or with a spirit of loving gentleness depended entirely on their behavior. And Paul would know, for the lines of communication were clearly open (1:11), and his man Timothy would also give a thorough report. See also Philemon 1:21, 22 for the suggestion of a hoped-for visit as an opportunity for accountability.

CHAPTER 5

DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH

The 1960's brought us a sexual revolution that sought to redefine love as sex, and it advocated "free love," meaning sex anywhere, anytime, with anyone. We have paid a dear price for that decade's folly. First there was skyrocketing pregnancy among the unmarried; then followed an epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases. The traditional, Biblical marriage definition came into question, and the roles of men and women were completely confused. Now less than 50% of American children grow up in a heterosexual, two-parent family. The inconvenient pregnancies and the new-found "reproductive rights" led to abortion on demand and 1.5 million murders of unborn babies annually since 1973. Finally, the growing acceptance of the perversion of homosexuality and the plague of AIDS threaten life and society around the globe. Sexual sins are not new, as the case raised in 1 Corinthians 5 indicates. Sadder still, it shows that even in the ancient world, sexual sin was found in the church. The question is, "Will God's people deal with those in the church who are guilty of such sin?"

DENOUNCING THE SIN

1) No gossip, no rumor, but factual reporting of an actual case came to the Apostle. A member of the church in Corinth had been sleeping with his stepmother! Such a sin would make the pagans, those outside the family of God, blush. This "divided" church was also a "disgraced" church. God's law and man's law prohibited such a thing.

2) The word "proud" or "arrogant" here means "puffed up." Only Paul uses it in the New Testament, and seven of his eight uses are in this book! What an egocentric church! Their response was prideful continuance of business as usual. It should have been grief at the sin and excommunication of the sinner. Dr. Wiersbe rightly says, "Church discipline is not a group of 'pious policemen' out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of brokenhearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family." The beginning of getting him back is putting him out of the church's fellowship.

DECLARING THE SENTENCE

3) "*Judge not, that you be not judged*" (Matthew 7:1) has to do with ascribing undiscovered motives, not with assessing facts and taking action based on known behavior. Too much sin has been swept under the rug based on a faulty understanding of Jesus' words. *In absentia*, Paul had already passed proper judgment on the offending church member.

4), 5) Matthew 18:15-20 should be read here. Together these two passages give good instruction on church discipline. We can assume the leaders of the church had gone through the early steps prescribed by Jesus. Paul adds this: 1) an assembly in Christ's name and power should be held. 2) If unrepentant, this man should be ceremonially handed over to Satan, whom he has made his lord for the time. The purpose of this is twofold. The "destruction of the flesh:" could mean either the waste caused by living in sin or the crucifying of the sinful nature when made sick of sin. His soul's security is

the second part - it will be finally saved, not condemned in the day when Jesus comes to judge.

DISCIPLINING THE SINNER

6) Leaven is usually a picture of sin in Scripture. It begins small, works quietly, spreads throughout, and puffs up - that is why dough rises when leavened! The pride and boasting of the Corinthian church while tolerating this gross sin was pronounced by the Apostle as "Not good." We must learn a holy **"intolerance"** when it comes to the matter of sin.

7), 8) Paul appeals to the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread for an illustration of the importance of purity in the church. Leaven was left out of the bread at the first Passover because they needed to be ready to move out of Egypt, and waiting for the dough to rise would slow them down. The church will likewise be impeded in its forward progress by the presence of sin. As the dough must have been completely without yeast, so he pleads for purity and sincerity in the body of Christ. How much more could be done for Christ today if the churches were not held back by foot-dragging sinners. He says to get rid of the leaven - disfranchise the sinning saint!

9), 10), 11) Here is, I think, the first public step in speaking to the conscience of the believer who is living in sin. It is what I call the "cold shoulder treatment." When someone in the church has chosen the path of sin over fellowship with the saints, we should avoid them socially, making it a point not to keep company with them. It is, after all, a path they have chosen, not to mention a command God has given. Someone may then ask, "Can we live in this world and not associate with unbelievers?" Paul responds immediately that he is not referring to those outside the church, but rather to a sinning brother (at least one professing to be a brother). The Apostle then expands the list of sins by several, I think to show that this is not just a precept for one sin, but that serious sin in general is at issue here. If the church would have power, it must have purity. The man who flaunts sin must not be treated as though nothing were wrong. Exclusion from fellowship is what is prescribed here without apology. It seems that this means in personal activity, and certainly in the communion meal. One should not, could not, be told not to attend; their presence in the worship services might just lead to repentance at the hearing of the Word of God. But they should not be served the elements of the Lord's Supper. Wisdom must be exercised here, and kindness should prevail, even when a measure of exclusion is prescribed.

12) Paul returns to the issue of who can be thus dealt with. It is never the church's prerogative to try and discipline a non-Christian. That being said, it is always the church's responsibility to discipline the sinning church member.

13) The non-Christian will not avoid judgment - God will see to that! But the church must, as a last resort, purge themselves of the sinning brother who will not repent. Hopefully he will one day repent and return to the fold. We have seen it work this way on several occasions.

CHAPTER 6

The chapter before us consists of two paragraph divisions. Verses 1-11 deal with the issue of believers and the civil courts. The matter of our testimony before the world is at stake, as well as is to be considered the principle that we are equipped to handle those matters within the family. The verses from 12 to the chapter's end deal with abuses of Christian liberty - yes. All things are lawful, but all are not appropriate for our participation, for reasons Paul will set before us.

WHY SAINTS SHOULD NOT GO TO COURT WITH EACH OTHER (6:1 - 11)

COMPETENCE - WE ARE CAPABLE OF JUDGING OUR OWN MATTERS

1) Public lawsuits would surely be divisive within the church, not to mention that fact that the church's testimony before the world would be greatly harmed. Should not the saints of God be able to settle their own disputes without involving the pagan courts? Word of some such lawsuit had reached Paul, and he was not pleased with the news. It is not generally (if ever) the purest motives that drive people to civil litigation. It is very often (dare I say "most often") prompted by greed for gain.

2) Next the Apostle cites the future judging office that the saints will occupy - he says that "the saints will judge the world." The question as he framed it demands an affirmative answer. "*You do know, don't you...*?" Verses like Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30, and Revelation 20:4 set forth the truth that saints will be involved in judging the world. If something of that eternal magnitude is within our ability, should we not deem ourselves competent to handle petty disputes of this life among ourselves? We certainly should!

3) A second rhetorical question is asked, it, too, demanding grammatically a positive answer. "*You do know, don't you, that we are going to judge angels?*" The future judgment of angels is mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, though neither of those writers mentions that we shall do the judging. Paul settles that issue for us in this text. Since we have a position above these supernatural beings that allows us to judge them, can we not find it in ourselves to settle conflicts "in-house?"

CONQUERED - WHEN WE GO TO COURT, WE HAVE ALREADY LOST

4) Even those within the church that are not highly esteemed for their wisdom could be appointed (that may be a command) to handle matters of dispute. While it is more likely that this is a question than a command (it would then be the third in a series of questions), the meaning seems to be that the least saint in the body called the church could easily help resolve issues of dissension among his or her brothers in Christ. In the pre-Christian Jewish community, judges were from within the fold, from the judges appointed by Moses at the suggestion of his father-in-law, to the *Av Beit Din* of the time of Jesus. He was the second highest ranking member of the Sanhedrin, and he was looked to as a judge.

5), 6) Paul is ashamed of the behavior of his children in the Lord in Corinth. They did not think that there was a man among them who could judge a dispute better than the Gentile, pagan courts! What a shame on them! The report was clear; this was not a saint suing a lost man - this was brother going to law against brother! And they were hanging out their

dirty laundry before unbelievers. The testimony of Christ is often done irreparable harm by the public actions of the redeemed. This ought not to be the case!

7), 8) The beatitudes of Matthew 5 taught us to pray for those who wrongly treated us. The principle may be expanded to say that when we are wronged, it is better to suffer the loss than to bring shame on the name of Christ by seeking satisfaction in a pagan court. *"Better to suffer the wrong,"* he says, and *"better to be defrauded."* Instead, the Corinthian believers were doing wrong by pursuing their own justification, by trying to settle some score with another saint! Badly done, badly done, Corinthians! They had already lost, suffered a defeat, before the case ever came to court!

CONTRAST - OUR BEHAVIOR SHOULD DIFFER FROM THAT OF THE LOST

9), 10), 11) *"You do know, don't you, that the unrighteous won't inherit God's kingdom?"* Again, a question whose grammar requires an affirmative answer. They did know it, they just didn't act like it! They were in some ways acting just as the wicked do, the ones who will be judged and lost forever. That was not appropriate behavior for saints. *"Stop allowing yourselves to be deceived!"* Know this that the people whose lives are characterized by these following gross sins are not believers - we must stand apart from them, not partaking of their behavior. These behaviors include, but are not limited to, the sexually immoral, idol worshipers, adulterers, those practicing homosexuality. Notice that three of the first four forbidden behaviors are sexual sins! Paul goes on in his list of people who miss heaven with those who steal, those who are greedy, the party-going drunks and revilers, along with those who swindle people out of their property. He then adds that the Corinthians had practiced many of these behaviors before they came to Jesus, but He had washed them clean of those hideous sins! The cleansing of all past sins at our new birth is a wonderful thing! Then the Holy Spirit goes to work with the Word of God to begin in us the process of sanctification - setting us apart to God and from sin. The ultimate goal of this process is to be like Jesus! He finally mentions that we are justified - which is a courtroom term. It means that regardless of our past, we are now declared righteous by the Holy God, the Judge of all the earth!

WE MUST KEEP OURSELVES PURE (6:12 - 20)

In 1 Corinthians, Paul set forth at least four tests for behaviors that will tell whether they are right or wrong. Three of them (in reverse order of their occurrence) will serve as introductory to the fourth, which is found in the first verse of our text here. 1 Corinthians 10:31 gives us the **test of end result** - does it glorify God or not? *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* In 1 Corinthians 10:23 we find the **test of edification** - does it build me up or tear me down spiritually? *"All things are lawful," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up."* Our third test comes from 1 Corinthians 8:9 *"Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak."* It is the **test of effect** - does it help others, or could it cause them to stumble? Applying these tests to behaviors will help us avoid wrong and do right. There is a fourth test that we will encounter shortly, but first this thought. If we build these principles into our lives, when the tests come, the decisions will have already been made! Instead of making tough choices, we just apply simple principles, and we win!

THE PRIORITY OF SPIRITUAL OVER PHYSICAL

12) Many commentators on this passage suggest that the opening words of verse 12 are a popular slogan used there in Corinth to mask their immorality, and not a statement asserted by Paul as true. The NIV here handles it by inserting the words, "you say." While the Corinthian believers may have been *antinomian* in their views (taking the position that law held no authority over them), Paul reminded them that not every permissible thing was beneficial, and that some things would enslave - giving us the **test of enslavement**. We must not let anything under the sun bring us under its power. We are bond-slaves to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to Him alone!

13), 14) The spiritual is always infinitely more important than the physical; the soul is always infinitely more important than the body. While it is true that food was made by God to enter the stomach and nourish the physical frame, and it is also true that the stomach was made to receive the food for that purpose, that is not the end-all of the story. We eat to live, not live to eat. We are not appetite-driven. The body as we know it, with its need for regular physical nourishment, is temporary. The future glorified state of our bodies will be quite different. He next mentions another physical appetite, sex, and the inappropriate satisfying of it in fornication - the body was not made for this, but for the Lord. Our bodies, with their appetites, should be surrendered to the Lord. He made them, and in the resurrection, He will reclaim them from the dust of death and make them immortal. So even now we should treat them with the respect they are due. Why Jesus even chose to live in a human body!

THE PROHIBITION AGAINST SEXUAL IMMORALITY

15) The first question is again worded so as to demand a positive answer - *"You do know, don't you...?"* Paul had taught the Corinthian believers that individually they were members of the body of Christ. God designed sex to be only between a man and a woman, and only in the marriage relationship. When a believer steps outside those limits and fornicates with a prostitute, a member of Christ's body becomes one with an inappropriate partner! Having stated this truth in the form of a question, Paul condemns such relationships in the strongest possible terms!

16) This is another question requiring a positive answer by its construction. *"You do know, don't you...?"* These readers had been taught that the consummation of a husband and wife becoming one is in the marriage bed. Paul now reminds them with a quote from Genesis 2:24, *"The two will become one flesh."* This lovely, Divinely-ordained thing should not be soiled by participating in the culturally accepted Corinthian activities of consorting with a prostitute! The believer who is one with Christ defiles himself by becoming one with anyone other than their spouse!

17) There are a number of important “unities” spoken of in Scripture. The Father and the Son are one - cf. John 10:30, 17:11, 21. Believers are to be one with each other as members of Christ’s body - cf. John 14:20; 17:11, 21-23; 1 Corinthians 12:12,13; Ephesians 4:4. The word translated “sexual immorality” in this passage (6:13, 18) gives us our word “pornography.” If we who are one with the Lord in spirit, unite our flesh with someone in sexual immorality, we defile our marriage and we defile our fellowship with Christ! This must be unthinkable to the child of God!

THE PURCHASE AND PURPOSE OF OUR BODIES AS TEMPLES FOR GOD

18) “Flee” is a present active imperative, meaning, “*Keep on running away from...*” Joseph fled Potiphar’s wicked wife (Genesis 39:12), and so must we flee sexual immorality! Elsewhere Paul taught us to flee idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14), the love of money (1 Timothy 6:11), and youthful lusts (2 Timothy 2:22). Each time he used the same imperative form. All these are outside the body, but sexual immorality is against the body itself! The intimacy of sexual union was designed by God to be exclusively with the spouse. All other such intimacy is a sin against the body!

19), 20) A third and final question occurs here that must have a positive answer: “*You do know, don’t you...?*” Three “**R**” words surface here. First is the **Residence** of the Holy Spirit in our bodies. In the old economy there was one Temple and many sacrifices. In the new, there is one sacrifice (Christ’s) and many temples (our bodies). The holy home of the Holy Spirit should not be defiled with fornication. Next is the **Redemption** by Christ. He made me, and He bought me; so I belong to Him (twice!). I cannot choose to defile my body which is His. Finally, there is **Respect** for God that is demonstrated by keeping our vessels clean before man and God. May God give us the grace and strength to honor our marriage vows - “Keep me only unto thee as long as we both shall live.” When we honor those vows, we honor the God before Whom we made them. **We must keep ourselves pure.**

CHAPTER 7

MIXED MARRIAGES & DIFFICULT DECISIONS

1 - 16

DISCUSSION OF MARRIAGE AND SEX

1) It appears that Paul was asked a question about celibacy (abstaining from marriage and sex) and marriage. Was the one who married, or the one who refrained from marriage more spiritual, better than the other? His answer is that celibacy is good. It is no sin to remain unmarried. He does not imply, however, that to marry was wrong.

2) Corinth was a city of sexual sin. There were temple prostitutes whose job was to perform sexually for men as an act of religious worship. In a climate where sex was found on every hand and accepted in almost any form, it would be better to be married and have a legitimate partner for sex. Celibacy and marriage each have a place.

3) A sub-question about a sort of “sexual fasting” seems to be addressed next. His response is that neither husband nor wife should require their partner to comply with such a thing (except as regulated in verse 5). Sex is normal **in marriage** - it is a gift from God designed for procreation and pleasure. There is no sin in practicing it.

4) We hear a bold assertion in our day that goes like this, “***It’s my body!***” This, of course, relates to women, pregnancy and abortion. The fact is that each mate should have willingly surrendered control of their body to the other. The husband’s desire should be to please his wife, not himself. The wife’s goal should be the same toward him.

5) If a couple were to have a time of sexual fasting in their marriage, it must meet three conditions: 1) It must be by mutual consent, no unilateral decisions here. 2) It must be for an agreed-upon time, after which the couple returns to normal sexual activity. 3) It should be for the purposes of devotion and prayer for both of the parties. If such principles are not followed, Satan may gain the advantage of a partner who has less self-control.

