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1 Corinthians

The Gospel on the Street



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Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons

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Born in Corvallis, Oregon, to a pastoral family, he felt the call to pastoral ministry early in life, following in the footsteps of his father, Ken, and older brother, Bill. While still in college, he served as youth pastor in Des Moines, Iowa. He ministered in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference before coming to California.

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1 Corinthians

The Gospel on the Street

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is an important and surprising document. It is important in that it is one of the earliest Christian documents that we possess. And it provides one of the most detailed accounts of early Christian congregations. Probably written before the first of the Gospels, 1 Corinthians gives us access to the ground floor of Christianity. We see Christianity as it grows, thrives, and spreads. We see the gospel making inroads into one of the great cities of the ancient world. In 1 Corinthians, Paul tries to equip early Christian disciples to live the gospel in the sophisticated culture of Corinth. He longs for his correspondents to establish a firm self-identity as Christians, one that will stand the onslaught of social pressure.

First Corinthians may come as something of a surprise. In writing the letter, Paul does not sit down and compose a detached theological essay. Instead, it is the work of a busy pastor-evangelist who addresses real issues confronting Christians at Corinth. What may surprise us is that they faced so many problems, felt the pull of so many temptations, and experienced such deep division among themselves.

This significant document, with its surprising and realistic portrait of Christianity in the apostolic age, has much to say to us. Modern cultures are increasingly urban ones. If the gospel of Jesus Christ is to advance today, it must walk the streets of modern cities and find a place in the hearts of the citizens of our world's great metropoles. And many of the themes treated by Paul are ones that are of real interest to Christians of our era. We still experience fractured fellowship and sometimes face one another in courtrooms. How to withstand the lure of sexual temptation remains a topic of importance. We wrestle with what it means to live in view of Christ's return, the appropriate function of spiritual gifts, and how to conduct public worship.

However, not every issue that Paul raises is a burning one for us. We may not find immediately applicable Paul's counsel on circumcision, head coverings, or food offered to idols. Even in the study of these topics we have much to learn, for Paul consistently views issues from a theological perspective. He drags the mundane and everyday into the realm of the profound and the eternal. Even when the theme seems peripheral to modern discipleship, Paul's reflections will prove inspirational.

We may take up the study of 1 Corinthians, then, with the hope and prayer that the God who inspired Paul to compose it will be present with us as we reflect on these ancient words.

The Gospel Invades Corinth



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 18:1-18; 1 Cor. 1:1-9; 16:1-24.

MEMORY TEXT: “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:8, 9).

KEY THOUGHT: The success of Paul’s mission to Corinth convincingly demonstrates the power of God’s grace. To the citizens of this important city, the good news about Jesus Christ came with the same transforming power that is available to us today.

CORINTH: HUB OF IMMORALITY OR CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN MISSION? We are often tempted to limit the bounds of God’s power to transform lives. The word *can’t* springs all too readily to our lips. Corinth was a large, wealthy, and geographically important city that offered its citizens all the pressures and temptations of a bustling urban environment. To establish thriving Christian congregations in such a place was a challenging assignment. Many converts would come directly from paganism. And their lives, once molded by immorality, had to be shaped by the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul, who knew well the transforming power of God’s grace, was able to look beyond the seemingly unbeatable challenges to see in Corinth a strategic center for Christian mission.

Do we see limitless opportunities for mission in spite of formidable obstacles?

PAUL—TENTMAKER AND PROCLAIMER (Acts 18:1-8).

With whom did Paul form a partnership in Corinth? Acts 18:1-3.

Because of an edict of Roman Emperor Claudius expelling Jews from Rome, Aquila and Priscilla (“Prisca” in Paul’s letters) came to Corinth. The pair were highly mobile (Acts 18:18; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19) and were, apparently, entrepreneurs who conducted a wide-ranging trade in tents and leather goods. They apparently already were Christians when they arrived.

To what missionary purpose did Paul commit his Sabbaths? Acts 18:4.

Paul’s work as “tentmaker” also played an important role in his outreach methods. “We worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God” (1 Thess. 2:9, NRSV). This verse suggests that Paul most likely shared the gospel in the workplace. Rising early and working late, bent over the workbench, we can imagine him proclaiming a risen Lord to his customers.

What succeeding events occurred in Paul’s ministry in Corinth? How would you rate his success? Acts 18:5-8.

Titius Justus is described as “a worshiper of God” (verse 7, NRSV). This phrase, like “[one] who feared God” (Acts 10:2; 13:16, 26; 17:4, 17), indicates a non-Jew who had been drawn to worship of the one true God without becoming a full Jewish convert.

Acts 18:1-8, with its portrait of workplace and synagogue, opens a window onto the large and cosmopolitan colony of Corinth, where Greeks, Romans, and Jews mingle in commerce and worship with people of all nations and creeds. When Paul wrote that there are “many gods” (1 Cor. 8:5, NIV), he spoke appropriately of Corinth. Statuary, coins, and temples reflected the worship of these gods, including Apollo, Athena, Tyche, Aphrodite, Asclepius, Demeter and Kore, Palaimon and Sisypus.

How successfully are you using your workplace to share your love for Christ? What fresh strategies could you employ? Share with your class a fresh and effective approach you may have used in reaching out to someone.

DISCOURAGEMENT FROM BELOW; ENCOURAGEMENT FROM ON HIGH (Acts 18:9-17).

Have there been times when your witness to friends and neighbors seemed in vain? Compare your experience to Paul's in Acts 18:9-11.

"Though Paul had a measure of success in Corinth, yet the wickedness that he saw and heard in that corrupt city almost disheartened him. The depravity that he witnessed among the Gentiles, and the contempt and insult that he received from the Jews, caused him great anguish of spirit. He doubted the wisdom of trying to build up a church from the material that he found there."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 250.

At this moment, Paul's dedication to mission in Corinth was buoyed by a direct message from the risen Christ. The message ended with these words, "There are many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18:10, NRSV). This message bears repeating. In your city and in mine there are people who already belong to God. Ours is the joyous task of discovering them!

After 18 months in Corinth, what events occurred to disrupt Paul's ministry? How is God's promise of personal safety to Paul fulfilled? Acts 18:12-17.

An inscription by Emperor Claudius, found at Delphi in Greece, confirms the historical background reflected in Acts 18. It refers to "Junius Gallio my friend, and proconsul of Achaia" and seems to date Gallio's rule to A.D. 51/52.

Paul's dedication to his converts was not temporary. He remained after the disturbance, completing some 18 months of ministry during his second missionary journey (A.D. 51-52). Sometime after his departure and before writing 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote them a letter, now lost (1 Cor. 5:9), word having come from Chloe's people and others with regard to the church (1:11; 16:17). And having received a letter from the Corinthians themselves (1 Cor. 7:1), Paul authored 1 Corinthians around A.D. 57, before his departure from Ephesus on his third journey (1 Cor. 16:8).

In what practical ways do you attempt to confirm the faith of fellow believers, including those you have helped win to Christ? Are you sometimes less attentive to people's spiritual needs after they join the church? Why?

SAINTS . . . IN CORINTH? (1 Cor. 1:1-9).

As is the case with most of Paul's letters and with ancient letters in general, 1 Corinthians begins with an introduction (prescript) and a thanksgiving (verses 4-9).

How did Paul address the Christians in Corinth? 1 Cor. 1:2, 3.

Paul used the phrases *sanctified* and *called to be saints* to describe his readers. The terms *sanctified* and *saints* are both based on the Greek word *hagios*, "holy."

What attitudes does the society in which you live have about holiness or being *holy*?

Corinth had a proud history and was strategically important, located as it was on the isthmus of Greece and serviced by two seaports (Lechaeum and Cenchreae). It was a wealthy city, especially noted for the advanced crafts of shipbuilding and architecture, as well as the manufacture of textiles and ceramics. However, for all its advantages, Corinth was not *holy*.

In an earlier era, authors from the competing city of Athens slandered Corinth by coining the terms *to Corinthianize* meaning "to fornicate," and *a Corinthian girl*, meaning "a prostitute." One author portrayed Corinth as having 1,000 prostitutes in the service of the goddess Aphrodite.

Corinth may have been no more nor less immoral than other similar cities. However, as Paul's letter indicates, the temptations of sexual immorality, idolatry, and gluttony (1 Cor. 5; 6:12-20; 8; 11:17-22) pressed upon the believers. And they were all too ready to yield. From the beginning, Paul focused on the sanctifying work of Christ on their behalf and called them to spiritual excellence. He reminded them that they *are* (not *will be*) *sanctified* and *called to be saints*.

Our submission to Christ and to His sanctifying work is what it takes to experience spiritual growth and maturity in Him. "Every weak, doubting, struggling soul who yields fully to the Lord is placed in direct touch with agencies that enable him to overcome. Heaven is near him, and he has the support and help of angels of mercy in every time of trial and need."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 299.

Do you need to hear afresh the assurance of Christ's sanctifying work for you and His call to spiritual excellence?

"OUR LORD, COME!" (1 Cor. 1:1-9; 16:21-24).