6) This simply means that what he suggested is **permission** for a couple to fast sexually, but not a commandment to do so. Otherwise, some might abuse this to force a mate into something they were not ready or willing to do. We are under grace, not some law, in this matter as well as in all our Christian living. And aren’t we glad!??

7) Paul had found happiness in his (unmarried? widowed?) state, and as such could wish that everyone else could be, too. But not everybody has the same calling, gift, and ability from God. Some could be single and sanctified; others needed marriage to prevent fornication (see verse 2). A person could be married or single and still be holy.

DIRECTIONS FOR MARRIED SAINTS

8), 9) In a time of persecution for believers, being single had its advantages. So Paul suggested to those who were not presently married that they remain in that state if they could. But it was for all people better to get married than to burn in lust for the opposite sex while trying to remain celibate. Now Paul was not suggesting that marriage was simply a way to legally satisfy sexual needs. It was and is far more than that, and if a person enters marriage simply for sex, their marriage is doomed for bad times. Marriage is for building a family, having someone to share life with, doubling our joys and dividing our sorrows, working together for God’s glory.

10), 11) In verses 10 and 12 Paul is not claiming divine authority for one statement and denying it for another. He is simply distinguishing between statements that refer to the earthly teaching of Christ, and those that address issues with which Jesus was not confronted. A believer is not to separate from their marriage partner. Today’s issue of physical abuse makes us want to tell the abused spouse to get out for their own safety. So we hear Paul follow up, “But if you must leave, don’t divorce them.” How many saints have held out for reconciliation to an estranged spouse and been blessed by getting right with the Lord and getting their life and marriage right!

DIFFICULTIES OF MIXED MARRIAGE SHARED

12), 13) These two verses give the same instruction each to husband and wife in religiously mixed marriages. In a later letter to Corinth (2 Corinthians 6:14) Paul would instruct believers not to marry unbelievers. Here was a case where two people were already married, and one of them became a believer after the wedding. So what to do now? The answer is to stay as you were when you got saved. Salvation does not alter the married state; it should however enhance it. He states simply and clearly that a Christian mate should not divorce his or her unsaved spouse. Staying together depends, of course, on the unsaved mate's willingness to remain in the relationship.

14) No person is saved simply because someone in their household is a Christian. It is eternally true, however, that a believer in any relationship can exert a powerful godly influence on others in the relationship. Husbands do so on wives, and *vice versa*. Unbelievers with a Christian in their family have a built-in witness working on them.

15) Paul anticipated the case where a lost mate would want out of the marriage. While others may differ, it is my conviction that the Christian here is to let them go, and that they are in such a case free to marry, for Paul did not tell them to remain unmarried as he did in verse 11. Jesus mentioned fornication (Matthew 19:9), Paul adds abandonment as a basis for divorce with Scripturally acceptable remarriage. It is as if the mate has died.

16) The desertion of an unsaved mate by a believer could be the death-knell of their soul. How many believers we have seen over the years win their unsaved mates to Christ. Peter gave such advice to ladies in 1 Peter 3:1 - 3. Men, ladies, pray for your lost mate, and by God's grace love them into the family of God. You are their greatest hope!

COMING TO CHRIST DOES NOT CHANGE OUR SOCIAL POSITIONS (7:17- 24)

Becoming a believer was a new, exciting, somewhat strange thing to the Corinthians. Many might seek a change in social relations by mistake. The equality of the sexes in Jesus, the lack of bond-versus-free conditions in the church, the importance of being with saved people, all might lead folks to carelessly look for an "out" from some relationship. Bondmen might want to be suddenly freemen; saved individuals might seek to divest themselves of an unregenerate marriage partner. Here Paul cautions against such rash and inappropriate movements by these new believers! Dr. Hodge said that "their relation to Christ was compatible with any social relation or position." Paul would emphasize this truth in this text.

CONTENT WITH OR WITHOUT CIRCUMCISION

17) When one comes to Jesus for salvation, so much changes! We move from darkness to light, from spiritual death to life, from being dominated by sin to pursuing holiness. But we do not stop being male or female, bond or free, married or single, and so on. These positions or relations continue into our new life in Jesus, and we are to continue in them. That is not to say that a single person cannot marry, or that a slave cannot legally obtain their freedom. It just does not mean that we rush out and seek a new position or relation socially because we have become a Christian. Surely God was at work in our lives before we met Jesus, and those positions and relations will provide opportunities to witness for Jesus.

18), 19) Identification with Abraham's seed by the circumcision of males, whether they are Jewish or Gentile proselytes, makes no difference in this new thing called the "church." A Gentile no longer should seek circumcision to feel he belongs, nor should a Jew seek to undo the sign of the Abrahamic covenant to be part of this new body, the church. Circumcision, other than for reasons of health, is irrelevant from this point forward. What is important as an outward sign of this new relationship is obedience to Christ's commands. Compare 1 John 2:3 here: *"And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments."*

SATISFIED WHETHER SLAVE OR FREE

20) Believers are commanded to "remain" in the social position or relation that was theirs when they came to Jesus. Change may come, but not immediately, and not by wrong methods. This is a more general statement, with a particular illustration following in verses 21 and 22.

21), 22) Since Paul does not condemn the institution of slavery, we can infer that it was more important to him how the Christian behaved as a slave than that he should be made free. If a slave, however, had or learned a skill, or got training that enabled him to work toward his freedom, Paul does not order him to remain a slave. It is encouraging to know that always at the forefront of attempts to abolish slave trade and slavery itself were men and women of God. The principle of contentment seems to resonate here - that a believer can and should be content in whatever station in life he finds himself. If change, improvement come, embrace it, but use your current station as a platform for witness to others in that station (and beyond). Verse 22 employs what almost appears to be wordplay. If you are saved as a slave, remember that you are god's freedman (like Onesimus in the story of Philemon). If you are a freeman who comes to faith in Jesus, you are a slave of the benevolent Master, Christ!

RESTING IN MY REDEMPTION THROUGH JESUS

23) God spoke through Moses (Leviticus 25:42, 55) of the people of Israel being His purchased servants - He had, after all, redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. Could Paul be echoing that sentiment here? We were enslaved to sin, and Jesus redeemed us from it (He entered the slave market [incarnation], laid down a price [crucifixion], and set us free). If the Son makes us free, we are free indeed (John 8:36). Our service to men, whether owed as a slave or purchased with wages, is secondary to our service to the true Master, Jesus!

24) Our social status when we met Jesus may change, often for the better. Our status before Jesus must ever be the same. We are to be faithful, obedient, and working with the Spirit in our sanctification to become more like Jesus! If I view

God as my Sovereign (and I should because He is), my station in life is a Providence, not a sad accident. And I can be content as Paul patterned in Philippians 4:11: *"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."*

INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE APOSTLE ABOUT THE MARRIAGE ESTATE

Paul had begun this section (chapter 7) by addressing a question that had been posed to him from Corinth (7:1). He now returns to the earlier subject of relations between the sexes, of which let it be known that there are only two - male and female - that is how God made the human race. Genesis 1:27, *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* Mark 10:6, *"But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female."* No legislation or assertion of any kind can change the unalterable truth of God. Let's abide in the truth.

BEING SINGLE MAKES IT EASIER TO HANDLE DISTRESS

25) Paul here makes a strange disclaimer - that in addressing their question, he was only advising, as he had no command from the Lord to give on these matters. His counsel comes from limited but sanctified knowledge. I believe the Apostle had the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures committed to memory. Whether that is correct or not, he surely did have extensive knowledge from which the Spirit could draw to guide him in this advice. And as a faithful, trustworthy father in the Lord, he would always give his best counsel to his dear children.

26) What is *"the present distress?"* It seems to at least include the status of this new faith, Christianity, in the present world of Paul's day. The Roman Empire did not look on this sect (as it was often called) with a favorable eye. They had crucified the Lord Jesus; they would execute many more believers, including him who was now writing to the Corinthian church. Judaism, which was widespread because of the *diaspora* was certainly no friend of "the Way," as they called it. They sought to kill Paul; all of the Apostles save John would be martyred - some of them at the Jews' hands. False religions hated the truth about Jesus, as was so clearly seen in Philippi. *"The present distress"* suggested the advantage of not changing your marital or relational status.

27), 28) With identical imperative verbs, Paul commands married people not to seek a change, as he did with those who are not married. There are advantages in each of these very different situations. A married man has the sweet companionship and love of a wife. He understands other married people better than he did when single. His physical needs are met in the bonds of a holy union. The unmarried man has more freedom of time for the things of the Lord than he would if married. He can take risks a married man must not for fear of endangering his family. As a "single man" he can have more of a "single mind." I have been single, married, and now widowed - believe me the differences are staggering (by the way, I would marry her again without a second thought). Paul adds that to marry is not to commit a sin. It does, however, especially in a setting of persecution, open the door for added troubles. In his great kindness of heart, the beloved Apostle would see his readers spared from those troubles if possible.

BEING SINGLE MAKES IT EASIER TO PRACTICE DETACHMENT FROM THE WORLD

29), 30), 31) The secret to *detachment from this world is attachment to Christ*. Paul is not here asking people to enter monasteries or convents, to absent themselves from the world in the pursuit of holiness. He is rather talking about a mindset - a "reckoning" of ourselves dead to this world and alive to Christ. Surely this is harder for the married person, who has responsibilities for provision and safety of other human beings called "family." Even for the married, Jesus must come first, but for the single or widowed there is more of life and time to commit to the Master. The married man or woman fulfills their familial duties as unto the Lord, and that is good and right. But they are more limited in what they can invest of time and resources to further the work of the Lord. The upside for the church and for the family-man and family-woman is that we often leave behind a legacy of godly servants in our children and grandchildren! What a blessing! This world is passing away (see also 1 John 2:17 here), and the more detached we can find ourselves from it, the more productive we can be in the things of God. If Paul meant the possible return of Christ when he said the "time was short," how much shorter must it be now!?

BEING MARRIED MAKES IT EASIER TO BE DISTRACTED FROM SERVING CHRIST

32), 33), 34) A person's marital status directly affects their anxiety level, as well as it divides their focus in life. A single believer can focus so much more time, attention, and resources on the things of God. But (while Paul doesn't say it here, since he is primarily addressing an environment of persecution) the single life can be a lonely life. I recall a young single deacon after a meeting one night bemoaning the fact that he was going home alone while the other men were returning to their families. God did say, *"it is not good that the man should be alone"* (Genesis 2:18). That single man could be more focused on his Christian responsibilities, and those married men had to focus also on their wives and children. Again, each has an advantage. An unmarried lady can focus more on her personal sanctification, while the married lady must think about laundry, meals, school lunches, the needs of her husband, and so much more. Those are noble pursuits, when done as unto the Lord, but you get what Paul is saying.

35) The Apostle lays on his readers no moral obligation to marry or remain single. He is simply pointing out advantages and disadvantages. He does this for the benefit of his readers, helping them to make informed decisions about these important matters. He was not trying to tie them to a single outcome, not to unduly influence their decision-making process. He just wanted to help them with thoughts they may not have considered. And they did ask the question. Neither is singleness and its celibacy a higher spiritual status than is being married, nor does marriage make one more holy in God's eyes. I think in our sex-crazed culture in the twenty-first century, marriage is a good safeguard against fornication, though it is not the end-all solution to problems of lust and evil thoughts.

FATHERS HAVE A DIFFICULT DECISION ABOUT GIVING THEIR DAUGHTERS IN MARRIAGE

In the culture of the first century, fathers had very much influence and even authority in their daughters' decisions about marriage. If there is such a thing as the "gift of celibacy (singleness)," the father would need to determine if his marriageable daughter possessed this gift (7:1). Some people can never marry and be just fine. Others may struggle with lust and sexual sin more if they do not marry (again, marrying is not by itself the answer to these issues).

36) I like the NASB translation of this verse better, for it reflects that the father (not the prospective husband) is the subject of the sentence (which I prefer as an interpretation). If the father grants or withholds permission to marry he has not sinned.

37), 38) However. If he is convinced that in her case remaining single is the better spiritual decision, he does well. Again we see that the Apostle does not try to place constraint on any of the involved parties, rather to offer what he believes is sound advice. Lest someone think that Paul was never married and thus not qualified to give counsel on these subjects, it is believed that to be a member of the Sanhedrin (which Paul clearly was - Acts 8:1 says Paul was "consenting" to the death verdict for Stephen). Paul finally tips the scales a bit with this closing thought on the subject when he says that the father who gives his daughter in marriage does well, but the one who doesn't give her does better.

MARRIAGE IS UNTIL DEATH SEPARATES, THEN CELIBACY IS PREFERRED

39) A marriage principle is found here. It is that marriage is a permanent contract, dissolvable only by the death of one partner. How does that square, then, with Jesus' exception clause about getting out of a marriage because of adultery on the partner's part? My answer is simple. Since under Moses adultery was punishable by death, the offending party in a case of adultery would die, thus ending the requirement for the offended partner to remain with the scoundrel. They are then free to obtain a divorce and remarry, but they must marry a believer.

40) A final "opinion" is given here. Paul thinks that a widowed or Biblically divorced partner will be happier if they remain single. I have no alternate opinion of my own, but as a widower, I have a feeling that one marriage was all I would ever have. My wife made me the best version of myself; she made me a better pastor, homeless shelter director, Bible teacher, and a better person in general. God used her to fill my gaps, to make up my shortcomings, to complete me in many ways. I don't think I will ever find that (or need that) again.

CHAPTER 8

It appears that another question had come to Paul from the church at Corinth. It had to do with the eating of meats from animals which had been sacrificed to idols. The Jerusalem council had instructed believers in the Gentile areas to not eat such meats (Acts 15:29), yet this seemed more like Paul's "advice and opinion" in chapter 7 here than a command from the Lord. Since Paul will allow Christians to eat such meats, except where it might offend the weaker ones, causing them to stumble, we can conclude that the council's word was advice, not command.

COMPASSION CALMS A CRISIS

REVEALING THE PROBLEM

1) The empire was filled with idolatry, and Corinth was no exception. The meat from idolatrous sacrifices was often later sold in the *agora*, the marketplace. Since the "god" to whom it was offered didn't exist, it couldn't really defile the meat. Maturing believers understood this. Weaker Christians with a pagan sacrifice background could be caused to stumble here. So, love must then be exercised, for knowledge alone only puffs up, whereas love builds up.

2), 3) Some thought their knowledge to be greater than it was, a thing common today, as well. Dr. Wiersbe says, "*The person who really knows truth is only too conscious of how much he does not know.*" Knowledge that puts self ahead of the interests of others is a puffing-up knowledge, devoid of love. Godly knowledge and godly love are inextricably linked. "*He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love*" (1 John 4:8). God recognizes, owns, and acknowledges as His own him who loves. Knowledge of the truth leads to knowledge of God, which leads in turn to a love for those who belong to Him. It is vital for the life of the Body (of Christ) that we exercise love in relations with other believers, especially those who are weaker in the faith. Paul would later in this letter compare the three great Christian virtues, concluding that "*the greatest of these is love*" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

RECOGNIZING YAHWEH AS GOD

4) Israel's religious cry from the time of Moses was the famous sh'ma, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*" (Deuteronomy 6:4). There is only one God, but there are many pretenders, all of whom are false. Therefore an idol really isn't anything at all, so it is of no moral consequence if we eat food offered by a person who doesn't *understand* - to a god that doesn't *exist*. But we need to remember that there are those who do not have that understanding yet.

5), 6) The heathen *speak of* and perhaps *believe in* many gods. For the sake of argument, let's say there does exist this pantheon, these "many gods." Only one God, Yahweh, is Creator, from Whom came the worlds. Tribal, local (imagined) deities are seen as inferior in their scope and power - even if they did exist - but they **don't**. Jesus Christ alone among the "so-called gods" is God's Agent of creation. With regard to creation, Paul here cites the Father as the Source and the Son as the active Agent. It is for Him, and Him alone, that we live. He is not **A** god among many, He is **THE** God above all! One is reminded of the irony of Matthew 16. At a place named for the god, Pan (Pania, Biblical Caesarea-Philippi, interestingly today called "Banias," because the Arabs could not pronounce "p" sounds, but would substitute "b" sounds in their place), Peter made his declaration - "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" We also own Christ in a place where men follow many lesser, non-existent deities.