One means that helps us understand an essay or a book is to read its introduction and conclusion before reading the rest of the document. Such an approach often helps to highlight concerns that are important to the author.

What concerns mark the introductory and concluding verses of 1 Corinthians? 1 Cor. 1:1-9; 16:21-24.

Paul's love for his converts shines through the introduction and conclusion of 1 Corinthians. His passionate concern and his desire that grace be evident in their lives is clear. And Paul's belief in the Second Coming is equally vivid. Christians await "the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7, NRSV). And Paul's joyful confidence in God's faithfulness is an inspiration to those of us who await Christ's soon return.

Compare how Revelation also reflects a belief in the Second Coming in both its introduction and conclusion. Rev. 1:1-8; 22:20-21.

The conclusions of both Revelation and 1 Corinthians contain the heartfelt call, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20, NRSV); "Our Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22). The call in 1 Corinthians is couched in the Aramaic phrase *marana tha*, the only use of the words in the New Testament, and is especially powerful because Paul has just pronounced a curse, *anathema*, against anyone who rejects Christ (compare Gal. 1:8, 9). *Anathema. Marana tha.* The words occur together in the Greek text. For Paul, *anathema* is appropriate to the one who refuses to love Christ. But the cry of those moved by love for their Saviour is *Marana tha*, "Our Lord, come!"

Notice, again, the three elements present in Paul's introduction and conclusion:

1. Obvious love for the believers.
2. Joyous belief in Christ's Second Coming.
3. Confident faith in God's keeping power.

Which of these three elements do you think is most essential to Seventh-day Adventists at this time in earth's history? Explain. Which do you need to emphasize most in your Christian experience just now and why?

THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS (1 Cor. 16:1-20).

What is “the collection for the saints”? (16:1). Explain why it was so important for Paul’s ministry. 1 Cor. 16:1-4 (2 Cor. 8, 9).

“The collection for the saints” features prominently in Paul’s letters and seems to have been his project for nearly twenty years. One central concern of his was the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles within the church (see especially Eph. 2:11-22). The collection of funds from his largely Gentile churches to aid impoverished Jewish believers in Jerusalem gave Paul a practical way in which to manifest his desire for reconciliation between these groups.

Such a project also reflects Paul’s belief in the words of Isaiah 58:6-8 and Matthew 25:34-46. How we treat those less fortunate than ourselves reflects in a major way our love for the Lord.

How would you respond to a friend who quotes 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 in favor of Sunday’s being the day on which the earliest Christians worshiped? On the other hand, how would you emphasize the larger picture of our concern for others’ needs?

Paul encourages the Corinthians to make advance preparation for “the collection for the saints,” which is to be gathered when he next arrives. “The context has little to do with church assemblies. What is called for is the private budgeting of an individual.”—D. R. de Lacy, “Holy Days,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and others (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 404. The passage may actually be taken as evidence for the continuing significance of Sabbath among Paul’s churches. The “putting aside” is an individual act done at home and likely represents the use of the first day for financial activity that would have been judged inappropriate on the Christian Sabbath.

What concerns did Paul express about the treatment of such faithful Christian leaders as Timothy, Apollos, and members of “the household of Stephanas”? 1 Cor. 16:5-20.

Outline practical steps you can take to encourage reconciliation in your church and respect for its leaders. Share such steps in the class and suggest ways for implementation.

FURTHER STUDY: At what other points in Paul's ministry does he receive a vision or dream? See Acts 9:1-19 (compare 22:6-16; 26:12-20); 16:6-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 27:21-26; 1 Cor. 15:3-8; 2 Cor. 12:1-10.

Chapter 24 in *The Acts of the Apostles*, "Corinth," pp. 243-254, traces Paul's early ministry in the city.

To supplement this week's lesson, consult a good Bible dictionary, such as *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, for information on the city of Corinth and an introduction to 1 Corinthians as a whole.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. On the idea of honoring Christian leaders, see 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13 and Philippians 2:25-30. How can we provide both constructive criticism *and* respect to those who serve us as leaders?
2. List the top five factors that make spreading the gospel difficult in your area. How can such factors be turned into occasions for God's intervention in the hearts and lives of your neighbors? Pray for them and for opportunities to reach them.
3. You have just listened to a lengthy lamentation about the challenges facing "our youth" and how often they "fall away." Much of the speech rings true. Based on this week's lesson, how would you respond in a way that reflects the living hope and faith of Paul?

SUMMARY: Paul's courageous example in pressing the Christian mission in Corinth calls us to reexamine our sometimes unsuccessful efforts to proclaim the gospel. His call to spiritual excellence, vibrant belief in Christ's return, and dedication to reconciliation likewise invite our self-examination. Can we, with full voice, cry, "Our Lord, come!"



Taught by An Angel

J. H. Zachary

The people arrived at the beach in trucks, buses, jeeps, and motorcycles for the mass baptism following evangelistic crusades in the Philippines. After a worship service on the beach, 30 pastors stood in the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean and baptized nearly 1,000 people. After the service a man gave his testimony.

His name is Baget. He is a member of the B'Laan tribe, an animist people living on the island of Mindanao. For years, he had robbed—and sometimes killed—his victims. He had earned a well-deserved reputation as a ruthless murderer, and was feared by the community.

But one day a glorious being appeared to Baget. His face was kind, and shone like the sun. He told Baget, "You must worship the God of heaven on *Sabado* [Saturday], God's holy day." Then the being was gone. Baget was stunned. He tried to recall the being's words. Worship the God of heaven? On *Sabado*? This was something new to Baget. The Christians he had encountered all worshiped on Sunday. Why would this glorious being tell him to worship on another day?

The shining being returned to Baget several times. Each time he revealed more of what Baget must do to worship the true God. Baget told his village elders of the being's visits and messages. The villagers, impressed by the visions, decided to obey.

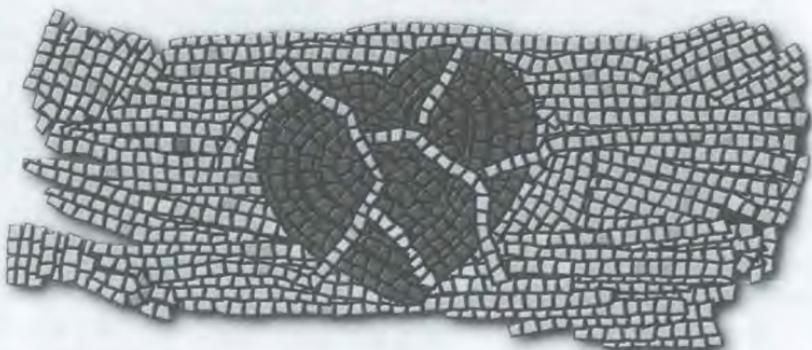
When Sunday-keeping missionaries entered the village, the villagers rejected their messages, for they did not teach the same truths as the glorious being. Then the local Adventist mission heard about the angel visits and sent a lay preacher to study with the people. As Baget and the villagers listened, they recognized that the lay preacher's teachings were the same as the glorious visitor's. They welcomed the lay preacher and joined his Bible studies.

Following recent evangelistic meetings, Baget brought 25 of his fellow B'Laan people to the mass baptism in the ocean to be baptized. Baget's life is a testimony to God's power to transform. Today Baget teaches others about Christ. Nearly 200 new believers worship in the two churches Baget has helped raise up.

God sent an angel to Baget (left). J. H. Zachary is director of Evangelism for The Quiet Hour.



Divided Loyalties



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-23.

MEMORY TEXT: "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

KEY THOUGHT: Paul grew concerned when he received a report of actions and quarrels among the Christians at Corinth. His remedy called for fresh attention to the realities that bind Christians together and for his readers to lay claim to all the blessings God has provided.

CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO FOLLOW CHRIST. Christianity, like the wider culture around it, has become more and more oriented toward the "stars." Gifted Christians attract a following because of their ability to speak more eloquently, argue more persuasively, or sing more engagingly than others. And sometimes the followers of one teacher or musician pit themselves against those of another in an attempt to press their "celebrity's" qualities.

If it is possible to mistreat Christian leaders, it is also possible to make a "star" leader too important in one's experience. We may become so starry-eyed that we forget the Son! Using powerful imagery, Paul calls his readers from divided loyalties to human leaders back to Spirit-inspired worship of God and His Son. Christ Himself is the head of the church, and He alone should be followed. That is why Paul seeks from his friends in Corinth a fresh dedication and loyalty to the divine Leader of their church.

CLIQUES IN CORINTH (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-4).

What problem had developed in Corinth that “Chloe’s people” reported to Paul? How serious does he consider this problem to be? 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-4.

Christians in Corinth were dividing along “party lines.” Paul suggested that there was a “Paul party,” an “Apollos party,” a “Cephas party” (Cephas is the Jewish name for Peter), and, a label that may have been claimed with a special air of sanctity, a “Christ party.” Against such divisiveness, Paul asserted the unity of Christians with a set of powerful questions: “Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (NRSV). To each question Paul expected, of course, a resounding “No!”