RESTRICTING OUR LIBERTY

7), 8) While maturing believers had *some* knowledge, many weaker brothers and sisters did not understand this “freedom of faith” - this Christian liberty. Their background in idolatry, from which God had called them, made meat offered to idols an offense, a defilement of their weak conscience. Our relationship to and fellowship with God are not based on what we eat. We do not excel or come behind based on what enters our mouths for consumption. Jesus had said, *“the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'”* (Matthew 15:18). As the idol is nothing, so the meat sacrificed to it has no moral connotation. It is okay to eat or not to eat. We in the family of God today need to make room for those who differ with us in personal convictions. One may not hold our convictions because he is weaker, another may differ with us because he is stronger.

9) We do not live to ourselves; we must, therefore, exercise caution that our freedoms don't cause some weaker brothers to stumble. We may unintentionally give occasion to someone to sin. My freedom to eat meat offered to idols ends where your conscience against it begins. Love demands that I consider you ahead of myself.

10), 11) An idol temple might have been used as a public assembling place. At the PTA meeting there, a meal might include meat from the temple sacrifices. The believer with a weak conscience might follow your lead and offend his conscience. The result could be that this weaker brother, so precious to Christ Who died for Him, gets all mixed up in his life. He has mixed signals because his conscience tells him one thing, and his respect for the more mature brother seems to say something else. He might suffer irreparable damage to his Christian testimony by yielding here and then yielding again at some other, more important issue where he should have held the line. Only eternity will reveal the impact for good or ill that our lives exert on others.

12) Paul expresses a principle he learned on the Damascus Road, “Attacking believers is attacking Christ.” To offend the Body is to offend the Head. He who sins against his brother sins against Christ. And though eating the meat is not sin in itself, knowingly and willingly causing another Christian to stumble surely is sin.

13) One of the goals we have in the church is to build up the saints in their faith. Paul was a fervent evangelist, winning many to Christ. And he added to this compassion for the lost a great concern for the believer to grow in grace. To cause a brother to stumble would work against his edification, and Paul, therefore, would never do anything - including exercise his Christian liberty - that might hurt one of the weaker ones. He would even become a vegetarian for the sake of not causing someone to stumble! Jesus had warned us against making one of the little ones to stumble. Let us work and walk in this kind of love for others.

CHAPTER 9

THE SPIRITUAL GOOD OF PEOPLE TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER MY CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

In this chapter, the Apostle demonstrates by example the truth he has just set forth - that he is willing to set aside his rights, his liberties, if that will further the cause of Christ. He has the right to live from the ministry by gifts, but he will make tents to earn his keep, thus working day and night, to avoid people thinking he serves for money. What a heart he has!

PAUL ENUMERATED HIS RIGHTS

1), 2) Paul asks questions to make a point. 1] I have Christian liberty as well as any; 2] I should also enjoy the privileges of apostleship, 3] I am an eyewitness of the risen Christ; 4] You are an evidence of the fruitfulness of my work. True, some others may question my apostolic office, but you, above all, should accept my claim. Your very conversion proves the genuineness of my apostleship. **YOU ARE MY CREDENTIALS!**

3) The apostle felt that some were examining him for authenticity. The answer, evidence, credentials he gave were verses 1 and 2. Peter, James, and John had accepted his apostleship - so should they. The word “defense” is *“apologia,”* the source of our word “apologetics.”

4) Rhetorically, Paul asks about his right to material support. As a minister of the gospel, he could and should live of the gospel. Yet in Corinth he didn't. The making of tents and receiving of outside gifts provided his sustenance.

5) He next discusses the prerogative of having a believing wife to travel with him if he so chose. He had as much right as did Peter, Christ's brothers, and other apostles. Roman Catholicism is in error with its requirement of celibacy for ministers.

6) Paul and his first journeyman, Barnabas, had not in every place exercised their right to support. But it was still their right. Paul could, if he chose, require the churches to provide his material needs.

7) He now illustrates the ancient principle that labor is entitled to reward. Soldiers serve, but those they protect keep them up. Farmers work crops, and they live of the produce. Shepherds tend sheep and goats, and they drink of the flock's milk.

8), 9) Paul is not making up the principles he is setting forth about ministers living of their ministries - he cites the Law of Moses for undergirding authority. Appropriate remuneration of ministers was practiced in the Hebrew Scripture era of the Law. Deuteronomy 25:4 said that a grain-treading ox should be allowed to work without a muzzle, thus enabling it to eat from the grain as it worked. Paul makes it clear there was a lesson in this for believers in any dispensation - that ministers should live of their work, just as do oxen do, and as other humans do world-wide.

10) Planting and harvesting become more personally gratifying when the farmer knows he will live off the fruit of his efforts. Should those who labor with the gospel-seed in the field that is white unto harvest not be supported by the gifts of the saints, whose giving is a means of worship for their Lord? Clearly, they should. A side note here - in going on six decades of vocational ministry, never once did I negotiate salary. Our family chose in faith to make do with whatever the

ministry felt they could afford as equitable pay. I would do it all the same again to avoid anyone charging me with greed.

11) The principle of reciprocity, of sowing and reaping, is set forth again here. Paul had blessed them spiritually by his evangelism, teaching, and discipling of believers. As he had ministered to them in their spiritual needs so they should care for him in his material needs.

12) Paul's earlier references to Peter and Apollos (1:12, 3:22) suggest to me that these men had ministered in Corinth. Does Paul imply here that the Corinthians had supported them materially? If that was the case, how much more should the founder of the church be supported in ministry than those who came along and helped after the fact! Yet Paul had not pressed this "right" so as not to offend and perhaps hinder the work of the gospel.

13) To further undergird his argument for compensation of ministers by those ministered to, Paul makes reference back to the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly the Law of Moses. The priests and the Levites were supported out of the offerings made to the Lord by the Israelites. This, he implies as precedent for a compensated ministry. The question requiring an affirmative answer makes it clear that he knew that they already knew this Biblical principle.

14) Here the Apostle cites the Lord Jesus as further basis for remuneration for those in ministry. Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7 may be what he had in mind. In each of those places the Lord Jesus comments that a worker is worthy of support, having instructed the disciples not to carry more than a little with them as they traveled in ministry, and not to move from house-to-house when ministering in a community. Such ministers are not seeking wealth, only sustenance.

PAUL EXERCISED RESTRAINT

15) Paul's service to Corinth was not contingent upon their support. He would never beg, but he would rather "make tents" as much as necessary to keep the gospel going out to them and others. As he wrote to the Galatians, his boasting was in the cross of Christ, and he would never let financial matters stop that cause for boasting. Like water, the gospel is free, but it does cost something to "pipe it." Churches ought to pay their ministers a decent salary, and the ministers should never be greedy of gain. There are many shortcomings on both these accounts.

16), 17), 18) Paul was conscripted, drafted into gospel ministry by the will of God, not by a choice that he made - he was not a "volunteer" in the wide sense of the word. On the Damascus Road, Jesus told Paul he would learn what he "must do." To the Romans he wrote, "*I am under obligation.*" He was less impelled than compelled (though ministry no doubt became a personal passion for him as time went by). Had he enlisted, things would be different; but he was drafted and made a steward of the gospel. His presentation of the gospel came with no charge for services rendered (though he did have the "right" to be provided for in his ministry). If others made it an issue, Paul would support himself to protect the integrity of the ministry. I almost always in ministry had part-time jobs on days off to supplement my salary.

19) Now although I am free (from the necessity of earning my own way with side employment), I still place myself under submission as it were - yielding my rights where it will assist in bringing people to Christ. "Christians are most free and most subject" - Martin Luther.

20), 21), 22), 23) Though now free in Christ from cultural obligations, Paul accommodates himself to Jewish people to win them. Free from the compulsions of the law, he still was willing to voluntarily comply with its institutions to win its subjects. The Gentiles had no written religious law, so when with them Paul did not conform to the Jewish law; a great impediment to the Gospel arises when those who are non-religious are pressed to comply with religious forms. Those not strong in faith found a friend in Paul who did not deride their weakness. He made accommodations wherever necessary (but never in principle) to win people to faith in Christ. Liberty was not his law (guiding principle), but love led him often to set aside his freedom in Christ in order to advance the gospel ministry.

PAUL EXCELLED IN THE RACE

24) The Corinthians were doubtless familiar with the Isthmian games. Paul appeals to them to illustrate the need for fervency in the Christian life, as well as the fact of reward for excellence in life's race. Paul employs here the metaphor of a race to teach us some valuable things about the Christian life. The comparisons are many, but the contrast is clear. In an athletic contest (a race) there is only one prize, and only one winner. He uses a plural verb to challenge all believers to race for the prize. By contrast to the single winner in a race, each of us can receive a crown from Jesus!

25) The prospect of obtaining a fading laurel wreath drove athletes to train with discipline and ardor. How much more should we believers spend and exert ourselves to receive an eternal crown! The effort put forth by modern athletes to be their best for fame and fortune should challenge us to be and do our best for Christ's eternal reward. Herein he gives comparison and contrast - Comparison: earthly athletes work hard, and so should we! Contrast - their crowns wither and fade, but ours will brightly shine at the feet of Jesus throughout eternity.

26), 27) Paul's efforts had direction and purpose. He was on a clearly-marked course as he ran and as he fought; his running was the disciplined gait of a trained athlete, not with wildly flinging arms and aimless steps. His blows were not shadow-boxing with no real target in mind; they were carefully aimed at a familiar enemy. We also should work with purpose and direction in our Christian lives. I do not indulge my senses, my flesh. I rather discipline them, make them my slaves; I who preach to others must not at the last be myself disqualified and disapproved. I, too, want to reach out and claim the prize from the hand of the Master. What else is worth pursuing?

CHAPTER 10

Perhaps again appealing to the Jews in the Corinthian assembly, Paul cites events from the Hebrew Scriptures that he applies to the issues of the day in Corinth. He says those former things were "examples" (types) to teach those who were

in the present age. The wilderness Jews were guilty of committing sins of idolatry, immorality, testing God, and grumbling against God (other sins might have been included, but these seemed to fit the present need aptly).

DON'T ABUSE YOUR CHRISTIAN LIBERTY! (10:1 - 13)

THE PICTURES

1), 2) His love for the Corinthians prompts Paul to teach them truths that warn them against repeating the mistakes of our forerunners. They had many benefits from God, but only two adults claimed the prize of entering the promised land (Joshua and Caleb). In these first four verses of chapter 10, Paul lists these benefits. #1, God's guidance - the cloud led them on their journey (even as the Spirit guides us on our journey). #2, God's power - with Moses, they all passed through the Red Sea in safety (even as with Christ we pass safely from death to life). Baptism here implies their identification with Moses, even as immersion for the believer identifies Him with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, which are the true means of our salvation (not the baptism itself).

3), 4) Further, as a national unit, the Israelites received God's supernatural provision of food and drink those forty years. Miraculous manna was theirs morning by morning, which was benefit # 3. Their desert wanderings were punctuated with relief from parching thirst; and so benefit # 4 was the life-sustaining water that flowed from a miracle-rock, smitten by Moses. The rock symbolized the ever-present Christ, their journeying Companion. The God Who delivered Israel from Egypt also sustained them in the wilderness. Jesus rescued us from death, and He also provides abundant life for us.

5) The morbid evidence of God's displeasure with the faithless people He so highly favored was a trail of corpses in the wilderness. With all their benefits, an entire generation including Moses and excepting Joshua and Caleb, died in the wilderness. They were disqualified from receiving the prize of reaching the promised land. And the Corinthian believers, with all of their spiritual benefits, should not think that would escape God's discipline for their wrongdoings. Let us not fail.

THE PRINCIPLES

6) The events of Israel's past are here stated to be examples to the then-current generation of believers to prevent them (and us) from repeating the sins of the past. Israel paid an awful price for her sin. America cannot escape the judgment of God, either. If we repeat their idolatry, lust, testing God's patience, and murmuring against Him, we will repeat their judgment. O, how we must guard our hearts!

7), 8) Paul begins now to clearly challenge the Corinthian Christians to avoid the sins that cost Israel so much. Idolatry was a plague in Israel and in Corinth. This often is accompanied by the indulgence of the physical appetites. And so festive gluttony, frivolous use of precious time, and sexual immorality brought death to thousands. Does this not sound like our culture today? Idolatry, Indulgence, Immorality. We make gods of any fad that comes along. We hedonistically seek pleasure on every hand. Sexual promiscuity abounds in our modern society, so much that we are at risk of becoming de-sensitized to it. Actions do and will have consequences, now as then in the wilderness and in Corinth.

9) Added to these sins was that of putting God to the test: i.e. they put His patience, good will, and power to the test by complaining of His provision and challenging Him to do better. For this they paid dearly with their lives, as 23,000 fell in death from serpent bites in a single day! Lest we think that was only for Israel, let's not forget Ananias and Sapphira!

10) Israel was also guilty of sins of the heart and tongue. They attacked Moses and Aaron, but their real offensive was against God. Again, such complaining against God exacted an awful price.

THE PLEA

11) The entire Word of God is for the benefit of the believer - even these events that predate the law of Moses. The idea of verse 6 is repeated and enhanced. God placed their failures in the holy record to warn us who would come later. To learn from history is to complete that part of God's purpose in giving the record. Let us be wise and learn.

12) Here Paul urges caution to exercise vigilance. No amount of being gifted (in which the Corinthians thought they abounded), enjoying privilege, or experiencing progress puts us above temptation. He who thinks temptation cannot reach him stands on dangerous ground. Watch your step in the mind-field of temptation.

13) The expression translated "**temptation**" here, also admits of the translation "**testing**." If the thing considered is a solicitation to do evil, which always comes from the Evil One, it is **temptation**. If it comes from God, it is an opportunity to prove and improve ourselves spiritually, and then it is clearly a **test**. The word of warning is followed by words of encouragement and hope. While temptation and testing are universal, our faithful God keeps them from being irresistible by providing a way (literally, "the way") out. God only tests; Satan tempts, but God never lets either be more than we can bear. He tests as a loving Father, and He places limits on the temptations by Satan.

G. Campbell Morgan helpfully says that in answer to the Corinthians' questions about food sacrificed to idols, "... the apostle laid down governing principles (viii); and illustrated those principles in application to his apostleship (ix), and as revealed in the history of Israel (x. 1-13)." In the closing verses of chapter 10, Paul wraps up his discussion of the issues raised by questions coming to him from Corinth.

WE MUST AVOID ANY SEMBLANCE OF IDOLATRY (10:14 - 22)

A COMMAND AND COMMON SENSE

14), 15) Paul now gives instruction based on this view of Israel's failings and with an appeal to common sense. Don't toy with temptation! Run, flee, get to the high ground, as did Lot. Get yourself out as Joseph "*gat him out*" of Potiphar's house and from his seductive wife. Cross the street to avoid temptation and possible sin. Keep your distance from sin. Yes, you have liberty in Christ, but don't let that liberty allow you to walk too close to the edge! You could fall off the bridge! You are

a sensible people; you will make the wise choices.

THE BOND SEEN IN THE BREAD

16), 17) As the Jews had a certain national unity and common identification with Moses, so the church has an organic unity and common identity with Christ. The Lord's Supper reminds us of this unity which comes from our common union with Christ. So there are at least two sources of strength to overcome temptation - the help of others in the body and the one Who is the Head of the body. Though many, we are one, and we are so because we are linked to him. The word (twice) in verse 16, sharing (NASB), or communion (KJV), or participation (ESV), is the word *koinonia*, fellowship of the most spiritually intimate measure. Our common union leads to our communion.

PARTICIPATION AND PROVOCATION

18) Even as the Priests and the Levites of Israel identified with the sacrifice and the God to Whom the sacrifice was offered when they ate of the things offered, so those who offered to Pagan (nonexistent) gods, identified with them. It could be a harm to their conscience then, to eat meat that had been offered to such so-called gods (really demons) of their past. This may possibly include the occasion where an unregenerate family invited a believer to a meal, and they made it known that the food had been offered to "such and such" a god. The believer must kindly ask not to be served such meat, lest they appear to sanction that practice, or even be complicit in that worship.