Compare Paul’s later call to unity in Ephesians 4:1-6. Notice how he answered many of the questions he raised in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Explain how being humble, gentle, and patient with fellow Christians promotes unity.

“Has Christ been divided?” Christian unity finds its source in the worship of one Lord. “Was Paul crucified for you?” The level ground at the foot of the cross underlines the fact that we are one. “Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” We have all participated in the cleansing waters of “one baptism” and were baptized in the name of Christ. These realities of our faith unite us. However, we must not only celebrate such unity as an article of faith, we must work toward it in practical ways. Paul calls believers to turn the union that is already theirs into reality.

Seventh-day Adventists cannot afford to take for granted a unity of faith and purpose. The divisions experienced in the Corinthian church can undermine the unity of our church today, unless the love and lordship of Christ unite us to Him in our diversity. Paul’s words offer a cure to the disease of disunity.

How does true Christian unity relate to Christian uniformity? To what extent does Paul’s bidding to “be in agreement” (1 Cor. 1:10) mean we should think and act alike? What may be dividing our church here and now? What can we do about it? Write a one-page letter dealing with divisiveness in your church and what can be done to build unity. Share your letter with your class members and listen to theirs.

SEPARATE OR TOGETHER? (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-4).

Where did early Christians meet, and what was the nature of early Christian congregations? 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-5.

Newly formed religious groups without the approval of the government did not have the choice of owning public structures for worship. In fact, separate church buildings were uncommon until near the end of the second century.

The Corinthian Christians do appear to have met as a whole from time to time. Paul, writing from Corinth, speaks highly of "Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church" (Rom. 16:23). And 1 Corinthians 14:23 refers to "the whole church" coming together. These, though, seem to be exceptional occasions.

Of Paul's churches, we know the most about the one in Corinth. It is possible to identify as many as 16 of its members by name. Based on the evidence in the New Testament, one widely respected estimate suggests there were some 50 members in the Corinthian church during Paul's day, perhaps a few more.

What are the strengths of groups of church members meeting separately and in some isolation from the larger congregation? What are some of the dangers? 1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-4.

"It seems likely that the various groups mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 1:12 would regularly have met separately. Such relative isolation would have meant that each group had a chance to develop its own theology, and virtually assured that it took good root before being confronted by other opinions."—Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, Good News Studies, 6 (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983), p. 158.

House churches are sometimes regarded as "*the* New Testament model." Should we argue for an exclusively house-church model for modern Christians? What can we do to facilitate both smaller group fellowship and wider unity within our congregations?

It seems that wherever Aquila and Priscilla lived, they opened their home to the Christian community. How can you make your home a place of nurture, peace, and friendship?

THE CHURCH AS GOD'S GARDEN (1 Cor. 3:5-9).

In the chart below, list the images Paul used to remind the Corinthians of his pioneering role in their church. Also explain Apollos' role.

Text	Paul's Role	Apollos' Role
1 Cor. 3:1-3		
1 Cor. 3:6		
1 Cor. 3:10, 11		

Who was Apollos? What do we know of him from the New Testament? Acts 18:24-28; 1 Cor. 16:12; Titus 3:13.

After ministering in Corinth on the second missionary journey, Paul had moved on to Ephesus, where he left his companions Aquila and Priscilla. With Paul in Palestine, Apollos arrived in Ephesus. He possessed natural gifts of eloquence, a profound understanding of the Old Testament, and, most importantly, a “burning enthusiasm” for Jesus (Acts 18:25, NRSV). But there was a significant gap in his knowledge in that he knew only “the baptism of John,” a lack filled by the instruction of Priscilla and Aquila, who were very valuable lay workers and teachers. With the aid of believers in Ephesus, Apollos wished to expand his ministry into Achaia. So he went to Corinth, where God helped him to nurture the faith of the new converts and defend Christ to the Jews.

“He who sends forth gospel workers as His ambassadors is dishonored when there is manifested among the hearers so strong an attachment to some favorite minister that there is an unwillingness to accept the labors of some other teacher. . . . It is seldom that one minister has all the qualifications necessary to perfect a church in all the requirements of Christianity; therefore God often sends to them other ministers, each possessing some qualifications in which the others were deficient.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 277, 278.

How do you react when you discover that others have gifts that you do not have? Are you thankful for your gifts, and do you have a teachable spirit, a willingness to learn from others?

THE BELIEVERS AS GOD'S TEMPLE (1 Cor. 3:9-23).

Temple is used frequently in the New Testament as an image for Christians or a Christian community. It is also true that the individual believer is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. How does the use of the imagery in each of the following passages compare with its use in 1 Corinthians 3:9-17?

1 Cor. 6:19 _____

2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 _____

Eph. 2:19-22 _____

1 Peter 2:4-8 _____

Paul writes to heirs of the classical Greek “temple culture.” Corinth had a history of providing both craftsmen and materials for building temples in other cities. As reconstructions of the city center at the time of Paul indicate, the presence of temples was an unmistakable feature of Corinth. The people to whom Paul wrote, in walking the streets of their city, daily observed temple-building and repair projects. Therefore, they would easily understand Paul’s temple imagery.

Paul uses common ideas about temples: 1. A temple belongs to its god and is of value to that deity. Thus, damage to a temple is an insult to the deity. 2. A temple houses the deity. 3. The building of a temple requires supervision. 4. Contractors are rewarded for successful work and fined for poor craftsmanship.

How did Paul conclude his discussion about factions among the Corinthian believers? How does he describe the divine evaluation of “the wisdom of this world”? 1 Cor. 3:18-23, NIV.

The Corinthians were charmed by the wisdom of earthly teachers. And such teachers as Peter, Paul, and Apollos were surely wise. However, an unhealthy level of personal allegiance to individual teachers had developed. And this snobbish loyalty risked serious damage to the church. In this way they had relished the “wisdom of this world” and had missed the wider privileges of Christian discipleship.

In what ways have you succumbed to the “wisdom” of your age and failed to see it for the foolishness it is?

BUILDERS OF GOD'S TEMPLE (1 Cor. 3:9-17).

Within the context of the temple imagery, what does Paul say about Christian workers who minister in inferior ways? 1 Cor. 3:9-17.

Through the years, Bible students have wrestled with these words about the performance of Christian leaders. But the meaning of the passage becomes clear when we consider ancient inscriptions about temple-building. A fourth-century-B.C. inscription from Arcadian Tegea may be especially helpful. It details conditions contractors and workmen should abide by as they construct the temple of Athena. It reads in part:

"If anyone should oppose the allotment of the jobs . . . or should do harm, doing damage . . . in any way, let those who made the allotments fine . . . him, whatever fines . . . seem right to them, and let them publicly announce it as their determination and summon him into the presiding court for the full sum of the fine. . . .

"If anyone, having signed a contract, should damage any other of the existing works, . . . whether sacred, public or private, contrary to the agreement of the contract, let him restore the part that was damaged at his own expense [to a condition] not inferior to what it was at the time of the contract. If he does not restore it, let him pay the fines . . . in keeping with those established for those jobs . . . which have run past [the appointed time]."—Translated by Jay Shanor, "Paul as Master Builder: Construction Terms in First Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988), p. 462.

Paul has described the status of Christian leaders as "God's servants" (1 Cor. 3:5-9, NRSV). What point about his own identity does the use of temple imagery allow him to emphasize? 1 Cor. 3:10-12.

Paul labels himself the "skilled chief builder" to whom God has entrusted oversight in the construction of the temple, the Corinthian church. While all leaders are servants of God, Paul wishes to remind his converts of his special, God-given role with regard to the Christian church in Corinth.

Think of the members of your Sabbath School class. What unique roles and gifts has God granted to each one? How can you best work with them to "build up" God's church?

FURTHER STUDY: Wednesday's lesson includes a number of passages that use temple imagery to describe God's church. There are many others. How do the following passages add to our understanding? Matt. 16:18, 19; John 2:18-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:19; Heb. 3:1-6; Rev. 3:12.

The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 26, "Apollos at Corinth," pp. 269-297, provides inspired commentary on the passages covered in this week's lesson.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Recall observing a house being constructed. What lessons did you learn about your relationship with Jesus and other believers through this experience?
2. Paul Minear, in his book *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, counts a total of 96 such images. The church as "body," as "temple," and as "bride" are especially significant in Paul's writings. Which of these images do you think are most important for today and why? What modern images could we use to refer to the church?
3. We employ temple language to describe our church. We speak of "foundational truths" and describe people as "pillars." Is it possible to misuse this language? Notice the way Paul mixes architectural language with biological language in 1 Corinthians 3 and Ephesians 2:19-22. How could too great a fascination with the static imagery of a temple rob us of dynamism and growth?

SUMMARY: To attach oneself to a specific teacher in isolation from others or to a specific faction in isolation from the church at large can lead to spiritual illness. Instead, Paul calls us to exercise our full Christian privileges and accept all the blessings of thought and fellowship God has provided.