19), 20), 21) Paul states that he does not imply that there is any reality to the "so-called" gods, or the sacrifices made to them. He does make it plain that demonic realities are often behind the idol-gods of the pagans. An idol is just a piece of wood or a graven image - it is not a real deity. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 32:17 that when the Israelites worshiped false gods they were actually doing homage to demons! So with Christians in a pagan society like that in Corinth, there must be a clear separation between the followers of Christ and their activities and the worshipers and worship of demons. He had commanded fleeing from idolatry (10:14), and now he gives rationale for that flight!

22) Weak Israelites had by their idolatry provoked Yahweh to jealousy (Deuteronomy 32:21). The Corinthians had among them those who fancied themselves as spiritually "strong." But God is omnipotent, and He should not be challenged by idolatrous behavior. His strength will win out in any conflict.

The tests for acceptable behavior in this epistle are striking. Let's review them here. There is first the TEST OF ENSLAVEMENT - 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, **but I will not be dominated by anything.**" Then comes the TEST OF EFFECT - 1 Corinthians 8:9, "But take care that this right of yours does not somehow **become a stumbling block to the weak.**" Next follows the TEST OF EDIFICATION - 1 Corinthians 10:23, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but **not all things build up.**" The final is the TEST OF END RESULT - 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.**" Viewed from this perspective, the choice to do or not to do something becomes a bit easier. Our present paragraph sets forth the final two of those four tests.

OUR ACTIONS IN EVERYTHING MUST PUT SELF LAST (10:23 - 33)

THE HUMBLE GOAL - ALWAYS PUT OTHERS AHEAD OF MYSELF

23), 24) One of these tests is clearly horizontal - it has to do with our relations with, our impact on other people. We are not in this Christian life to put ourselves first, to be egocentric. Our goal in actions as believers should be to build up the other person, to help them become more like Jesus. In so doing we will be edified ourselves, becoming more like the Savior. One of humanity's most deep-seated sins is selfishness. After over 62 years as a believer, I still fight the impulse to look out for number one (as the world says). The big problem there is thinking that I am number one! That is a place reserved for ONLY Jesus! And after Him must come consideration for others.

25), 26) Meat sold in the (Corinthian) market may or may not have been sacrificed to idols; in general, it was acceptable to the Apostle to buy it without considering from where it came. The idols represent non-existent gods, and the meat is part of that world that belongs to the one and only true Deity - the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter learned through his vision/dream at Simon the Tanner's house that what God has cleansed, no man should call unclean. Since the earth and everything in it belongs to God, it is all sacred, untainted by any previous connection with false gods or idols. If others do not raise the issue, we should not either.

27) At the table of an unbeliever, the Christian should eat whatever is set before them, asking no questions about its origin. If the invitation to eat is declined by the believer, a great opportunity for witness may be lost. Even the young Corinthian believer with a weak conscience because of past pagan associations must accept the invitation and eat the meal, as best he can, setting potential conscience issues aside for the greater good.

28), 29) In the case where it is brought up that the meat was indeed offered to an idol, the whole scene changes. Now another man's conscience is at stake. He has clearly revealed this information to see what the Christian will do. Since he might assume that eating such meat in some way validates the idol, Paul says not to eat it. It is better to eat a meal of vegetables than to give a wrong impression to one who needs Christ. And if a weaker Christian brother is present, the eating of the idol-offered meat might lead that weak brother to offend his own conscience by following his more mature brother's example. We must think beyond ourselves in such cases and consider how our actions affect others.

30) "To eat, or not to eat - that is the question." The answer lies in the test of effect - will my action cause another to stumble? Will my eating idol-offered meat convey a wrong impression of Christ to a lost man who needs Jesus? While a Christian is free before God to eat whatever he chooses, before others he must take into account how they will be

affected. Liberty is not the ultimate consideration here - the weaker brother and the lost person come first.

THE HIGHEST GOAL - THE GLORY OF GOD

31) Here is "the test of end result" - will my behavior glorify God? Even eating or drinking (or any other behavior) by a believer has a spiritual connection. There is no "secular" in the life of a believer; all is sacred, and all should be done with a view to glorifying the Lord. We Don't "turn off" our Christian responsibilities when we walk out of the meeting-house door, or when the calendar turns from Sunday to Monday. The old chorus was apt - "I want to be more than a Sunday-go-to-meeting Christian..."

32), 33) The duty of believers before God is broadly summarized in the Great Commandment - "Love God, and love people." Verse 31 references duty toward God; 32 and 33 address duty toward other people. We must seek the glory of God and the good of others. We must not deliberately give offense by our actions, and we must attempt to please others with a view to bringing them to Jesus. Seeking our own good is ruled out, and it is replaced with the goal of seeking the good of others and the glory of God. May we be successful in this venture.

CHAPTER 11

1) It is said that "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." When someone suggests they would like to be like you in some way, it does indeed make you feel good, perhaps even appeals to your pride a bit. In 4:16 Paul gave an abbreviated version of this present command. He sent similar sentiments to the Philippians (3:17) and to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:6 and 2 Thessalonians 3:9). The statement here carries so much weight because first, it is an imperative verb, a true command, and second, because Jesus is the base Model for imitation. We should only anticipate mimicking (the Greek word here yields that word - *mimetes*) of our lives when our lives resemble that of Jesus. In paragraph thought, this verse fits better as a conclusion to the previous text than as an introduction to that which follows.

2) When a congregation stays true and faithful to the basic doctrines of Scripture as they had been taught them by their founder or a former pastor, it brings gladness of heart. That led Paul to a word of commendation and praise for the Corinthians on that count - goodness knows he had been tough on them on some other matters, which they deserved! It is good to render praise where praise is due. That balancing factor makes it easier to receive (and give) the criticisms that arise from time to time.

3) As the following section is to deal with matters of the woman's station in the church, Paul begins here with a statement of the divine order of headship in the church and home. Every man (and here he uses the word for males, not the generic word for mankind) has Christ as his head. The idea is that the man is under the authority of Christ, is subject to the will of the Savior. That Christ is our "Head" implies subjection, and it carries the idea of our "origination" from Jesus. The Creator (Jesus, John 1:3) made the man (Adam), and so our origin is found in Him. He goes on to state that the man is the head of the woman. We assume that the woman both being subject to and having been made from (11:8) man are also intended here. Lest the fairer sex resist this idea, Paul reminds us that even Christ has Head - God, His Father. Surely if Jesus can submit to His Father (and He clearly does), the woman can find it in herself to submit to her husband. Headship and submission in no way suggest superiority and inferiority, as no one could ever speak of God and Christ in those terms.

4), 5), 6), 7) This paragraph is a difficult one to understand in the twenty-first century, especially since we cannot get into the skin, the mind, the heart of a first-century Corinthian. Let us first define the two activities, praying and prophesying. Simply stated, praying is talking to God (often on behalf of people), and prophesying is talking to people (always) on behalf of God. And now about the covered and uncovered heads. So much has been speculated and written about this, and I will venture my own thoughts on the subject. The main idea is honor and dishonor. And these are timeless values. A man should ever work to honor his Lord, and it is right to maintain the honor the Lord has given man by praying and prophesying with a bare head. Remember, this flies in the face of some Jewish thought that requires the *kippa* (or *yarmulke*) or perhaps the *tallith* (prayer shawl) over the head of a man when in the sacred places. But Paul asserts that as the head of creation, man should worship with uncovered head, as God has honored man's position in creation. The woman, in order to show submission to her head, would in the first century cover her head with a shawl or other covering. That we can call cultural, but the submission we must see as timeless. Submission is shown today more in actions and attitudes than in customs of apparel. I hope these thoughts are helpful, and that they do not pour fuel on the fires of debate about these issues.

8), 9) For what purpose did God make me? If I can discover that purpose, and if I then pursue fulfilling it, I will be at my most productive and least frustrated. That is true in any individual, and it holds true for any individual in a relationship. God saw that it was not good that the man (Adam) be alone, so He determined to provide a companion and helper for him - Eve. While in birth, we all come from a woman (who has been with a man), but the original woman came from the original man. When God did these "firsts," there can usually be found a principle therein. He made man first, and the He made the woman **from** the man and **for** the man. The principle of man's headship and woman's submission is the one found here. They are equals in value to the world and to God, but they are also in an order of authority established by God. By the way, here Paul not only reaffirms the social issue, but he also validates and authenticates the facts of the creation account. Paul was a creationist, and so was Jesus (Matthew 19:4, 5).

10) The New Testament teaches that angels are spectators, observers, of things related to the church (here, 4:19, Ephesians 3:10, 1 Timothy 5:21). Woman's obedience to God's instruction about her being in submission to man is one of the things angels may observe. We are going to be involved in judging them (6:3), and here they are scrutinizing us and perhaps judging our level of obedience to their and our God. Most honest scholars admit not being clearly certain of what Paul intended for us to understand here. I humbly join them, having offered my simple thoughts.

11), 12) If we were not already confused enough, Paul adds fuel to the fire of our puzzlement! There is such a connection between man and woman! Having lost my wife to heaven several months ago, I know the value of what I lost in her death. Any good marriage develops more and more into an interdependent conjoining of minds and hearts. When husbands and wives live separate lives - individual finances rather than family economics, private and separate vacations, living apart under one roof, and other such things - they are missing God's best for them in so many ways! We were intended to fill each other's gaps, to complement one another; we cannot do that when living apart! Paul reminds his readers (and us) here that the first woman came from man and that we all now come from woman. Neither must a man think too highly of himself in headship, nor a woman devalue herself in submission. If anything, we are surely a team in life!

13), 14), 15) It is necessary here to understand a little about two kinds of revelation (disclosure of truth from God to people) - special revelation (the Word of God), and general revelation (observations in nature analyzed by God-given common sense). So far Paul has appealed to the Bible for support of his teaching. Here he adds reference to people "judging for themselves," because "nature teaches you..." Historically we had instinctive thoughts and reasonings about the differences between the sexes. An effeminate man was often thought to be homosexual, as was a "bit-too-tom-boyish" girl. In today's culture, those on the wrong side of spiritual truth are erasing all the lines and blurring all distinctions, to the devastation of much in society. Transgenderism is clearly a tool of Satan to fly in the face of the God of creation. God's people need to clearly stand against this evil. In this short section Paul moves from a separate physical covering for a woman to the idea of her long hair being a glory and covering for her in places and at times when that is desired or required. I will not enter the debate about how long a woman's hair should be or how short a man's should be. You can decide how you feel about that yourself. Suffice it to say that men should be men, and women should be women. A strong, opinionated woman is no less a woman, and she can be of great value in a marriage. My wife had a special saying about spouses trying to change their "other half" into something they were not. It went like this, "I have to let Lindsay be Lindsay." What wisdom was in that saying that we call a "Gramism."

16) While Paul was a reasonable man, and he even appealed with reason to people who didn't get the truth, he is not going to argue unnecessarily. Authority both from the Hebrew Scriptures and from nature have made their argument - the issue is settled for Paul and the other Apostles ("we"). If someone just wants to be contentious, Paul has no time for that. If you find yourself a person who is frequently challenging the accepted interpretations of Scripture, maybe it's time to get in line with the many who have gone before and for whom these matters are settled. Don't argue for the sake of argument!

HOW TO COME TO THE TABLE 20 - 34

EXISTENCE OF SECTARIANISM

17), 18), 19) Paul must have taken great joy in verse 2 in saying "I commend you," for again, there was so much in the church at Corinth that was not commendable. Sadly, he now comes to an issue for which he cannot commend them - the way they handled themselves on occasion when they came together, when they assembled. The principle of synergy suggests that a group can do more together than the sum total of what they could do apart from each other. That should be true of the church of the Lord Jesus, but it was not true at Corinth. Things did not get better when they convene, but they became worse. Paul would occasionally receive reports from the churches, and he had certainly gotten information from Corinth, some of which grieved him. The schismatic nature of the assembly goes against the teachings of Christ Himself. He had prayed that His followers would be one, as He and the Father were one. The word translated "divisions" here gives our word "schisms" (*schisma*). He has dealt with this issue earlier in the letter, but he raises it now in the context of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. If believers should be united anywhere, this table is certainly a place for that unity! The word translated "factions" gives us our word "heresies" (which is exactly what the King James Version uses to translate it - well done, men!). God is able, however, to bring good from evil. The presence of the "heresies," the differences among the people in the assembly, enables that the tested-and-approved can be recognized. Darkness shows up light, and such. Only when the wrong is evident can the true saints separate themselves from it, as Paul would have them do (see 2 Corinthians 6:14 - 18).

EXCESSES WITH THE SYMBOL

20), 21) The church of Jesus Christ has two observed ordinances - Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, or Communion. An ordinance is a symbolic rite that sets forth some major truth of the gospel. The Lord's Supper speaks of Christ's death, Baptism, of His resurrection. Neither of these has any saving effect; each is only to remember and show forth what Christ did for us to be saved. The Lord's Supper is an oft-repeated corporate memorial meal. The church at Corinth had a way of going to excess, as they showed in their abuse of spiritual gifts, and now here in the Lord's table. So far from proper was their meal that Paul said it was not even the Lord's Supper! People did not wait to partake together; some ate and drank too much, while others received nothing at all. As in the words on Spiritual gifts, Paul was not commending their behavior, but rather chiding them for it. Theirs was a negative example!

22) The selfless death of Christ was to be set forth in this meal. Corinth had done just the opposite by their sectarian,

selfish attitudes in the meal and its accompanying feast. Poor believers were made to feel poor at tables spread by the rich and kept exclusively for the wealthy. This activity showed despite for members of Christ's body - not at all what the meal was intended to do! Parties could be held at home; there should be equality in the Body.

EXPLANATION OF THE SUPPER

23) Now Paul begins to set forth the full meaning of the Lord's table. This information he received from Jesus, presumably during his Arabian desert experience. The timing was the night Jesus was betrayed - Thursday night - but earlier, in the upper room. The Passover celebration had ended, and two of the elements on the table were included by Jesus in this first memorial meal. Paul mentions first the bread - which was clearly unleavened.

24) Jesus prayed over the bread, a prayer of thanksgiving, and then He indicated that the bread represented His body, which was given in sacrifice for us just the next morning. Our catholic friends mistake the words, "this is my body" to mean that the bread literally becomes flesh. Jesus meant what we would mean when pointing to a photo and saying, "this is my wife." He was standing there in His body, and He would not have eaten Himself!

25) Jesus then referred to the cup and its contents as representing the new covenant which would be sealed with His blood in just hours. How solemn was this meal, and how seriously we should take it today! The law had come by Moses, now a covenant of grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. How blessed we are to celebrate it today!

26) Each believer who celebrates the table of the Lord preaches a sermon in so doing. It is a proclamation of His death for our sins - the greatest story ever told. And we do it simply, though ceremoniously, by partaking in memory of Him the elements on the table. "Until He comes" and "as often" speak of the age-long nature of this ordinance.

EXAMINATION OF SELF

27) While we do not have to be worthy to celebrate the meal, there is a worthy manner, and conversely, an unworthy manner, in which to partake. We must not unworthily partake by doing so in disunity of the body, which seems to have been a major problem in Corinth. Christ lived for, prayed for, died for ONE body. Let us come together!

28), 29) Self-examination and confession of known sin also help us to partake of the meal in a worthy manner. We must not lightly come to the table with no thought of our sin. The great men of Scripture knew what it was to confess sin and sinfulness - Moses, David, Job, Daniel, Peter, Paul. We, too, must hate our sin to love Christ. Now some would handle this quandary - to eat or not to eat - by staying away from the Lord's table. This is not the answer. Rather we should examine ourselves, confess our sin, make amends with brethren where we can, and then come to the table with joy and thanksgiving that God made a way for sinners to enjoy spiritual worship.

30) Carelessness in spiritual matters not only has eternal and spiritual impact, but there are also temporal and physical implications. While we do well not to judge these matters today, the Apostle, who had so much the mind of Christ and the pen of inspiration, told that some Corinthians had become sick, and others had died for unworthily partaking!