Winning the Masai, Part 1

A Time to Dance

Jan Meharry was fascinated when she saw a Masai man herding his cows outside Nairobi, Kenya. These proud, nomadic herdsmen of the African plains, dressed in their traditional *kangas* (cloth wraps) and wool blankets, have stubbornly resisted Western influence, including Christianity. As Jan learned more about the Masai, a desire grew to work with these people.

Jan visited a Masai home outside Nairobi. She greeted her Masai hostess then ducked her head to enter the tiny hut made of thin sticks covered with cow dung. The entire Masai home would have fit into her living room! Two beds made of cow hides stretched over rough frames, hugged opposite walls. Between them a circle of rocks imbedded in the dirt floor held the cooking fire. Smoke curling upward from the embers burned Jan's eyes. A shelf above the fire held a cooking pot, two bowls, and a stirring spoon.

Jan's Masai hostess offered tea. As the woman swished out the cups with not-so-clean water, Jan prayed, "Father, keep a smile on my face and the tea in my stomach!" God answered her prayer, and gave Jan a growing love for these simple people of the plains.

Later, at a Masai feast, the missionaries photographed their Masai hosts as they performed traditional dances. But Jan did not just want to watch; she wanted to experience their culture. Bravely she asked if they would teach her one of their dances. First surprise, then smiles crossed their faces as Jan and a friend tried to imitate their dance steps. An *mzee* (elder) told them that if they wanted to be like Masai, they must dress like Masai. He tied a *kanga* around Jan's shoulders Masai style. Then Masai women put jewelry on the guests, so they would look "proper." What fun they had learning from their new friends!

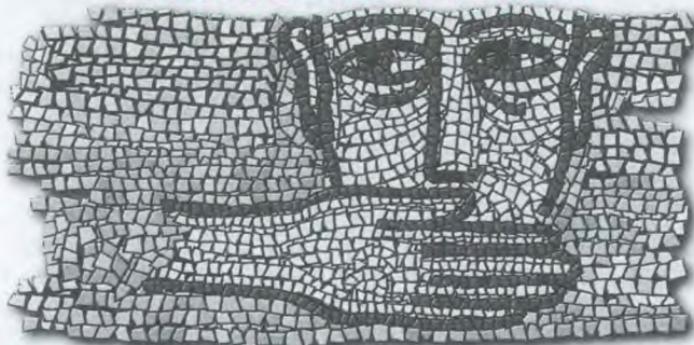
But after they left the village, Jan wondered if she should have joined in their dancing and singing. Would her actions keep these people from accepting the gospel when it was presented to them?

(continued next week)

Jan Meharry (right) with some Masai friends. She and her family served as missionaries in Kenya until 1996.



The Lord of Glory, Not Glorious Words



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Cor. 1:18–2:16.

MEMORY TEXT: “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

KEY THOUGHT: To early Christians who were tempted to validate what was common, Paul speaks lasting words. He encourages them to cling to the wisdom of God seen in His crucified Son.

CHRIST JESUS HAS BECOME FOR US WISDOM FROM GOD. Abandoned by both his parents, Robert Allen lived with elderly relatives who did not allow him to attend school. Although his Aunt Bevie had only an eighth-grade education, she taught him to read. He sharpened this skill by reading the King James Bible twice through to his blind great-aunt Ida. Thus rooted in the knowledge of God's Word, Robert read widely, gleaning some 2,000 volumes from yard sales. In 1981, at the age of 32, he decided to try education and passed the college placement test with high scores. Within a few years, Robert earned a college degree, graduating summa cum laude. He went on to receive both a Master's and Ph.D. in English—all rooted in the wisdom he found in reading God's Word to a blind aunt.—*Chattanooga News-Free Press, Parade*, Dec. 22, 1991, pp. 4-6; True wisdom finds the same source, in God's revelation of Christ; adapted.

PAUL'S APPROACH IN CORINTH (1 Cor. 1:18–2:16; Acts 17:16–34).

Compare the two approaches Paul used in his ministry in Athens and in Corinth. Acts 17:16–34; 1 Cor. 2:1–5. What do you learn about witnessing from this comparison?

Paul argued for the gospel in synagogue and marketplace before being ushered to Athens' famed Areopagus ("Mars' hill," KJV), the "Royal Porch" in the marketplace. The Areopagus was "the most venerable institution in Athens, going back to legendary times, and, in spite of the curtailment of much of its ancient powers, it retained great prestige, and had special jurisdiction in matters of morals and religion."—F. F. Bruce, "Areopagus," *New Bible Dictionary*, second ed., p. 81. Paul, ever the zealous evangelist, may have been disappointed in the results at Athens. However, at least one member of the aristocratic council, "Dionysius the Areopagite," became a Christian, plus some others.

Paul, as he moved on to Corinth, was convicted by the realities he faced there and felt an urgent need for his message to represent a revelation from God. He could not be satisfied with any humanly crafted message. Nor could he risk sharing words that depended more on one's speaking ability than on divine power.

Read through the entire segment for this week's lesson, 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16. Then try to develop an outline. The following suggestion is to help you develop your own outline:

1. Main Idea (1:18–25)

2. Support for the Main Idea (1:26–2:5)

A. (1:26–31)

B. (2:1–5)

3. What the Main Idea Means for Christians (2:6–16)

How would you explain the gospel story to someone from another religious or secular background? What approaches could you use? What role would culture and generation play in such approaches?

THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

Read the selection for today's lesson, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, in light of 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Explain how the two sections are related.

At the heart of the partisan spirit in Corinth seems to have been a craving for "wisdom," an appetite borrowed from the wider culture. One ancient author comments on the Corinthians' love for oratory "even amongst women and children." The phrase *Corinthian words* was used to describe well-crafted speech. Christians, maintaining such a fascination, identified with this teacher or that, over against others who, in fact, had been provided by God for their benefit, as well.

Paul had already addressed their leanings and will do so again (1:10-17; 3:1-23). Here he argues against the driving force behind the factions—that one should be in search of the sharpest "wisdom."

Paul refers to "the foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21, KJV). What does he mean by this?

Paul clearly had a high regard for preaching (Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Tim. 4:13-15; 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:1, 2). The proclamation of the gospel only appears foolish to the nonbeliever. To the Christian it provides the power and wisdom of God. "Many do not look upon preaching as Christ's appointed means of instructing His people and therefore always to be highly prized. They do not feel that the sermon is the word of the Lord to them and estimate it by the value of the truths spoken; but they judge it as they would the speech of a lawyer at the bar—by the argumentative skill displayed and the power and beauty of the language. . . . If you listen to him [the preacher] as though he were not commissioned from above you will not respect his words nor receive them as the message of God."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 298.

Many Christians learn the art of public speaking. Do Paul's words call into question such attempts to improve one's speech? Explain your answer. As a listener, what attitudes have you detected in your own heart that make it easier or harder to hear the message God wishes to communicate to you through the pastor? What helpful or affirming observation do you feel free to share with your pastor?

THE WISDOM OF GOD (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

How does Paul compare “the wisdom of the world” with “the wisdom of God”? As you carefully study 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, which of his remarks do you find most telling and why?

In Paul’s day, those of the world looked to “the one who is wise,” to “the scribe,” and to “the debater of this age” for wisdom. But Paul suggests that to do so is to end one’s search with an inferior brand of wisdom. Our world assumes that all really valuable wisdom, the kind that makes a difference in boardrooms and on balance sheets, stems from advisors, consultants, and lawyers. Our world turns for wisdom to the latest self-help book or best seller in pop psychology. However, taking our cue from Paul’s argument, true wisdom is to be found at the foot of the cross. And real discernment is given by God’s Spirit. We need to remember, however, that God uses the wisdom of Christian counselors and other experts to help us.

What was the typical request of the Jew and the usual desire of the Greek? How would each be likely to respond to a crucified Christ? 1 Cor. 1:22-24.

Jesus is the One whom every Jew, every Greek, every person, in their inmost heart, seeks. In Christ, the Greeks could find the real meaning of life and how to realize it *in fact*. So often perceived desire masks the true hunger of the human heart. Satisfying that true hunger is *the goal of Christian mission*.

“Jesus, whom Paul was about to present before the Greeks in Corinth as the Christ, was a Jew of lowly origin, reared in a town proverbial for its wickedness. He had been rejected by His own nation, and at last crucified as a malefactor. The Greeks believed that there was need of elevating the human race; but they regarded the study of philosophy and science as the only means of attaining to true elevation and honor. Could Paul lead them to believe that faith in the power of this obscure Jew would uplift and ennable every power of the being?”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 244.

Imagine yourself as a citizen of Corinth, listening to Paul in the synagogue, workshop, or marketplace. How might you have reacted? Would you have needed the gift of God’s Spirit to enable you to discern true wisdom? Do you need similar enlightenment today? What can you do about it so that you may see Christ as your sure enabler and true wisdom in your life?

**FOOLISH, WEAK, DESPISED: GOD'S PEOPLE IN CORINTH
(1 Cor. 1:26-31).**

Who were among the “not many” (verse 26) of the Corinthian Christians who were wise, powerful, and of noble birth? Acts 18:8; Rom. 16:1, 2, 23.

Paul does not deny that there were some among the Corinthian Christians who held positions of importance in society at large. Paul mentions one such citizen of Corinth, Erastus, in Romans 16:23 and notes that he was the “city treasurer” (NRSV) or “director of public works” (NIV). A Latin inscription found at Corinth reads, “Erastus laid this pavement at his own expense, in appreciation of his appointment as aedile.” The “aedile” was in charge of public buildings. And it is often thought that the Erastus of the inscription and the Erastus of Romans 16:23 are one.

Though some of the members in Corinth had significant social standing, Paul’s words are clear—most of them did not. Among those who would hear these words of Paul’s read in the house churches were artisans, housewives, children, and slaves occupying the lower rungs of the social ladder. To them, Paul’s words must have provided considerable comfort. A world accustomed to social standing and high finance ignored them. But God had especially selected them to advance His cause. Some time ago, Donald Kraybill wrote a book about the Gospels entitled *The Upside-Down Kingdom*. First Corinthians 1:26-31 is Paul’s introduction to this upside-down kingdom.

What great word of assurance did Paul write to the Corinthians? In what sense is Christ all of the things Paul mentions? 1 Cor. 1:30.

Not many of the Corinthian believers were of “noble birth” (1:26). The Greeks treasured noble lineage as much as the Jews cherished a pure lineage. Over against “noble birth” Paul sets the royal descent of the Christian. “The gospel has ever achieved its greatest success among the humbler classes.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 461. Such classes feel a greater need to belong to God and His family. Thus, in Christ, they indeed possess heaven’s noble and royal lineage.

Have you ever felt like a social outcast in the family of God? How can we avoid perpetuating the social barriers of the world within the church?

THE MIND OF CHRIST (1 Cor. 2:6-16).

How does “God’s wisdom” relate to “the wisdom of this world” and “the princes of this world”? 1 Cor. 2:6-8.

Though the wisdom of God manifested in Christ crucified may not attract those in search of a popular philosophy, its lack of current appeal is unimportant. It is wisdom with eternal credentials, founded on God’s decree “before the world” (KJV) or “before the ages” (2:7, NRSV). And it is wisdom with a future. It is not a wisdom “of this world” (KJV) or “of this age” (2:6, NRSV), but a wisdom that discloses “the Lord of glory,” the One who will rule over “the ages to come” (2:8; compare Eph. 2:7).

We use the quotation in 2:9 in a variety of ways. How does Paul use it in the context of 1 Corinthians 2:6-16?

The source of the quotation in verse 9 is not obvious. Paul seems to have drawn on Isaiah 64:4 and 52:15 to form a composite quotation. Just as the prophet in Isaiah 64:4 ponders the uniqueness of a God who intervenes on behalf of His people, so Paul accents the surprising nature of God’s intervention through His crucified Son (1 Cor. 2:7, 8, KJV): “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard” what God has revealed and done for His people through Christ crucified.

Wisdom and spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul continues his critique of those who laid claim to spiritual maturity, to being “spiritual,” and who boast that they possess special “wisdom” (compare 3:18-20; 8:1-3). Such people also held that certain spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues, provided evidence of exalted spiritual status (1 Corinthians 12-14). Paul underlines the obvious but important thought that it is the Holy Spirit who provides true insight into “spiritual gifts.” (See especially 2:12, 14.)

In 1 Corinthians 2:16 Paul uses the words, “the mind of Christ” (compare Rom. 8:9, Gal. 4:6 and Phil. 1:19). What do you think it means to have “the mind of Christ”? Is this a privilege that is available to every Christian? Explain your answer.

“The sinner unites his weakness to Christ’s strength, his emptiness to Christ’s fullness, his frailty to Christ’s enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 675.

FURTHER STUDY: Besides 1 Corinthians 1:30, what other passages highlight the privileged status of Christians as children of God? See John 1:12, 13; Romans 8:14-17; 1 John 2:29-3:3. Can you think of others?

Ellen White was convinced of the importance of the cross of Christ. Ponder these inspiring statements:

"If there is anything in our world that should inspire enthusiasm, it is the cross of Calvary. 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.' Christ, made unto us 'wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,' should be humbly and thankfully received by us. His sacrifice should inspire us with zeal to work in His service, calling upon others to behold in Him 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' "—*Review and Herald*, Sept. 29, 1896.

"Christ crucified—talk it, pray it, sing it, and it will break and win hearts. This is the power and wisdom of God to gather souls for Christ."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 67.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. We sometimes speak of a person as being "really spiritual." What do we mean? What criteria do you use to determine whether a person is "spiritual" or not? How valid are those criteria in the light of Paul's discussion of wisdom?
2. Think of a time when you had to take an unpopular stand for Christ. What enabled you to do so? How can you be motivated to cling to God's wisdom when the wisdom of the world seems so much more appealing and is ever so widely accepted?
3. How should we encourage young adults to relate to the "wisdom of the world"? Should we attempt to:
 - a. isolate them from it;
 - b. equip them to master it;
 - c. other?
4. Differentiate between God's wisdom and the wisdom of the world. By what criteria will you know the difference?

SUMMARY: We are not to recognize true wisdom by the quality of its rhetorical manifestation or its level of acceptance by the world at large, but by its ability to transform the life and to reflect accurately the wisdom God revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ crucified.



Winning the Masai, Part 2

A Time to Speak

Jan Meharry wanted to work with the Masai, the nomadic herdsmen of Kenya. While attending a Masai feast, she had asked her hosts to teach her a traditional Masai dance. Later she wondered if her actions would prevent her from witnessing to them.

She expressed her concerns to a Masai pastor. He viewed the video Jan's husband had taken during the feast, then he told her that the Masai *mzee* (elder) had said, "If these women are willing to dance with us, then let's welcome them." The pastor added, "Dancing with the Masai probably was one of the best things you could have done. When it is time to give them the gospel, they will listen, because you were willing to become one of them." Jan was thrilled.

Several months later Jan learned that a young couple teaching at Maxwell Academy not far from Nairobi, also had a deep love for the Masai. Gwen had even begun a Bible story hour for the small group of Masai who lived near the Maxwell campus. Jan could hardly wait to meet Gwen. When Jan visited Maxwell, she learned that the Masai women were attending Gwen's story hour with their children, and the women often visited in one another's homes as well. It was apparent that Gwen Edwards deeply loved her neighbors the Masai. Once she found Gwen on the hill behind her home, helping the Masai women mix mud and cow dung to repair their houses!

And one day the Masai women asked Gwen to teach them about the God who made her so loving and kind. Would she conduct a church service for them in the grove of trees behind their homes?

Gwen was breathless with joy—until she realized she would have to preach! She had never preached before. But the women did not want a pastor; they wanted Gwen. She prayed that God would tell her what to say to these people who knew so little about Him.

God answered her prayer when a Masai boy lost one of his goats on the hillside behind Gwen's yard. The happiness he showed when he found his goat reminded Gwen that these cattle-herding people would understand that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

(continued next week)



Gwen Edwards (left) with one of her neighbors. Jan Meharry and her family served as missionaries in Nairobi, Kenya for six years. They recently returned to the United States.

“Paul, Called to be an Apostle”



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Cor. 4:1-21; 9:1-27.

MEMORY TEXT: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1 Corinthians 9:24, 25).

KEY THOUGHT: In illustrating the ministry of apostles, Paul defends his own commission and records valuable counsel for later Christians. With Paul, we are invited to become “all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:22) and to “run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24, NIV).

CHRISTIANS AND THEIR LEADERS NEED TO WORK TOGETHER MORE EFFECTIVELY. Have you criticized or praised your pastor lately? Or has your pastor criticized or praised church members? If there has been criticism only, has it been founded on a thorough knowledge of your pastor’s gifts and responsibilities? Or a thorough knowledge of members’ gifts and responsibilities? Misunderstandings between Christians are not new. Paul’s reputation in Corinth suffered as a result of unflattering comparisons. So in his letter to the Corinthians, he spent much space attempting to broaden their understanding of his ministry, thus mending his relationship with them. First Corinthians, chapters 4 and 9, deal directly with Paul’s role as an apostle. These chapters show us that it is possible to have understanding leaders and members in every congregation.

FIRST, APOSTLES (1 Cor. 4:1-5).

An “apostle” is an authoritative messenger or representative. Paul uses the term informally, referring to messengers from churches on practical missions (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25) and more formally, referring to the spiritual gift, one sent by Christ to proclaim the gospel (1 Cor. 1:1). Our lesson focuses upon the latter use.

What is the function of an “apostle,” and for how long was the gift to be active in God’s church? Acts 2:15-26; 1 Cor. 9:12; 12:27-31; 15:3-8; Eph. 4:11-13.

Two positions have been taken regarding the identity of apostles and the period of their ministry:

1. The apostles were a special group of people consisting of the twelve, Paul and perhaps others who, at the beginning of the Christian church, helped to lay down an authoritative foundation for future Christians. There are no living apostles in modern times.
2. The term “apostle” was assigned to the twelve who participated in Christ’s earthly ministry. Others, though, especially Paul, could justifiably claim the title. And the gift is to operate in the church until Christ returns.