31) He makes it abundantly clear here that he had spoken of failure to clean up our lives and confess our sins that brought the chastening hand of God. For he adds here that those who exercise themselves in the matter of self-judgment will not suffer as these did. So, let us keep short accounts with God in confessing our sins.

32) How much our heavenly Father loves us! He sent Jesus to die for our sins; He called us to Himself and saved us. He made a way for believers to deal with the defilement of daily sin. And when we fail to respond, He chastens us to awaken our sense of need for Him, reminding us that we are his, and no longer under the world's judgment.

33) One of the strengths of a local assembly is its unity. Corinth had a real lack here, and their spiritual advisor was guiding them toward correcting the problem. When the folks gathered for the Lord's table, formerly they had acted schismatically. Now he directs them to wait for the whole company to gather, and then to eat as a unified body.

34) How practical that he would instruct people to eat before coming to church so they would not be driven by hunger to jump in before others arrived. Apostolic instruction is not staid and out of reach for the common man. It is rather putting truth on the shelf where all can reach it. Let us approach Communion with such a practical mindset.

CHAPTER 12

Not so many years ago, the issue of spiritual gifts was very divisive. The rise of the modern charismatic movement in the 1960's engendered many arguments and battles, most of which produced more heat than they did light! I can't tell you how many hours I even spent in debates with family and friends about whether the sign gifts were temporary or permanent! I am ashamed and embarrassed that I and others spent so much time and energy dividing into different camps based on our position on these matters. The reality is that the gifts were never designed to divide, but rather to unite us as believers. Now, mind you, I still have my very strong beliefs about these matters, but I am not on a mission to straighten out every person who disagrees with me about spiritual gifts anymore. Believe what you would like to believe, just be able to defend your position from Scripture and not from experience (never a test of truth!). And if you disagree with me, well, as Dr. McGee used to say, "You have just as much right to be wrong as I do to be right!"

THE UNIFYING GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

1 - 13

THE MARK OF THE SPIRIT

1) The dear saints at Corinth had so many problems! Does it remind you somewhat of churches today? It comforts us to know that even first century Christians had issues to be handled, and that we are not the first generation to struggle among ourselves. Three chapters now before us concern the issue of spiritual gifts, Paul instructing the church to behave properly in these matters. Proper doctrine produces proper deportment.

2), 3) Before coming to Christ these Gentiles had worshiped idols, false gods who were unable to speak to them. Paul says that something “led” these people. We must conclude that behind the dumb idols were real, foul, spirits we call “demons.” God’s Spirit leads men to do and speak right things. Men need to know to distinguish between the two. Here, as in 1 John 4, we are given a test for recognizing the origin of a spirit. In each place it is a doctrinal confession relating to Jesus! For any who might have bought the line that doctrine is unimportant, this contradicts that notion. Some say that “doctrine divides.” Yes, it divides between the true and the false, a necessary and blessed thing. The central doctrine of Scripture must be Christology, the study of Christ. It is worth saying that “you cannot think right in the rest unless you think right in Him.” All truth centers in Jesus.

THE MANDATE OF THE SPIRIT - UNITY

4), 5), 6) Here is so much truth! Paul is discussing the diversity of gifts given to the body, the diversity of ministries that these gifts enable, and the diversity of ways they may be put into use. With all this difference, the gifts flow from the same Father (God), the same Son (Lord), and the same Holy Spirit. Here is a strong Trinitarian statement. The Spirit endows believers with the gifts, as we shall also see later in our passage. The word translated “Gifts” gives us our word “charismatic.” The gift equips us to do certain kinds of ministry, or service, as administered by the church’s Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. The original word behind “service” comes over into English letter for letter as “deacon.” It is then the Father Who “energizes,” taken directly from the word translated “works.” While the variety of gifts in the church in Corinth seems to have been a source of conflict and schism, the opposite should have been the case. The body has many needs, and the various gifts work together for the meeting of those needs. The functioning of the body in its missions to evangelize sinners, edify the Saints, and exalt the Savior requires all the gifts the Spirit has given. This co-laboring with God and with one another has a unifying effect on a healthy body. Apparently, the Corinthian church was not so healthy.

7) The Spirit is then demonstrated to be in a person’s life when the endowment He has given works for the good of the body common. Spiritual gifts were given **to** the individuals **for** the good of the body. Gifts are unifying, not for personal and private edification. “Common good” translates a verb that means “to bring together.” When the church is schismatic, something is not working correctly. Read John 17 and notice there Christ’s prayer for unity of believers.

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SPIRIT - GIFTS

8), 9) 10) Nine gifts are listed here as endowed upon the believers by the Spirit. The “word of wisdom” is the ability to communicate truth so that people can apply it their lives. This is such a practical thing, one would think every pastor’s flock would benefit if he had and exercised this gift. The “word of knowledge” communicates truth to give a better understanding of life. What a help this gift is to a teacher of the Scriptures. “Faith” is a special ability to trust God for unusual things. If you read a biography of George Mueller, you will see this gift in action. “Healing” meant the ability to bring physical wholeness to a diseased or deformed body. Acts 3 has in the first dozen verses an account of Peter exercising this gift. Behind the words “miraculous powers” are two Greek words that give us our words “energy” and “dynamite.” This was clearly an ability to do supernatural things by God’s power. “Prophecy” was receiving new truth from God, revealing it to men. “Distinguishing between spirits” had to do with determining whether or not one whose speech came from some spirit actually spoke from God. “Tongues” and “the interpretation of tongues” were companion gifts, given to two different people. This was speaking in a known language previously unknown to speaker, with someone interpreting it.

THE MAKING OF MEMBERS BY THE SPIRIT

11) These (and other) gifts were all given by the same Holy Spirit. He decides who gets what gift, and then He bestows them according to His sovereign will. They are not to be sought by individuals as though we could choose our own gift, and they are no cause for pride - they are “gifts!” Abuse of spiritual gifts is a great cause of division.

12) The Apostle now defines his metaphor - Christ’s church is like the human body. Both have many (different) parts, and yet they each are a unit. Division is not an option; the physical body and the body of Christ function best when all the parts are present and working. Unity is a mandate. All the parts are needed, and each is important. The many different parts (gifted people) combine to make one complete, properly functioning whole.

13) Believers in Jesus Christ, regardless of ethnic background or social standing, experience Holy Spirit baptism at the time of their conversion. We were baptized by Jesus (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16) in the medium of the Holy Spirit. This results in our permanent membership in the body of Christ, as well as our receiving the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. These truths should thrill us with the knowledge of what we have as believers in Jesus!

EVERY GIFT IS IMPORTANT (OR A RECIPE FOR A HEALTHY BODY) 1 COR 12:14 - 31

THE EXAMPLE OF THE BODY’S UNITY

14) In any living organism, the presence of all necessary parts is vital for proper functioning. This is true in nature, and it is true in the spiritual realm, as well. The body of Christ, and especially its local manifestation, the local church, has been blessed by the Holy Spirit with many varied gifts to make it a unified whole. The emphasis on glamorizing certain gifts in the body is wrong. None is more important or necessary than the others. The body could not properly function if it were devoid of any of the Spirit’s gifts. The many are vital.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE BODY’S UNITY

15), 16) An absurd illustration is used to show the absurdity of the Corinthian error of magnifying certain sensational gifts over other gifts. In the human body no rivalry exists between the oft-unnoticed, covered foot and the exposed and admired

hand. Each is vital in its own purposes in “body-life.” If there were no functioning feet, could we easily “walk on our hands” to get around in life? Certainly not - we need the feet for mobility, as we need the hand for other tasks. Absurdity is appealed to again - the beautiful eye is not to be envied by the less-attractive, rarely-mentioned ear. The ear does not leave the body for jealousy over the greater amount of attention paid to the eye. Yes, we enjoy the beauty of the world around us as we are enabled to see it with the eye. It is also true that we love to hear the bird sing, the cricket chirp, and the lovely sound of a loved one's voice speaking our name. Eye and ear work together to bless the physical body's life, and all spiritual gifts are designed to cooperatively bless the body called the church.

17), 18), 19), 20) In the human body and in Christ's body, the church, there is a great need for variety of parts and a variety of functions. If everyone has the same gift, there would be great gaps in the body's life. Every gift is needed to make a healthy, well-rounded, smoothly functioning body. We have no right to challenge God's wisdom in distributing the gifts and arranging them in the various local assemblies. To the minutest detail, He has planned for things to be exactly as His infinite wisdom deemed appropriate. If all the prophets splintered off and formed their own body, to whom would they prophesy? And how would the rest of the body fill its need for prophecy. The mercy-showers need the rulers to keep them organized; the rulers need the servants to keep them sweet. How wise is our Lord to create this organism called the human body; and how much we see His wisdom in the creation of the Church. How foolish was Corinth (and any who would do it today) for trying to make one gift fit everybody, and to magnify that gift above the others. His plan is better than any perversion of it.

21) The eye, the hand, the head, the feet, are all necessary to the body, and even to each other in the functioning of the physical body. And every Holy Spirit given gift is necessary to the body of Christ for it to function as it should. The gifts are complementary, not in conflict. There is no competition for supremacy in the body of Christ, and any dear friends who make some gifts more important in their thinking than other gifts, do a disservice to themselves and to the body.

22), 23) Some in Corinth (no doubt they have many offspring today) were placing relative values on spiritual gifts. To this crowd, some gifts were more honorable than others, some were stronger, and some were more or less presentable. These values made people want to seek certain gifts and avoid certain other gifts. The reality is that every believer is endowed with a spiritual gift by the will of the Spirit (12:11), not by our own wills. After many years of suffering with issues of the digestive system, and no few surgeries intended to address these issues, I can tell you that the unattractive, hidden small bowel is vital to the normal, comfortable functioning of the human body. No gift in the body we call the church is less important than any other gift, regardless of visibility and apparent beauty.

24), 25) The gifts do not function independently - God has combined them. Imagine a recipe for some splendid dish of food being spoiled because the cook thought the baking powder was not important and left it out! If we will have life in Christ, we must mix the Word and faith (Hebrews 4:1). If we will have a productive body in the church, we must mix the gifts together - the so-called “unlovely” with the “lovely,” the strong with the weak, the lesser with the greater (and all of these are men's designations, not God's). We must leave none out!

26) The diverse members must be so combined that they have a great sympathy for each other. As one hurts, all must feel the pain; when one has cause for joy, all must share in it. There should be no favorites, no schisms, no cliques, or such. The Lord Jesus, the Head of the church, felt the pain of the persecution of His body by Saul of Tarsus. He didn't ask why Saul persecuted the church; He rather spoke of Saul persecuting Him! The parts of the physical body, and the body of Christ, and those of the local manifestation of that body - the local church - are inextricably tied together and mutually essential for effective functioning.

THE EXECUTION OF THE BODY'S UNITY

27) The emphasized word here is “You.” The saints in Corinth belong to Christ's body - even with all their failings! And the individuals were each members of that growing, living, learning, serving, reproducing, worshiping, body.

28) Paul lists just a few of the Holy-Spirit-given gifts within the church. The Apostles and prophets were foundational gifts - they were temporary, and they were not to be repeated after the foundation was laid. He mentions six other gifts, three of which were service gifts, three were sign gifts (miracles, tongues, healings). These latter were early-church evidences of the reality and authenticity of this new thing called the church.

29), 30) This is a series of questions that are framed in the original language to demand a negative answer. It would go like this, for example, “Every believer was not an apostle, were they? Not every Christian was a prophet, were they?” This goes to the point that the Holy Spirit sovereignly assigned various gifts to different people so that the body would be complete with all its parts, lacking nothing. Nor should we seek the gifts for ourselves that God has given to someone else. The principle of contentment from Philippians 4:11 is applicable here.

31) If the verb here is an imperative (a command), it is directing the church to ask God to send them the needed gifts. If it is indicative (a statement of fact), it is a criticism of individual believers trying to decide which gifts they should have instead of relying on the goodness and grace of the Holy Spirit. We are not supposed to “seek gifts.” We are rather to exercise the gifts given us by the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 13

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

1 Cor 13:1-13

This “Ode to Love” is the greatest description of the leading Christian virtue in all of Holy Writ, yea, in all of literature. The

word that is used here for "love" is the highest of the several Greek words for love - "agape." It speaks of the *"decision, followed by action, to pursue the welfare of another, no matter what it costs me, and whether I get anything in return or not."* It is not a feeling, but a choice, an attitude, and the consequent action. It is the love of God in John 3:16 and Romans 5:8. It is a love, not of pleasure, but of preciousness, not of selfishness, but of self-sacrifice. It is God's love for sinners, a mother's love for her child, of a husband for his wife. It is a love that chooses rather to give than to get, to bless, and in blessing is blessed itself. It is the first-fruit of the Spirit.

THE PREEMINENCE OF LOVE

1) In serving Christ, the ability to speak well may enhance ministry and enable us to help more people. It is the basic communication skill. The highest eloquence of men and angels that is devoid of love (the desire to bless others) is just noise-making. Paul uses words here that sound like what he is describing - "clanging gong and cymbal." This literary device is called "onomatopoeia" - a word whose pronunciation makes its own sound.

2) The Corinthian assembly was filled with strife over who had the superior gift. There was a lot of selfishness and self-seeking in the battle. Several important gifts are mentioned here in great bestowment - "all mysteries and... knowledge," mountain-moving faith. If Paul has all of this without love, he considers himself useless in Christ's work. Love is essential in the *manner* (vs 1) and essential in the *methods* (verse 2) of our Christian service.

3) Love is also essential as the *motive* of our service. It is the basis for benevolence here. One may be so charitable as to give away everything he has to help the less-fortunate; he may even die as a martyr for the cause of Christ. But if love isn't behind his giving and dying, heaven will find him without reward. Love blesses our gifts and our giving. And without love, all that we have and do amount to nothing.

THE PERFECTIONS OF LOVE

4) Here are 14 characteristics of God's love that should be manifest in us. The first is "patience;" it is "the capacity to be wronged and not retaliate." Next, love is "kind;" this is benevolence to the one doing us harm - how like Jesus! Love doesn't envy - it is "content." Love does not possess the attitude of pride, nor does it display the actions of pride. It is unostentatious and humble. See here Philippians 4:11 and Proverbs 27:2 for contentment, humility.

5) Love is further described as "not rude" - love acts like a lady or a gentleman. "Not self-seeking" strikes me as the heart of love. See Philippians 2:4 for Christ's self-forgetfulness. Love is "good-tempered," it doesn't get provoked or angry easily. The loving person doesn't have a score-book of who injured him and how often. It can forget wrongs done.

6) Here the apostle declares that love is "high-principled." In Philippians 4:8 he had given instructions on the thought-life; it was to be kept on a high and noble plain. Love doesn't live in the gutter, seeking the lowest common denominator. It lives high and tries to lift others up to a plain that is worthy of man who was made in God's image.

7) If evil were falling like rain, love would put up an umbrella over its object to protect the loved one. Love doesn't play the cynic; it doesn't distrust the one whom it loves. It is believing. Some Puddleglums (see C. S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair*) in life find all the bad prospects for any situation. Not so with love - it is the eternal optimist - always seeing the best possibility in any circumstance. Love just doesn't give up! It keeps on trying, knowing that there is a way to win the day.

THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE

8) Perhaps this is the climax of the chapter - "Love never fails!" Corinth was enamored with the gifts like prophecy, tongues, words of knowledge, and yet it seemed to be missing the joy of simple love. Paul now sets out to demonstrate the superiority of love on the basis of its endurance. The three aforementioned gifts, he declares, will not last - they are temporary in nature. They will pass away in time. But the superior love will outlast them all.

9), 10) While there is some (and not small) disagreement as to the meaning of these verses, let me set forth what I believe that they clearly state. Remember that he is talking about permanent love and temporary gifts. God used these gifts, prophecy, knowledge, etc., to reveal His will to His people. They were partial means to a complete end. The complete ("perfection") end they looked toward was the finished revelation we have in the Bible. When John penned the "Amen" at the end of the Apocalypse, God's revelation to man was complete, and the temporary means of giving us that revelation were no more needed, so he put them aside. While they were necessary for a season (like manna), when the need for them ended, so did the temporary gifts.