Which position do you regard as more valid? Why?

How does Paul invite us to picture an apostle? 1 Cor. 4:1-5.

Do you know one or more persons who were sent by God to accomplish a special mission for Him? How was their work similar to that of the apostles?

An apostle, says Paul, is a servant to whom has been entrusted the management of the divine Master’s goods, much like Joseph’s service to Potiphar. With such an important position goes a high degree of accountability to God. What matters most is what He thinks of our service; and His measure of success is not recognition or position, but faithfulness to Him. We cannot afford to be distracted by the world’s symbols of accomplishment and success. Our God is loving and faithful to us, and our love and faithfulness to Him is what He values above all (1 Cor. 4:2).

"MADE A SPECTACLE" (1 Cor. 4:6-13).

Paul continued to describe the role of apostles, noting that he was especially speaking of himself and Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6). In verses 8-13, Paul compared his own circumstances ("we apostles") to those of his opponents in Corinth who had apparently been using Paul's bleak circumstances against him. But Paul laid claim to suffering and trying circumstances as a badge of honor rather than a signal of God's displeasure.

What lessons about Christian living may we learn from Paul's defense of his ministry? 1 Cor. 4:8-13. How do we discern God's plan for us through trying circumstances and even through false accusations?

Though Paul is speaking of apostles, he indicates that others are to learn from his words, as well (verse 6). Then he invites Christians to imitate him (verse 16). Paul's account of his ministry challenges us. "The scandal of the cross is written large over Paul's vision of his own apostleship. For him it truly was 'like master, like servant.' " —Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 175. Could the same be said about our ministry for Christ?

What language does Paul employ to further describe the role of apostles? 1 Cor. 4:9.

The amphitheater served as an arena for the battles of gladiators. Corinth's amphitheater accommodated some 14,000 people. Paul compares apostles to the band of doomed prisoners already sentenced to die who are brought in at the end of the performance. Such wretches would bring the crowd added sport as they were slain by gladiators or wild animals (1 Cor. 15:32). Paul, with all true apostles, has become "like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things" (4:13, NRSV). Some Corinthian Christians may have thought he was too! In vivid language, he agrees that he is in trying circumstances. But he also wishes to point to the One who has permitted these circumstances. Thus, God arranges for Paul (and his fellow apostles) to be on display for "the world, to angels and to mortals" (4:9).

Have you ever suffered for the sake of the gospel? Do you know others who have? What would you say to encourage them? What words of Paul could you share with them?

THE APOSTLE'S RIGHTS (1 Cor. 9:1-18).

What rights that belong to an apostle does Paul claim are his? 1 Cor. 9:1-12.

As he had been earlier (1 Cor. 4:3-5), Paul remains concerned about those who are preoccupied with judging or examining him. In 1 Corinthians 9:1, 2, he uses a series of questions to set forth his credentials as an apostle. He has seen the risen Lord, and his ministry has been validated by fruit born, including the winning of Christians in Corinth (perhaps some of the very ones who are now critical of him). Paul assembles considerable evidence to establish his point, drawing illustrations from military service, agriculture, and animal husbandry. He further supports his argument with material from the Old Testament.

What parallel does Paul draw between the support of the Old Testament priests and Levites and the support of Christian ministers? 1 Cor. 9:13, 14.

Paul is not interested in reshaping the Christian ministry in the form of the Old Testament priesthood. He will elsewhere argue for the concept that has come to be known as “the priesthood of all believers.” Nonetheless, he draws a specific parallel between the Levites, who were supported by the tithe (see Num. 18:21, 24; Lev. 27:30, 32; Mal. 3:8-12), and the support of those who commit themselves to proclaiming the gospel of Christ. Notice that, as a crowning piece of evidence, he claims the authority of Christ Himself for such an idea (1 Cor. 9:14; Luke 10:7).

God calls us today to: 1. participate in the ministry that God has entrusted to us, whatever our occupation, and 2. return tithe for the support of those who have dedicated themselves to the proclamation of the gospel as a full-time occupation. In this passage, there also rings an additional challenge for those who accept such support. How quickly would the message spread if those of us who benefit from receiving tithe funds or who do not would be as dedicated as Paul in spreading the gospel!

How easy is it to delay and rationalize the decision to be faithful in returning tithe? Is your commitment to Christ strong enough to be reflected in the way you manage His gifts to you, including money? What important role does your trust in God play in becoming a faithful steward?

PAUL, THE ADAPTABLE APOSTLE (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

How adaptable does Paul claim to be in his bid to win people to Christ? 1 Cor. 9:19-23.

We sometimes find ourselves specializing in some specific way to share Christ, then grow nervous if we find ourselves pushed beyond what is familiar to us. Leonard Sweet tells of overhearing one graduate student sharing with another that the job offer he had received was beneath him. The other student responded, "You know, the world's a better place because Michelangelo did not say, 'I don't do ceilings.' "

The interchange inspired Sweet to write the following:

"....The world's a better place because Moses didn't say, 'I don't do Pharaohs or mass migrations.'

"The world's a better place because David didn't say, 'I don't do giants.'

"The world's a better place because Peter didn't say, 'I don't do Gentiles.'

"The world's a better place because John didn't say, 'I don't do deserts.'

"The world's a better place because Mary didn't say, 'I don't do virgin births.'

"The world's a better place because Paul didn't say, 'I don't do correspondence.'

"The world's a better place because Mary Magdalene didn't say, 'I don't do feet.'

"The world's a better place because Jesus didn't say, 'I don't do crosses.' "—Adapted from *Leadership*, Spring 1994, vol. xv, no. 2, p. 32.

In what ways do you think Paul proved adaptable for the sake of proclaiming the gospel? To what extent may we adapt our approaches in order to share Christ effectively with others?

Faithfulness to God as He empowers us to advance His Kingdom "is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Cor. 4:20, NIV). We often just talk about what God calls us to do, but do not earnestly seek the power of His Spirit to bring such talk to reality!

Is there something God is calling you to do for Him to which you are responding, "I don't do . . ."? How do you experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life to transform your talk to reality?

RUN TO WIN (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Paul takes us to Isthmia, 9 miles (14 km) east of Corinth, site of the important games that Corinth sponsored. Here, he invites us to watch a race, to see the boxers spar, and to take an example from the disciplined training of the athletes. While he is still interested in demonstrating how he conducts his ministry, he encourages Christian disciples to draw lessons for themselves.

What parallels and contrasts does Paul draw between athletics and the Christian life? 1 Cor. 9:24-27.

Again Paul employs imagery that is accessible to those who will hear his letter read. The Isthmian Games, held every two years, were second only to the Olympics. Some suggest that Paul may have attended the games during his stay in Corinth and helped to provide tents for the thousands of competitors and athletes.

Each of the ancient Greek games featured a ringlet made of specific greenery as a symbol of victory. Perhaps Paul watched from the sidelines as a winner took a victory lap in the Isthmian Games. On the winner's head would be a ringlet of . . . withered celery! Yes, the Isthmian games featured a celery crown, which was already wilted when presented and was surely more so by the end of the victory lap atop a sweaty brow. Fleeting honor indeed!

It is exciting to watch someone win a gold medal in today's Olympic Games. But even those medals are only *gold-plated* and worth about \$100.00 each. The victory ceremony lasts for a few fleeting moments. The top three competitors mount the platforms to have their medals placed around their necks. Then the flags of the nations they represent are raised and an *abbreviated* version of the gold medalist's national anthem is played. In a flash, it's over. Only marginally better than a wilted celery crown! And yet you would be hard pressed to find a winner who would say it was not worth it. Paul's point is that such effort, invested for so fleeting a prize, shames us in our lackluster response to the reward Christ promises His followers.

"We are striving for a prize infinitely more valuable, even the crown of everlasting life. How much more careful should be our striving, how much more willing our sacrifice and self-denial!"—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 312.

What honors does Revelation promise to Christian victors? In what arena will they receive these honors? How lasting will be their rewards? Rev. 2:7, 10, 17; 2:26-28; 3:5, 12, 21 (compare Matt. 6:19, 20).

FURTHER STUDY: First Corinthians 4:9-13 records Paul's trials and afflictions. Also read Romans 8:35; 2 Corinthians 4:8, 9; 6:4, 5; 11:23-29; 12:10. Why do you think Paul so frequently reviews his difficulties?

The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 30, pp. 309-315, comments on 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

First Corinthians 9:27 contains an important admission on Paul's part that we should not overlook. "Paul clearly envisages the possibility that, notwithstanding his work as a preacher, he may himself fall from grace and be rejected. . . . His conversion, his baptism, his call to apostleship, his service in the Gospel, do not guarantee his eternal salvation."—C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, second ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971), p. 218. What importance does Paul's statement have for us today? Is it possible to overemphasize either the permanency on the one hand or the fragility on the other of the relationship between Christ and His followers?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Paul calls for "firm self-control, strict temperance, and unflagging zeal in service" and holds that "the Christian must put forth the utmost exertion in order to gain the victory." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 309, 311. How does Paul's call for excellence in Christian living (1 Cor. 9:24-27) relate to the fact that salvation is a gift from God?
2. Paul's tone changes from that of sternness in 1 Corinthians 4:8-13 to a gentler, fatherly call in 1 Corinthians 4:14-21. But this call ends firmly with Paul threatening "the stick." What situation calls forth Paul's strong words? Do modern Christian leaders need to follow Paul's call to "imitate me" and become more firm disciplinarians?
3. Envision a church in which there is an absence of all gossip and backbiting for a year. List some possible results. Would you or your class be willing to initiate such an experiment?