11), 12) This is the first of two illustrations designed to show that temporary things may be set aside when their usefulness is past. Paul speaks of the speech, thinking, and reasoning of a child. They are necessary steps in his development, but they mature into the speech, thinking and reasoning of an adult. No more "Mommy's widdle boy" when a son is grown. His second illustration uses an ancient brass mirror, with its somewhat cloudy and distorted image reflection. The incomplete revealed truth of God with some shadows and questions would give way to the blessed crystal-clear picture of Him and His will in the completed Word of God. When this happened, the short-term (temporary gifts) would give way to the perfect revelation of Scripture. They would end.

13) While temporary gifts would be set aside, Christian virtues would last throughout the age of the church. He mentions "faith," which when we see Christ will turn to **sight**. He speaks of "**hope**," which will become **reality** at Christ's coming. And then there is "**love**," that greatest of Christian virtues, which, when we meet our Lord face-to-face, will grow into its fullest strength. Thus, he says, "The greatest of these is love." We say, "Amen!"

CHAPTER 14

PROPHECY AND TONGUES - TO SPEAK OR NOT TO SPEAK? 1 - 12

There seem to have been issues in the Corinthian assembly related to the gifts of the Spirit and their use. In chapter 12,

Paul spoke more about the nature and names of the gifts; in chapter 13, he set forth the law of love as the ruling principle in the use of the gifts. Now, in chapter 14, he gives details explaining and regulating the exercise of the gifts. Some in Corinth seemed to value more highly the miracle, "sign gifts." They were indeed extraordinary, and certainly more visible in their exercise than the ministry gifts. Here the Apostle balances that valuation with a true understanding of those gifts.

THE USE OF THE GIFT(S) MUST BE CONSTRUCTIVE FOR THE CHURCH

1) The three verbs in this verse are all plural - they were speaking to the assembly, not to individuals within the assembly. The first two verbs were present tense imperatives - the church should "keep on pursuing" love, and they were to "keep on desiring" that the assembly be filled with all the spiritual gifts. That way there would be no lack in the functioning of the body! However, if they were to desire the presence of one gift more than others, they should desire the gift of prophecy. He is setting this above especially the gift of tongues, which they seemed to magnify, perhaps because of its miraculous nature and its visibility.

2) Standing alone, one speaking in a known tongue (unknown by the speaker) can only be understood by God. The assembly is not benefitted by this, for he is speaking mysteries, only known by the Spirit. The goal of exercising gifts in the assembly should be the edification of the assembly, not the notice of one by many for some miraculous activity. This is not a theater, and gift use is not a show!

3) By contrast, the use of the gift of prophecy in the church is universally beneficial. The entire assembly may find in the utterance of new truth from God that they are growing, being built up by knowledge and application of that truth. Such prophesying may also provide encouragement - the person is "called alongside" the one prophesying that they may stand together in strength. The "consolation" spoken of as resulting from the gift of prophecy points out the fellowship, the commonality of heart among those blessed by the use of the gift. The gift is seen as bringing friends together in a common cause, to accomplish something in the unity of purpose. This is truly a blessing to the church.

4) One who speaks in tongues without someone else being present with the gift of interpretation truly stands alone, benefitted alone in the use of their gift - which is not the purpose of the Spirit, Who wishes to build up the whole body. Even the person so speaking would have no knowledge of what he had uttered, and what good is utterance without understanding? None at all. The Apostle had made it clear that the best goal was benefit to the church (not the individual).

1 Corinthians 12:7 "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good.**" **10:24** "Let no one seek his own good, but **the good of his neighbor.**" Some even see Paul's remark here as sarcastic - suggesting that the person is off the mark for trying to build themselves up instead of the church.

5) 1 Corinthians 13:8 told us that the gift of tongues was temporary in nature; it would cease at the proper time. So, while Paul gives directions for the exercise of that gift in this passage, it is not to be seen as directing the use of the gift today (a statement that not all will accept as accurate - but we will have to disagree on that). For Paul to be sincere about wishing all spoke in tongues would contradict the sovereignty of the Spirit in the assignment of the gifts. My thinking here is that since the church was putting such a high value on this particular gift, Paul put his tongue in his cheek and said that he wished they all had the gift they valued so much. He then returns to a more serious tone and speaks of the superiority of the gift of prophecy because of its blessing to the whole body.

THE USE OF THE GIFTS MUST HAVE CLARITY IN COMMUNICATION

6) Paul here relates the substance of the supernatural utterances of those speaking in tongues. Their benefit would be real (with interpretation) because the Spirit-given-utterances" contained revelation or knowledge (new truth from heaven) or prophecy (foretelling the future or calling out against sin) or teaching (giving the meaning of a revelation, helping the hearers understand it). Of course, once the Bible was complete there was no more need for vehicles of revelation in the church (tongues, prophecies, visions, dreams, and such). As 13:8 said, "*when that which was complete was come, that which was in part would be done away.*"

7), 8) Here is an emphasis on clarity for understanding. No one can sing along with an instrument whose playing is not giving distinct sounds. The military bugle, if it gives indistinct sounds, will not stir the troops to ready for battle (or whatever command the bugler may be sounding). If music is not pleasing to the ear, it will not be received well by the hearers. An attack by an enemy would be more devastating if the alert sounded did not help people get inside the city walls and close the gates! The use of tongues is futile if the gift does not communicate a spiritual message. Instead of "this is what God wanted me to know or do," the observation would be, "okay, you spoke in tongues - now what?"

9), 10), 11), 12) The drawn conclusion is here: If your speech lacks intelligibility, how will others in the church know what is said? It will be as if you were just talking into the air with no purpose. In verses 10 and 11 Paul makes it clear that the gift of tongues was not some heavenly gibberish, but it was rather the speaking of a message from God in a real, known language that the speaker did not know (see Acts 2:8 - 11 for similar clarity on that point). Whenever there was a legitimate use of the gift of tongues (and there were only three such historical uses in Scripture [Acts 2, 10, 19]), there would have been someone [and not the tongues-speaker] who would interpret. I say "not the tongues-speaker" because 1 Corinthians 12:10 made it clear the gifts were to be found in different people. The Corinthians were eager to have gifts that were manifest, observable, and Paul said, "then strive to build up the church." If a gift puts the spotlight on the user, and if a gift builds up the user, the Holy Spirit is not the Giver of that gift.

WE ARE TO BUILD UP THE BODY 14:13 - 26

The issues suggested by our text today are thorny indeed. The best of friends and close family have fallen on opposite sides of the matter of spiritual gifts. While these are not matters of orthodoxy versus heresy, and while we should love and

fellowship with those of contrary views, we must know what we believe. The “thus saith the Lord” - that is the Word of God - is the final sentence, not anyone’s personal experience. So, we come to the Scripture to carefully study what the matter really is. God will not let us down, and the Holy Spirit will indeed enable us to conclude as we should!

UNFRUITFUL VERSUS UNDERSTANDING

13) Read here 1 Corinthians 12:8 - 10, where you will see that the Holy Spirit gave the gifts of tongues and of interpretation to “different” people (the word “another” includes the idea of a different person). That must then make us translate this verse something like this, “*the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that ‘someone’ may interpret...*” The tongues-speaker and interpreter were clearly two different people.

14) Furthermore, the one who spoke in tongues was miraculously enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak a known language, but it was not known to him. This verse seems to indicate that the speaker had no idea what they had said while speaking in tongues. The “unfruitful mind” was made fruitful when another gifted person interpreted.

15) Paul now gives a general rule that is of more importance than the rare (only three historical occurrences in the New Testament) event of someone speaking in tongues. It is this: When I speak, sing, or pray (especially in public worship), I want my mind involved as well as my spirit. Feelings without understanding are shallow.

CONFIRMATION OR CONFUSION

16), 17) Intelligible communication will edify the body, while unintelligible utterances leave others wondering just what may be going on. We need to remember that worship is very little about us as individuals - it is more about God, the primary Audience in worship, and others in the assembly who may benefit from what the Spirit leads us to share. To affirm what is being said by giving an “amen,” one must certainly have an understanding of the utterances. It is not only poor theology, it is also weak ethics that act as though those who do not “get it” when it comes to tongues-speaking “just haven’t arrived yet.” Such thinking is shallow and egotistical at the very least.

PAUL’S INDICATION AND PROPHETIC ILLUSTRATION

18), 19) I beg those who “disagree” with the position set forth here to do so “agreeably.” What did the apostle mean by “*I speak in tongues more than all of you?*” May I suggest an alternative option to the gift of tongues (because I cannot see Paul boasting about a “gift”)? Paul was able to communicate in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin, and probably several other languages - might he have meant this? For certain, he makes intelligible speech (like prophecy) 2,000 times better than its “tongues-speaking” counterpart. We used to sing, “O, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise!” May God stir us to effectively use the one tongue we have.

20) In Corinth, Christians were acting and thinking like little children. That could be positive if we are innocent with regard to evil. But it is negative in Spiritual matters when we are playing with the package, not the gift. Or if we are given to ignoring the Giver, focusing on the gift. The Corinthian believers held false high estimate of incidentals. They seemed to be boasting of the presence of many of the “evident” gifts, things observable - like tongues and prophecy. They didn’t seem to have as much interest in the “behind-the-scenes” gifts, like showing mercy, giving, and such.

21), 22) Paul cites Isaiah 28:11, 12b on the subject of tongues. God used men of other languages in the Hebrew Scripture era as a sign to Israel (unbelieving Israel). Isaiah likely was looking to the Babylonian invasion that was to come. This was necessary because Israel would not listen to her own God-sent prophets! What a shame!! Would Corinth learn from Israel’s mistake? Paul then makes a transition from the illustration to a current issue. Even now, tongues were a sign from God, a miracle to demonstrate to unbelieving Jews that this Gospel of God’s grace in Christ was approved of Jehovah and designed for their acceptance. The gifts of tongues, along with the other “sign-gifts,” were credentials for those teaching that this new Church thing was **from God** and **for them**. Our credentials today are found in the completed Word of God.

INVITING CRITICISM OR IMPACTING CONVERSIONS

23), 24), 25) It appears the Corinthian church was abusing the gift of tongues, perhaps with people mimicking the gift. The failure to have an interpreter present meant that 1) this was not the Holy Spirit’s work (He would have arranged the presence of an interpreter), and 2) the tongues had no spiritual benefit. Prophecy, the superior gift, edifies believers. So, in the assembly of believers, if everyone is speaking in tongues, some (including visiting unbelievers) will deem this crowd insane! There is no edification of saints or evangelizing of sinners in such activity. But if the Christ-rejecter or the honest inquirer come into a service of worship and hear people prophesying (that is, putting forth God’s Word), they may be gripped by conviction of their sin and God’s judgment. Such spiritual working would give the lie to Satan and disclose the truth to their hearts in a manifest way. Such people may experience repentance and prostrate themselves in worship, recognizing that God is real and that He is at work to redeem them.

FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE GIFTS 26 - 40

GUIDELINES TO PREVENT CONFUSION AND CHAOS

26) Having contrasted two scenarios, one of chaos and resulting confusion, one of order and consequent conviction - he now asks how it was with them. Paul then describes a worship situation of universal participation, selecting five things people might do in a service of worship as led by the Spirit. Then he gives the principle that should govern participation by multiple individuals: “*Do everything in a way that leads to the edification of the body.*” This idea keeps surfacing - the building up of the group is the main thing, not a focus on the individual. God help us to lose ourselves as individuals in the body, and maybe it is there where we will truly find ourselves!

27), 28) Bear in mind that if the gift of tongues has ended (as I believe that it had), this is not instruction for present-day

exercise of that gift in the church (or anywhere else). Restrictions were placed on the use of tongues: first of all, it was not essential that the gift be exercised (even when it was clearly still an active gift), as demonstrated by the phrase "if anyone..." Secondly, if anyone did speak in tongues, no more than three should do so, and that only one at a time. Finally, they were to use that gift only if an interpreter is present to give the sense of what was said in the tongue. There is a rather obvious reason for this - a language not understood by the hearers benefits no one. Therefore, if no interpreter were present, the would-be tongues-speaker should just silently meditate on his truth, communicating with God without speech.

29), 30) Of prophecy, Paul speaks words of encouragement, not of restriction (as with the tongues): There is no "if" here as in the previous restriction. The prophets should speak (it was not optional), and as many as two or three should hold forth. Listeners should thoroughly discern ("*weigh*") what they say, that is, they should contemplate it. The last directive about prophesying was that rather than waiting turns, as with tongues, a parenthetical, spontaneous explanatory utterance would take precedence over the main discourse, and the first speaker would pause to allow the second to take the floor (as we might in a meal stop eating the steak to add salt or steak sauce). There was still an orderliness, not a jumble of confusion in the worship time.

31) Orderliness in worship is again enjoined - specifically, that only one prophet was to prophesy at a time. This would give the maximum instruction (touching the mind) and encouragement (blessing the heart).

32) Allowance for orderly interruption is possible because in the superior gift of prophecy there is no ecstatic, trance-like utterance. The speaker can and must control his spirit in the pursuit of orderly worship.

33) All of the above demonstrated a plan for order and peace, not disorder and confusion. Even when the sign gifts were still legitimately being exercised, they were done so without the modern confusion that exists when multiple people are jumping to their feet and speaking in tongues or even in the language of the locality. My single exposure to this was visiting a friend's church as a teenager. Almost everyone in the congregation was uttering at the same time, and I was completely confused, just as Paul mentioned earlier in this chapter. Videos of other such chaotic services have confirmed that what I saw was not a rare exception, but something that is often practiced in many places.

GOVERNANCE INVOLVING FEMALE PARTICIPATION

34), 35) How difficult these verses are to understand and explain. I must confess my shortfall of certainty about Paul's intended meaning. Some would set this all aside as cultural and not mandated for the duration of the age. Others would take a very literal view and place women under the order of silence when crossing the threshold of the door of the church's meeting place. The best understanding is somewhere in between, I must think. May I venture that this text be considered alongside 1 Timothy 2:8 - 14, which I insert here:

1 Timothy 2:8 I desire then that in every place the men (the word for "males") should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; **9** likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, **10** but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. **11** Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. **12** I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man (again, the word for "males"); rather, she is to remain quiet. **13** For Adam was formed first, then Eve; **14** and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

It seems best to me that women teach other women and children, but not to teach men. Paul's rationale is (1) the order of creation and (2) that Eve was the one deceived by the Devil. This no doubt raises the ire of some and the laughter of others. I maintain, however, that since these things looked back 4,000 years when they were written, the 2,000 years of cultural changes from then til now have not removed their standing as guiding principles. These things in no way demean the fairer sex, nor do they suggest inferiority of understanding and wisdom. They just follow the divine principle that man is head of the woman, and her behavior should reflect that knowledge.

GETTING OUTSIDE OUR NARROW EXPERIENCE

36) When I was a young believer, a new Christian, all I knew was my church, my pastor, the teaching under which I sat. As I grew in experience and exposure to other believers, to different congregations, I learned not to think so narrowly - as ours was the only church who did it right. The Corinthians are cautioned by the Apostle to not think of themselves as exclusive recipients of God's Word. The Word of God did not come *from them*. It came from elsewhere *to them!* So we are neither source nor exclusive recipient of the Scripture, and we must not be so egocentric.

37), 38) A person with a true prophetic gift will know that Paul's written words to them are the Lord's commands. Even a non-prophet who is spiritual, who is in tune with the Spirit of God will see this. If he doesn't, then he is not acknowledged as what he thinks he is! To confess Jesus before men leads to Jesus confessing us before the Father (Matthew 10:32). And as the next verse in Matthew indicates, to deny Jesus before men will result in our being denied by Jesus before the Father. The same principle is here - if those in Corinth recognize and follow Paul's Apostolic authority, then well done. If they do not, there will be a price to pay when he comes to town. He will reject those who reject his teaching and instruction.

39), 40) The Corinthians were to obey this command - be zealous in your desire for the gift of prophecy in the church. It is

the superior gift, even though it may not be as showy as the gift of tongues. It will stand alone, needing no interpretation, and it will guide the believers. Secondly, though the gift of tongues is (was) the inferior of the two gifts, those with other gifts must stop forbidding the tongues-speakers from exercising their gift as well. Let them not forget that clear guidelines have been laid down in regulation of the gift of tongues. It must be interpreted, limited to no more than three people in one service, have some benefit for the hearers, not done in a chaotic, confusing way, and as with all gifts, governed in its use by love. So, while this was an active gift in the church age, it could be used, but in a limited, controlled way.

CHAPTER 15

There are in Scripture a number of chapters of "signal importance." Some that come to mind include Psalm 23, John 3, Romans 8, and 1 Corinthians 13. This 15th chapter could certainly be added to that list, as the teaching here on the resurrection is of such significance. My final exam in one semester of "Pauline Epistles" was a single essay question: "Discuss 1 Corinthians 15." I hand-wrote 12 pages and received a 96 on the exam. It was a "killer." Let us approach this chapter with eagerness to learn, readiness to believe, and willingness to obey where we are challenged in our behavior!

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION 1- 11

The doctrine of the Christian faith that separates it from all other faiths is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is the Gibraltar of Christianity, the foundation of our faith, the keystone in the arch of our hope for heaven. Remove the resurrection, and all that we hold dear falls like a house of cards. But thank God, Jesus did rise, and this chapter goes farther to prove that fact than any other similar portion of the Word of God.

THE ELEMENTS OF THE GOSPEL

- 1) Paul addresses saints: "brothers" suggests "born of the same womb," in this case, born of the Spirit. Those outside the faith cannot grasp resurrection truth, for it is spiritually discerned. He reminds them of the gospel, the good news, which he had declared to them. They had eagerly received it, & they were standing on it as the good foundation which it is, this gospel. The Corinthian believers had cast their lot with Jesus & His followers.
- 2) Through this gospel, salvation had come to them ("saved" is a passive voice verb, they did not save themselves, but God saved them) since (not "if") they were holding fast to it. The "believing in vain" is cleared up by verse 17: if Christ didn't rise, our preaching is vain, and so is your faith! But that is the point - Christ did rise, and our faith in Him is not futile. It accomplishes the greatest thing in the world, taking a sinner from death to life, darkness to light!
- 3), 4), 5) This is the way truth is transmitted from one generation to another - it is received, and it is passed on. In this case, Paul eagerly grabbed the gospel, and he gladly passed it on to those who came after him. This is a priority item; nothing is more important. Element #1 of the gospel is the death of Christ for our sins, something the Scriptures had predicted. If Jesus doesn't die, we are hopeless! The gospel's element #2 is Jesus' burial, for it is from the grave that He must rise! The final, element #3, is that Christ rose on the third day, and again Paul says this is "according to the Scriptures." The Christian gospel is not at odds with Biblical Judaism; it is the very natural continuation of the unfolding drama of redemption. It was predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus would die - see such passages as Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Daniel 9:26. Likewise was His resurrection on the third day a feature of Hebrew prophecy - notice the picture in Isaac and Abraham in Genesis 22:4, or Jonah (Matthew 12:40), even Psalm 16:10 and the reference to "decay" compared with "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead for four days" (John 11:39). Then Paul begins the litany of mentions of those to whom the risen Christ appeared, confirming He was alive! Skipping the appearances to the women, Paul jumps right to the Sunday appearances to Peter and the group.

THE EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION

- 6) One of the great proofs of the reality of Christ's resurrection was the fact that He appeared to so many people in His glorified body. The law called for two or three witnesses for confirmation, but here are over 500 witnesses, most of whom could be interviewed by any serious inquisitor. His resurrection is one of history's best attested facts! Here is a list of the Biblically-recorded post resurrection appearances of Jesus:

POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES OF JESUS

- 1) Mary Magdalene (Sunday A.M.)..... John 20:11ff
- 2) Women leaving tomb (Sunday A.M.)..... Matthew 28:1ff
- 3) Peter Sunday (P.M.?) Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5
- 4) Cleopas & other (Emmaus Rd) (Sunday Afternoon) Luke 24:13ff
- 5) Disciples, Thomas absent (Sunday P.M.) John 20:19ff
- 6) Disciples, Thomas present (8 days later) John 20:26ff
- 7) 7 Disciples at lake John 21:1ff
- 8) 11 Disciples again (now in Galilee) Matthew 28:16ff
- 9) 500+ 1 Corinthians 15:6
- 10) James 1 Corinthians 15:7
- 11) All apostles (At the ascension) 1 Corinthians 15:7, Acts 1:6-9
- 12) Stephen..... Acts 7:56

- 13) Paul (Damascus Road and the Arabian Desert) 1 Corinthians 15:8
14) John, on the Isle of Patmos Revelation 1:13

7) The siblings of Jesus did not believe in Him early on (John 7:5), but at least two of them became convinced of the reality of Jesus' claims - James and Jude. This James became the leader of the Jerusalem church, showing the power of Christ's post-resurrection appearance on him! All the remaining eleven apostles saw the risen Christ!

8) Very humbly does Paul mention the Damascus Road vision he had of Christ. As Israel was a nation late-born, even so Paul was the latest of the apostles to come on board. His epic encounter with the risen Jesus made an impact on Paul from which he never turned back. The Persecutor became the Preacher; the Murderer was changed into a great Messenger - what a change can happen when Jesus comes in!

9) Who could understand grace better than Saul of Tarsus, now having become the apostle, Paul? He felt unworthy to even be called an apostle, yet he outshone them all in his service for Christ! He called himself the "least of the saints" and the "chief of sinners." This great man of God sought not greatness for himself. Greatness doesn't know its own mirror reflection. It is always accompanied by humility.

10) Paul confessed that grace had transformed him - and even the work he did for Jesus was because of God's grace through him. It was enough for him to be known as a hard worker for the cause of Christ. The merit was all God's, as was the glory for any accomplishments. May God make us hard workers and not glory-hounds.

11) The most important thing in the sharing of the gospel is not the one sharing it; Paul says "Whether then it was I or they...) The gospel is the thing that matters most, and through it's declaration people believe and are saved. This can be by an evangelist to millions through electronic media; it can be through a pastor from his pulpit in a small country church. A Sunday school teacher named Albert Gentry led my best friend to Jesus with the gospel. Sometimes the best congregation is an audience of one, like Nicodemus with Jesus in that famous nocturnal meeting in John 3. Who will be your next "one?"

IS OURS A SAVING FAITH? 12 - 19

DOUBTING RESURRECTION IN GENERAL

12) The old Sadducean doctrine denying any resurrection had made its way into some parts of the new church. The fact of Christ's resurrection (as it has been proclaimed) repudiates such a notion. God is able to give life again to the physically dead, even as in regeneration He gives life to the spiritually dead.

13), 14) Paul adds logic to verifiable history and good Hebrew Scripture theology. "If (as you say) there is no such thing as resurrection, then Jesus must not, could not have risen. And yet the Hebrew Scriptures (Psalm 16:10, the book of Jonah) declared in advance that He would rise. So, do you deny the Hebrew Scriptures? Do you deny the testimony of hundreds of credible witnesses, including myself? And do you destroy the gospel which I preached, and you believe, making my preaching and your faith empty - vain, to no purpose, useless indeed?"

15) If Jesus didn't rise, and if there is no resurrection at all, not only is our preaching empty (along with your faith), but our declarations of the gospel are false, lies that misrepresent God. This logically follows if there is no resurrection, because we preach the essential nature of Christ's rising from the dead as an element of the gospel!

DENYING JESUS' RESURRECTION IN PARTICULAR

16), 17) Consider the list of negative consequences flowing from a denial of the resurrection! Those who make that denial call God a Liar, make us into false witnesses, find themselves with an empty faith, and we all remain in our sins - lost and headed for hell! To deny Bible truth is no small matter, even the denial of one doctrine alone.

18), 19) The negative consequences of resurrection-denial may be found on both sides of the grave. For the dead, those who died trusting in a risen Christ have actually perished in their sins, for a dead Savior cannot rescue others from sin and death! And as for the living, well, those of us trusting in a Savior Who could not conquer death for Himself are found to be miserable creatures indeed. If our hope in Christ only pertains to the path before the grave, how we are to be pitied!

NO MORE DEATH 20 - 28

The distinguishing doctrine of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus "out from among the dead." There is nothing like it in any other so-called "faith." Believe it, and your soul is saved from sin and its consequences. Deny it, set it aside, and Christianity implodes, falls like a house of cards in a gust of wind. Literature's greatest "if clause" is found in this chapter (verse 17) - "If Christ be not raised..." O, my! How thankful we should be that "Christ has been raised" (15:20)! History's greatest day yet was the Sunday when Jesus burst the bars of death and came forth from the grave, rising "out from among the dead!" By this rising Jesus was confirmed to be the "Son of God with power" (Romans 1:4). So, when we come to this 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians - "the resurrection chapter" - we are surely "standing on holy ground!" Reading it from beginning to end will greatly enhance the blessing of considering this short passage before us

CHRIST REVERSES ADAM'S DEATH

20) The hypotheticals in the foregoing verses presented a most miserable circumstance, especially for those who believe in Jesus. But it was not a record that agrees with the reality of what did indeed happen! The previous, hypothetical statements were telling what it would be like if Christ had not risen from the dead. Satan would have won; we would still

be dead in our sins; hell would be the destiny for the entire human race from Adam to the last human born and dying! Now Paul affirms that Christ has indeed risen - He was the very First of the dead to experience resurrection. Someone might ask, "But what about the three Hebrew Scripture characters who came back to life, and the three in the gospels, and the three in the early church as recorded in Acts? Great questions, all. None of these were technically resurrected - rather they were only resuscitated, to die again later. When Christ rose from the dead, it was unto glory, never to die again. That is resurrection!

21), 22) All humans are related to Adam by birth and will die, because he brought death into the world by his sin and passed it to us all. The classic verse on this truth is found in Romans 5:12. I believe this Romans verse teaches that we sinned *in Adam*, much like Levi paid tithes *in Abraham* (Genesis 14:18-20, Hebrews 7:9). As in and through the first Adam all die, so all those who have become related to the last Adam, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45), by the new birth shall rise because of Him. They will conquer death in the first resurrection. In fact, all people, saved or lost, shall rise sooner or later, and they shall all stand for judgment in their own physical bodies. One should here consult such passages as Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28, 29, which speak of both resurrections. Adam's disobedience brought death; Christ's obedience brings life - eternal life for the soul by faith, and resurrected life for the body in time to come. The work of Christ to undo the work of Adam required more power than did the original sin and its consequences. As they say in real estate, "location, location, location." So, it is in the world of sin and death, righteousness and life. If we are only *"in Adam,"* we are bound for a Christless eternity in hell. If by faith we are now *"in Christ,"* heaven is our destined home!

CHRIST READIES FOR VICTORY

23) End time events do not just happen all at one time. Jesus doesn't just appear, and suddenly everything is turned from wrong to right. There is quite a sequencing that occurs: Rapture, Tribulation (with so much going on for that seven years!), second coming, Judgment of Israel, Judgment of the nations, binding of Satan, Antichrist and False Prophet cast into Gehenna, millennium, Satan loosed, the last war against Jesus, great white throne judgment of the unsaved dead, the passing away of the old heaven and earth, the coming down from heaven of the new Jerusalem. There is so much, and it takes place over the period of over 1,000 years! It should not surprise us then, that the resurrection(s) to come are not all one big event. Paul dispels here the idea of a general resurrection. There is a sequence with divinely-planned order. The Lord Jesus Christ was raised first. When He comes again, He will raise those who belong to His body; all the remaining dead will be raised later.

24) Between verses 23 and 24, there is the tribulation, followed by the millennial reign of Christ, the Messiah. After that reign, Jesus will hand over the earthly kingdom to the Father, Who will merge it into the eternal kingdom. By now Jesus will have put under His feet all resisting powers. He will once and for all forever subjugate Satan and all the forces of evil. That allows the glories of Revelation 21 and 22 to exist without the threat of evil.

25) Psalm 110 begins, *"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"* This will be fulfilled by the end of the "Day of the Lord," And Jesus will be King reigning over all.

26) Just today we read the obituary of a friend who leaves behind a widow and two sons and their families. Death is here referred to as an "enemy." It is the last one that will be defeated. It appears that during the millennial kingdom, people will die (see this in Isaiah 65:18 - 20). But there shall come a day when death shall plague us no more, a day when the life-giving and life-sustaining power of Jesus Christ will be manifest in the earth.

CHRIST REIGNS UNDER GOD

27), 28) The "all things" that will be put under Christ's authority of course do not include God the Father. While there is equality without jealousy in the Godhead, there is a Divine order of authority. It is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit is subject to the Son (He sent the Spirit into the world). The Son is subject to the Father, and always does His will. This order and the actions within it redound to the Glory of God. This was the goal of Jesus as He ministered here on earth - John 17:4 - *"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do."* It should be our goal as well - 1 Corinthians 10:31 - *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."* What a marvelous purpose we have - Let us "do all to the glory of God!"

IF NO RESURRECTION, THEN WHY...? 29 - 34

WHY PRACTICE BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD?

29) There is neither any command to practice some "baptism for the dead" in the New Testament, nor is there any record of such a practice by any church that was obedient to the Word and not fraught with problems as was Corinth. The logical conclusion is that this practice had developed there in Corinth, and that Paul was asking them what was the purpose of such a thing done "for the dead" if the dead are done and gone, never to be resurrected to life again. And it made no sense indeed; in fact, "baptisms for the dead" make no sense under any circumstance!

WHY PLACE OURSELVES IN DANGER THROUGH MINISTRY?

30), 31), 32) If there is no resurrection, and this life is all there is, why would one not do everything possible to make this life last as long as possible? Why then would the Apostle minister for Jesus in a way that imperiled his life daily? And it really was the case that Paul faced the possibility of death so very often. His next letter to them was the most autobiographical of his writings. In that letter he mentioned several times the dangers he faced and the near-death experiences he had. Here are some of them:

2 Corinthians 1:8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the **affliction** we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. **9** Indeed, we felt that we had received the **sentence of death**. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. **6:4** but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, **in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger;** **11:23** Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more **imprisonments**, with countless **beatings**, and often **near death**. **24** Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the **forty lashes less one**. **25** Three times I was **beaten with rods**. Once I was **stoned**. Three times I was **shipwrecked**; a night and a day I was **adrift at sea**; **26** on frequent journeys, **in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;** **27** in **toil** and **hardship**, through many a **sleepless night**, in **hunger** and **thirst**, often **without food**, in **cold and exposure**. **28** And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Again, if there is no resurrection, why not labor to avoid these dangers and get the most out of this short life?! But this life is not all there is; there is a resurrection unto life that never ends. And that makes all the dangers worthwhile if they result in some others coming to know the Christ Who can save them!

WHY PUT ANY TRUST IN THESE TEACHERS ANYWAY?

33), 34) The Corinthian assembly had many moral issues, some of which Paul deals with in this letter. They also had the leaven of some false teachers among them. Bad doctrine leads to bad deportment, and hanging around with and being influenced by those resurrection-denying teachers would lead those in the church to bad morality. Bad teaching was intoxicating, and Paul, with two imperatives, commands the saints to become alert to the problem and stop their sinning! The teachers who were leading them into sin had no true knowledge of God, and Paul was ashamed of those who were following them! How can we detect false teaching when it arises? By knowing the truth from diligent study of God's Word!

WHAT KIND OF BODY WILL WE HAVE IN THE RESURRECTION? 35 - 49

A STUDY OF COMPARISONS IN NATURE

35) Here some doubter may ask, "How can life come from death? What process is used to restore a decomposed body? What will the body resurrected be like?" The natural mind finds these things incomprehensible, but not the mind that has been renewed by the Spirit. We can fully trust that God is able to do what He promises to do!

36) Paul points the questioner to the garden. Look at the seeds you plant in the ground. They must die there, but they bring forth life, and, later, wonderful fruit for eating! He describes as "foolish" the one who doubts God.