SUMMARY: Paul's ministry gives us insight into the ministry of all Christians. We are all, in some sense, "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1) and have become "a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Cor. 4:9). Paul also reminds us that we need to support financially God's work and model his flexibility in mission strategy and his commitment to spiritual excellence. Last of all, Paul still extends the challenge "Run to win!"

Winning the Masai, Part 3 A Time to Build

Gwen Edwards watched from her window as her Masai friends climbed the gentle hill toward the grove of trees where they would worship God for the first time. Gwen gathered her felt board and felts and hurried up the hill after them. Despite her earlier fears, she enjoyed giving her first sermon. She told about Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and the lost sheep. She truly enjoyed the worship service! At first the Masai wanted only Gwen to lead them in worship, but in time the little congregation moved into a room on the academy campus, where others joined the Masai ministry project.

Solomon, a young Masai man who met Jesus Christ while working as a gardener at Maxwell, had translated for Gwen's story hour and Branch Sabbath School. Now he organized a baptismal class. And on a special Sabbath in May 1994, six Masai from the settlement near Maxwell were baptized.

One woman's husband was so impressed with the positive changes he saw in his wife, that he offered a piece of land at his primary home at Kisaju if Adventists would come and teach the people there. Gwen asked Jan Meharry if she would like to go to Kisaju to hold a short evangelistic series. Jan was eager to go! When she arrived at Kisaju, Jan recognized it as the same village where she had learned to dance! God had brought her back to minister to the very people who had accepted her four years earlier!

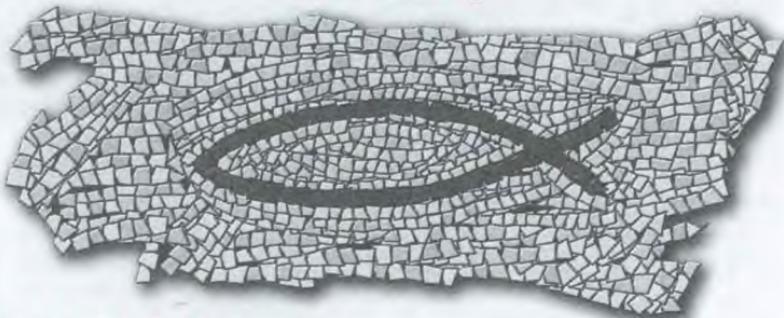
Gwen, Jan, and others worked with the Masai at Kisaju. The Holy Spirit touched the hearts of the people. They expressed their gratitude to those who came to teach and help them. Again they asked for a church in their settlement. Friends in America learned of the need, and within months a group from the Pacific Northwest traveled to Kenya and built a gift of love for the Masai—a simple chapel where the Masai worship God, learn to read, and learn how to improve their lives through proper health practices.

(continued next week)



The church at Kisaju (left). Gwen Edwards works at Maxwell Adventist Academy near Nairobi, Kenya. Jan Meharry and her family recently returned to the United States following a term as missionaries in Kenya.

Reviving Christian Identity



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Cor. 5, 6.

MEMORY TEXT: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

KEY THOUGHT: Paul warned the Christians of Corinth to refrain from immoral practices and legal proceedings against fellow church members. He also challenged them to regain their Christian identity as the washed, the sanctified, and the justified.

THE CHURCH IS TO NURTURE ACCOUNTABILITY AND MINISTRY. Adventist college students were once asked, "What do you like or dislike about the Seventh-day Adventist Church?" Amid the more positive responses came this reply: "I like the church because it doesn't demand. I dislike it because it has a tendency to abandon people in crisis." This person did not seem to recognize both as part of one pattern—a church detached from its members. The gospel, however, calls us to be accountable to our fellow church members (thus making "demands") and to be positively involved with people in crisis.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 to help the Christians in Corinth establish such a caring community. Because of incest and an arrogant protection of the offender, Christian accountability within the Corinthian church declined. And court battles strained at the seams of Christian community while Christian morality stretched beyond all bounds as Christian brothers defended their visits to brothels.

PURITY IN AN IMPURE WORLD (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 6:9-11).

First Corinthians 5 and 6 are important to a Christian understanding of human sexuality. But these chapters do invite a word of caution. One ancient author defined a letter as “half a dialogue.” We might say that reading a letter is often like listening to only half of a telephone conversation. In reading these two chapters, we must not presume too much about the half of the conversation we have not heard!

What situation existed in Corinth, and what did Paul feel needed to be done about it? 1 Cor. 5:1-8.

First Corinthians 4:14-21 leads up to the treatment of a drastic problem in view of which Paul threatens to come to Corinth “with a stick” (1 Cor. 4:21, NRSV). At the beginning of chapter 5 he reveals what has brought on his “spare the rod, spoil the child” strategy. The words Paul chose suggest that the offender’s partner is not his mother but a later wife of his father. And the man may have formed the liaison after his father’s death. But neither of these possibilities lessens the need for swift and decisive action.

Describe the sexual climate of Corinth. How did it contrast with the Christian life? 1 Cor. 6:9-11. What is the tremendous hope of transformation that the gospel brings to the most hopeless human condition. How does this hope affect our witness to the ones described in this passage?

“We would do well to meditate on the message and meaning of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The world today is one vast Corinth, with sexual perversions and vices of every kind rampant. But the miracle at Corinth tells us that Christ can save men and women out of even the vilest practices. . . . Thus, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 both encourages and informs. It is a window that lets in the power of the Word of God, inviting us to experience afresh the miracle at Corinth.”—William G. Johnsson, “Windows on the Word: Miracle at Corinth,” *Adventist Review*, Feb. 5, 1981, p. 6.

How does Paul’s suggested treatment of the offender compare to Christ’s treatment of the woman caught in adultery? (John 7:53–8:11). How do you account for the differences as you carefully consider the different circumstances?

ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE CHURCH (1 Cor. 5:1-5, 9-13).

Compare the attitudes of Paul and the Corinthian Christians regarding church discipline. 1 Cor. 5:1-5, 9-13.

The phrase *church discipline* may seem to be contradictory, especially since the spirit of our times is expressed in sayings such as: "It's my life, and I'll do what I want." "It's none of your business." And "Why should you care?" Yet our age also echos a haunting loneliness of spirit. Paul assumes that the Christian community is one in which members call one another to accountability. In the early house churches, there was no organizational distance from erring members. They all knew one another well. If anything, their acquaintance with the transgressor led them to downplay offensive behavior and dismiss that which required immediate treatment.

How does Paul picture his participation with the church, and what outcome of the disciplinary action does he imagine? 1 Cor. 5:3-5.

What does it mean that the church is to "hand this man over to Satan" (1 Cor. 5:5, NIV)? It is Paul's way of describing the disfellowshiping of a member—outside the church lies the kingdom of Satan (Col. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:20; 1 John 5:19).

What of "the destruction of the flesh"? This likely means that the man's removal will, hopefully, cause him to "wake up," and return to Christian commitment, thus destroying the flesh. "The purpose of the banishment is not so much the preservation of the purity of the community as the winning back of the offender by making him ashamed of his conduct. . . . What is to be destroyed is not the body, but the tendency which binds the offender to sin."—N. G. Joy, "Is the Body To Be Destroyed?", *The Bible Translator* 39 (1988): 435, 436.

This final phrase is more amazing than unclear—"so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (NRSV). Paul looks toward the final day of judgment and imagines the disciplined offender as standing among God's people!

"Among the more serious of the evils that had developed among the Corinthian believers, was that of a return to many of the debasing customs of heathenism."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 303.

What misunderstanding had developed as a result of an earlier letter written by Paul? How is this significant for the Seventh-day Adventist mission today? 1 Cor. 5:9-13.

YOU REALLY ARE UNLEAVENED (1 Cor. 5:1-13).

How might Paul's counsel correct some of our concepts of "church discipline"? 1 Cor. 5:1-13.

Notice these aspects of Paul's understanding of church discipline (could you add others?):

1. *It is active.* He is not satisfied with a passive approach to a serious problem. For Paul, when a member puts the integrity of the church at risk by crossing certain boundaries, the church must act.
2. *It underlines the local church's responsibility.* While Paul imagines himself participating in treating the problem, he regards the responsibility for action as the local congregation's. He urges them to do their duty.
3. *It is redemptive.* Paul, despite his feelings about the offender's not being in church, hopes for the man's re-entry. In doing so, he provides us with an important example. Often we are prone to label fallen church members as "hopeless."