37), 38) Here is comparison and contrast in one illustration. The planted seed is quite different from the plant which comes from the seed, yet there is also similarity. Only a seed falls into the ground, an entire plant comes forth, and with it many seeds. Seed is the fruit or part of the fruit of the plant, and yet it must be replanted to produce more fruit. Without the planting and the death of the seed, the cycle of life ceases. With it, the cycle goes on as long as God prospers the planted seed. We do the planting, but God gives the increase - this is just like soul-winning. We do the burying; God does the raising from the dead in new and different, but similar bodies.

39) So often the doubter in Scripture (like Thomas in John 14) gives rise to such wonderful explanations of truth. He asked a dubious question about the kind of body one might have in the resurrection. As surely as the flesh of men, animals, birds, and fish differ, so there can be a different kind of body from the natural one, and that is the spiritual body.

40), 41) Paul moves from botany and zoology to astronomy to continue his illustrative answer. Just as there are earthly bodies that differ from heavenly bodies, there is the difference between a natural body and a spiritual one. To move a step further, among the heavenly bodies there are all kinds and degrees of splendor. The sun has one splendor, while the moon's is much less, since it is derived from the sun's. Because of their distance from us, the stars are even less brilliant to the eye. Paul answers the wag's doubts about there being different kinds of bodies than what he knows by finally pointing out the difference one may see even from star to star.

A SERIES OF CONTRASTS BETWEEN OUR CURRENT BODIES AND OUR FUTURE ONES

42), 43), 44) Here Paul concludes a previous argument by summarizing the comparison he has been detailing. He then points out four contrasts between the body as we know it in this life and the resurrection body for the next. This body can perish; it is subject to disease, death, decay, and dissolution. The resurrection body will not be subject to those negative things; it is imperishable. There is nothing honorable or strong about a body being buried. It is, however, going to be raised in honor and strength! It will be buried as a natural body, but it will come forth at the shout of Christ at His return and our resurrection as a spiritual body. Never doubt that such a body can exist, for one already does. It belongs to Jesus, and He spent 40 days here in it. He ate, walked, talked, seemed not to be limited by time, space, and matter. It is certain that such a body will one day be ours!

A SIGNAL CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO HEADS OF OUR RACE

45) The human race has two heads, Adam and Jesus (the last Adam). The first is our physical head, and from him we derive physical life (as well as sin and spiritual death). The Last is our spiritual Head, and from Him we may receive the life of the Spirit. Entrance into each family is by birth. If we are born only once (the physical birth), we will die twice; if we are born twice (adding the new, spiritual birth), we will only die once. How many births have you experienced?

46) There is here a general principle, or law, if you will. The imperfect precedes the perfect; the inferior comes ahead of the superior. We are born, and then later we may be born again. Death came by Adam's sin millennia before life came by Christ's obedience. The sickness preceded the cure. But deliverance from sin was right on time.

47) In the creation week, God formed Adam from the dust of the ground. It was only after He had made the form that He breathed into it the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul. So, the body was made before the person. We are not our bodies; we are souls that live in bodies. In the incarnation, the Person of Christ had lived long ages before the body was made into which He came. He took on that body forever, that is once it was glorified.

48), 49) A major part of this discussion concerns the nature of the body in the resurrection. "With what body will we rise from the grave?" is the question being answered. From an oak tree comes acorns that can produce other oak trees. The pine trees come from the cones of other pines. From Adam we received an earthly body and an old sinful nature. We look and act like our first father because we come from him; we bear his image. When we trust in Jesus and become children of God by the new birth, we get a new image, a new nature, and the prospect of being like unto His glorious resurrection body! To be *in* Him is to be *with* Him, and ultimately to be *like* Him.

VICTORY IN JESUS 50 - 58

THE CHARACTER OF THE VICTORY

50) Since the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, everything in this world has been dying. Plants, animals, and people all die. It is a world of mortality and corruption. The world to come, God's kingdom-world in heaven, is one of immortality incorruption. There, nothing dies. We cannot enter that world of incorruption in these bodies of corruption. He is going to describe the coming change.

51), 52) A mystery in Scripture is simply something not previously revealed that is now made known. Paul needs not whisper this truth - he fairly shouts it with his pen! Not every believer is going to die, but all believers will be changed. Remember, he is talking about the resurrection body. When Jesus comes, some things will occur very rapidly. At the trumpet sound, the graves of those asleep in Jesus will be vacated. Those dead bodies will rise to be re-occupied by the souls returning from heaven. Those bodies where we lived in this life will be made anew, and we will re-enter them, just as we left them at death! They will rise to die no more, being imperishable, incorruptible. The generation of believers living then will escape death. They (we?) will receive our glorified bodies right on the spot, without dying!

53) Once again, these bodies are in the process of decay - we realize that more as we get older! Ultimately, they are headed for death. Somehow, on that day, we shall disrobe the death-likeness and dress in imperishableness.

54), 55), 56) In Isaiah 25:8 we read, "*He will swallow up death for all time...*" Paul refers here to that text. This event, when our Lord Jesus raises the bodies of the dead and changes those of the living, is the beginning of the end for death. It has been conqueror over many for generations, but it will relinquish its crown to the true Conqueror, Jesus! Paul addresses death as though it were a person, asking it a painful question. "*Where, death, is your sting and your victory?*" Since Adam sinned, every child born to man has died save two - Enoch and Elijah. That's a pretty good record of conquest. Every family who has ever lived has experienced the sting of death. But 2,000 years ago, Jesus rose from the dead to signal the coming of an end to its morbid power - that power that was upheld by the law. And when He comes again, Jesus will deal another blow to death's grip on mankind. And it will be a legal blow, for Jesus satisfied the demands of the law at Calvary! He died for the sins of all men for all time!

THE CREDIT FOR THE VICTORY (GOES TO JESUS)

57) Here Paul tells us that this future victory comes from our Chief Benefactor. The verb "gives" is a present active participle. Even now we may experience victory through Christ. Sin does not have to have dominion over us who are in Christ. We may win the daily battle, even as He has won at the cross and the tomb, and He will finish the victory at the resurrection. Victory over sin, Satan, death, hell, and the grave - all this is ours in the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE CURRENT CONSEQUENCE OF THE VICTORY

58) And in that victory we may and must labor for Jesus! The winds of opposition will blow against us, but we can stand "*steadfast, immovable*" because of Jesus. We need never labor without purpose, for our work "*in the Lord*" is never "*in vain*." Each visit we make, every witness we share, all of our praying and studying has purpose and success. O sacrifice is wasted when done in Jesus. Keep on laboring for Jesus, dear friends. It will always pay off!

CHAPTER 16

THE FINAL WORDS TO CORINTH (UNTIL THE NEXT LETTER)

THE MATTER OF AN OFFERING FOR THE NEEDY IN JERUSALEM 1 - 4

THE COMMAND TO GIVE AND THE CAUSE OF THE NEED

1) This appears to be the addressing of a final question received from the Corinthians (7:1 "*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...*"). This matter was regarding ***the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem***. A discussion here about why there would have been such a need in the "Mother Church" seems to be in order.

Acts 11:28 - 30 found the prophet Agabus predicting a widespread famine that prompted the church at Antioch in Syria (and perhaps other nearby assemblies) to send a relief offering to the "brothers living in Judea." So a famine would be a possible reason, but the famine was "over all the world," so why only a concern for the churches in Judea? Let's examine further. I know a Jewish man in Jerusalem who became a Messianic believer. That cost him and lost him much business

among the Jews in general. He survived as an artist and a sculptor because the Christian community became familiar with his excellent work (I have three pieces myself!). Was it a similar thing in the first century? Did these Jewish (now Messianic believers) businessmen lose their customers and vendors to the point of being in financial need? It is entirely possible that such a circumstance, coupled with a famine, could be responsible for the need. If I may add a third and final possible causative factor, it is this: economic communism rarely if ever works in the long run. As you will no doubt recall from the incident regarding Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), the Jerusalem church folks entered into that economic paradigm. Those who held property sold it and people had the wealth of the church community "in common." I contend (and not alone among Bible students) that this was a well-intended, but ill-advised financial arrangement, and the years passing by found the failure of that system (no doubt coupled with the two previously-mentioned reasons) placing the people in dire need. Communism in economics almost always erodes initiative and creativity, resulting in economic decline. So, several times Paul rallies the mission churches to come to Jerusalem's aid. The following passage expresses the widespread effort for this relief: Romans 15:25, *"At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings."*

Our verse here also adds the **churches of Galatia** to the list of those asked to help. It is a general principle among believers that we should help the needy, especially our family in Christ. 1 John 3:17, *"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"* Galatians 6:10, *"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."* Verse 1 here is not a suggestion; it is rather a command - an imperative verb.

THE COLLECTING OF THE GIFTS

2) The **timing** of their collections suggests that the church was meeting on Sunday for worship (*"the first day of the week"*). The **manner** of the giving is next set forth. It should be universal - *"each of you"* - as everyone can do something. The giving should be proportional - *"as he may prosper"* - meaning some could do more, others, less. It should be done promptly, before Paul's visit, so they are not scurrying around for crumbs when he arrives.

THE CARRYING OF THE GIFT TO JERUSALEM

3), 4) A final item of manner is placed here - accountability - the Corinthian church was to prepare letters of accreditation for those they would trust to best handle the gift to be carried to Jerusalem. And if they so desired, Paul would accompany them on the mission. For many, many years now, our homeless shelter ministry has engaged an accounting firm to do an official audit of our finances. It feels so good to do that and to have that demonstration of ministry integrity. That is what Paul was calling for here.

MISSIONARY TRAVEL PLANS 5 - 11

THE ITINERARY OF THE APOSTLE

5), 6) *"I will visit you"* is in the indicative mood, meaning a statement of certain intent. Corinth was south of Macedonia, and it was his intention to go **through** the one and **to** the other. In the first century, winter travel was not advisable, so the Apostle said he just might stay there during those bad-weather months. What a blessing for them to have his presence and ministry for such an extended time! He even mentions that they could help him reach his next destination, perhaps as recompense for his months of ministry there. He was currently in Ephesus, and he could sail the Aegean Sea to Corinth, or go north and west overland through Macedonia to Corinth. He chose the latter route.

7) Paul wished to time his visit for the maximum length of stay in Corinth, not just a quick in-and-out appearance. That desire should have flattered them and told them how dear they were to the Apostle's heart.

8), 9) What a contrasting set of circumstances Paul found at present in Ephesus - a wide, open door for effective work, and many adversaries. The enemies of gospel work in general and personal sanctification in particular are **the world, the flesh** (sinful nature), and **the Devil**. You can take your pick as to which you think was meant by Paul here - probably a combination of the three. In so many places the Jewish religionists would oppose him, and other false worship groups would eagerly join in if his preaching threatened their system (and their pocketbooks). Great opportunity often sparked great opposition for the Lord's work.

THE INTENTION FOR THE APPRENTICE (AND APOLLOS)

10), 11) Since Timothy was coming ahead of Paul's visit, the Apostle wanted to prepare the way for the younger assistant. The young man had some stomach problems, likely ministerial ulcers. Not all of God's people are easy to work with (though my own experience has been that most of them will work with you if they see you have a heart to work with them). Note these passages that Paul wrote later to Timothy: 1 Timothy 4:12 *"Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."* 5:23 *"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."* Paul required of the Corinthian saints that they treat Timothy with kindness, letting him work in peace - and the language of verse 10 suggests that the young man was a real worker - **"working the work of the Lord"** is a more literal rendering. "Treat him well, and then help him come to me, for I am expecting his arrival."

12) Was Apollos going to visit the Corinthians? It appears that it would not happen now, but later. He had come there from Ephesus as recorded in Acts 19. His presence there had been so impactful, that when the Corinthian Christians were dividing up into sects, one such group hailed Apollos as their champion (1 Corinthians 1:12). Perhaps it was that group who wanted him to return?

GREETINGS AND EXHORTATIONS 13 - 18

Verses 13 - 18 contain no less than six imperative verbs - words of command. One subjunctive nearly has the force of an imperative, so Paul is laying down some non-optional guidelines for the Corinthians as he closes the letter. Let's take a look at them, and therefore at what Paul required from them as he wraps up his missive.

A SERIES OF COMMANDS

13) "*Be watchful*" could read "*be on the alert!*" Vigilance is vital in the battle with the forces of spiritual darkness. To fall asleep on guard duty would put yourself and those under your care in grave danger from the enemy. Head up, eyes open! The present tense means to be ever in this posture of watchfulness. The Corinthians were to keep on standing firm in regard to the body of truth ("the faith"), as well as in their trust in Jesus. There is never a time to get away from Scripture or the faith it produces in our lives. "*Keep on being manly*" as you are soldiers of the cross. The spiritual warfare they were in was no place for the faint of heart. "*Keep on being made strong*," the passive voice here reminding us that our strength comes from outside ourselves, from the Spirit of God.

14) Lest it sound like the Corinthian believers are instructed to become callous, hardened, heartless soldiers in the fray, Paul reminds them of the overriding principle from chapter 13, the principle of love. This, too, is a command, that all our actions be governed by love.

15), 16) Corinth was the capital of the region called Achaia, central and southern Greece. There appeared to be leaders in the church there who included the family of one Stephanas. He and his family were among the early converts to Christ in the province, and they were natural leaders. Paul admonishes the Corinthians to get in orderly ranks under their leadership. The idea is almost like a military detachment ready for inspection or battle, lined up and with a watchful eye to the commanders. The work of Christ is a team effort, and the team needs a captain for leadership, or it will flounder.

THE SWEETNESS OF THEIR COMING

17), 18) Paul appears to be writing from Ephesus, and it seems that this group of three men had visited him there from Corinth. Perhaps they brought the letter that contained the report of behavior issues as well as the questions Paul addressed. Even though their news was in large part difficult to hear, with all the bad tidings, Paul seized here upon the better parts and spoke of the joy he experienced as they brought refreshment for his spirit. I recently told my daughter, since we have lost her mother, that her "mom's absence was made easier by her presence." This is similar to what Paul asserts here about his three visitors. Since he could not get to Corinth just yet, it was good that part of Corinth came to him. The fellowship of the saints is indeed a precious thing that we greatly enjoy.

THE CLOSING THOUGHTS 19 - 24

SALUTATIONS

19), 20) These personal remarks are often a part of Paul's writing. He was a people-person. The best pastors, really the only ones who deserve the title, are people-persons. They get to know their sheep; they visit their homes and their hospital rooms. They get to know their strengths and weaknesses, and they use the strengths to bless the church, while trying to help improve areas of weakness. If there is a church workday, they show up with their work clothes on and pitch in to help. This wins so much respect from the saints; they will follow a man like that anywhere he leads them. They will fight ferociously to defend him. Such men are fewer and farther between than ever in my lifetime. Several churches across the Aegean had sent greetings through Paul to Corinth. The Ephesian assembly that met in the home of Priscilla and Aquilla, sent warm greetings. And Paul admonished the Corinthians to warmly greet each other within their own assembly - doing so with a kiss of holiness.

SIGNATURE

21) At some point here, Paul took the pen from his scribe and finished the letter himself, likely for the purpose of demonstrating authenticity. It was a signature in his own handwriting. What a precious document that would be to possess! Yet we who have the Word of God today have something equally precious to us!

22) False teachers and their false teaching were so abhorrent to Paul that he lumped them in with those who have no love for the Lord. And here he calls upon the Lord to curse them. In the next breath he called on the Lord to return, and how often has that been the cry of our own hearts! The only way any of us can see out of the mess we have made of this world is for Jesus to return and bring the fix. As the poem said of Aslan, the Christ Figure, in ***The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe***, "All things will be made right when Aslan comes in sight."

23), 24) The final call is for Christ's grace and love to surround the Corinthian believers. Grace is God's unmerited favor, and love is His decision, followed by action, to pursue our welfare, regardless of the cost, and without thought of getting anything in return. These are certainly two of the greatest words in any language - grace and love. May we who study this Word of God find ourselves basking in the sunshine of his grace and love.