How does Paul use allusions to the Passover Feast in an attempt to reverse the arrogance of the Corinthians? 1 Cor. 5:6-8.

At the Passover, Jewish households were to participate in a diligent search to remove all bits of leaven (Ex. 12:14-20; 13:7). Paul points to the great antitype of the feast: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." While Paul still may have in mind the expulsion of the erring member, his application is broader. The believers are to be on the alert for those seemingly small, but really influential and destructive attitudes (like their "boasting") that could impact their discipleship out of all proportion to their "size" (compare Gal. 5:7-9).

"Those who cannot discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not, may be charmed with these societies that have no connection with God, but no earnest Christian can prosper in such an atmosphere. The vital air of heaven is not there. His soul is barren, and he feels as destitute of the refreshing of the Holy Spirit as were the hills of Gilboa of dew and rain."—*Evangelism*, p. 619.

What is the appropriate attitude of those involved in calling a fellow member to accountability? 1 Cor. 5:2; Gal. 6:1; 2 Thess. 3:14, 15.

COURTING DISASTER (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

In many countries today, it seems that everyone is quick to file lawsuits against anyone for anything. In Paul's day, Corinth may not have been so different. Dio Chrysostom, writing about A.D. 100, reports that there were "lawyers innumerable perverting justice." And wealthy and powerful citizens often used the civil courts to dispense injustice against those with less clout. This may be why Paul calls the judges "unjust" (1 Cor. 6:1) and says that the victors in the lawsuits "[do] wrong, and defraud" (1 Cor. 6:8, NRSV).

What further problem developed in the Corinthian Christian community, and what remedy did Paul suggest? 1 Cor. 6:1-8. Review the procedure Jesus commands as appropriate when a Christian believes himself or herself to have been wronged by another Christian. Matt. 18:15-20.

When will believers participate in the judgment of the world and of angels? Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; Rev. 3:20, 21; 20:4-6.

The issues raised in 1 Corinthians 5-6 are "insider" and "outsider" issues. Should one who is really "outside" be allowed to remain "inside" (1 Cor. 5:1-8)? Should former Christians be treated differently from those who have never been "inside"? (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Is it appropriate for "inside" issues to be taken up in "outside" courts? (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

"Satan is constantly seeking to introduce distrust, alienation, and malice among God's people. We shall often be tempted to feel that our rights are invaded, even when there is no real cause for such feelings. Those whose love for self is stronger than their love for Christ and His cause will place their own interests first and will resort to almost any expedient to guard and maintain them. Even many who appear to be conscientious Christians are hindered by pride and self-esteem from going privately to those whom they think in error, that they may talk with them in the spirit of Christ and pray together for one another. When they think themselves injured by their brethren, some will even go to law instead of following the Saviour's rule."

—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 305.

How do similar issues confront you? How can your class or church be helpful in similar situations today?

FLEE FORNICATION! (1 Cor. 6:12-20).

What illicit sexual behavior did Christian men at Corinth attempt to justify? 1 Cor. 6:12-20.

An early copy of 1 Corinthians exhibits no italicized headings, no chapter and verse divisions and no neatly indented paragraphs. Neither were there quotation marks or spaces between words. Thus, we must carefully consider which words are Paul's and which represent his quotations of ideas or slogans being offered at Corinth.

Most recent translations agree that the following are Corinthian slogans to which Paul responded: "All things are lawful for me" (verse 12) and "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" (verse 13, NRSV; a slogan apparently used to justify the illicit sexual practice). Additional slogans may be the phrases "God will destroy both one and the other" (verse 13, if taken to mean that since God is going to destroy the human body, what one does with it is unimportant) and "Every sin that a person commits is outside the body" (verse 18, NRSV).

How does Paul answer these slogans and establish important principles for a Christian understanding of human sexuality? 1 Cor. 6:12-20.

To each of the Corinthian slogans Paul adds a response. The philosophy at Corinth suggested that the body was morally irrelevant: what one does with one's body does not affect one's relationship with God. But Paul: 1. shows that God values the body so highly as to destine it for resurrection (verse 14); 2. demonstrates the absolute absurdity and sinfulness of a Christian man's association with a prostitute (verses 15-17); and 3. identifies the Christian's body as a temple of the Spirit and the Christian as a purchased slave who belongs to the divine Owner (verses 19, 20).

"God has bought us, and He claims a throne in each heart. Our minds and bodies must be subordinated to Him, and the natural habits and appetites must be made subservient to the higher wants of the soul. But we can place no dependence upon ourselves in this work. We cannot with safety follow our own guidance. The Holy Spirit must renew and sanctify us. In God's service there must be no halfway work."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1088.

Which of the above principles is most important in the context of modern culture? Why?

FURTHER STUDY: If 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 is any indication, instruction with regard to appropriate sexual behavior seems to have been part of Paul's basic teaching to new converts. Why was this the case? What were the themes Paul is likely to have emphasized? Do we need more instruction on such matters today?

Following is a portrait of Christian camaraderie and accountability: "Those of diverse exercises come together and with simplicity and humbleness of mind talk out their experience. All who are pursuing the onward Christian course should have, and will have, an experience that is living, that is new and interesting. A living experience is made up of daily trials, conflicts, and temptations, strong efforts and victories, and great peace and joy gained through Jesus. A simple relation of such experiences gives light, strength, and knowledge that will aid others in their advancement in the divine life."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 579. What steps can you take to foster such fellowship?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever been part of a class or a small group that attempted to practice Christian accountability? What was the result? Are Seventh-day Adventists too individualistic in their faith? Why or why not?
2. Some practical questions arise regarding Paul's counsel about litigation between Christians. For example, what if, following an accident in which you were involved, your insurance company sues another believer?
3. Paul's focus in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 is on the misbehavior of men, with little attention given to the women involved. What do you think would have been the impact of Paul's counsel on Christian women in Corinth?

SUMMARY: Paul calls Christians at Corinth away from a boastful attitude toward the open sexual sin of one member, away from an inappropriate use of civil courts, and away from immoral visits to prostitutes. While the purity of the apostolic age may be tarnished, we are the richer for Paul's list of principles that remain important for defining Christian identity today.



Winning the Masai, Part 4

A Time to Sing

Jan and Marlin Meharry visited the new believers at Kisaju as often as possible. But this trip was different. It was time to leave Kenya, and they had come to Kisaju to say goodbye to their Masai friends. Amid tears and singing, they bid farewell, and promised to return one day.

The work at Kisaju has continued with vigor. Solomon and Isaac, Masai layworkers, began teaching the women and children to read and write, using the Bible as their text. When the men heard that the women were learning to read, they wanted to learn as well. Soon they will be able to study the Word of God for themselves.

The little chapel at Kisaju has become the center of their lives. They worship, they learn, and they receive healing—both physical and spiritual—in their church. The Masai thank God for those who have come to teach them a better way to live and a Saviour to love.

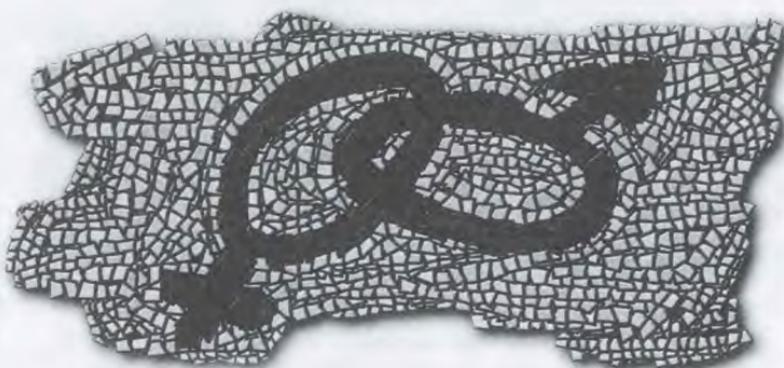
And on a recent cloudless Sabbath day, the believers of Kisaju gathered around a simple cement basin filled with water, and welcomed 23 precious Masai believers into the Adventist faith. With songs of rejoicing sung in English and Kimasai, joining the heavenly choirs, it must have sounded wonderful!

Church leaders have worked for decades to reach the Masai in East Kenya, but with little success. God chose instead to use two young mothers with no special training, but with a love and a burden, to win the Masai for His kingdom. Could He have used them if they were afraid to get dirty? Afraid to preach? Could He have used them if they had turned their nose up at strange smells or new foods? He tested their dedication and found them willing to do what He asked in order to win someone to Jesus. Praise God! Because these lay workers were willing to get dirty for His glory, precious souls have been baptized into God's kingdom.



Because of love: 23 new believers were baptized at Kisaju, Kenya as the result of the work among the Masai by lay men and women. (Photo by Jackie O. Smith.) Jan Meharry, Gwen Edwards, and Charlotte Ishkanian contributed to this four-part testimony of God's love.

Christian Sexuality



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Corinthians 7; Eph. 5:21-33.

MEMORY TEXT: "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that" (1 Corinthians 7:7).

KEY THOUGHT: How should Christians make decisions about marriage, remaining single, or coping with conditions thrust upon them? How can Christian values and principles inform these eternally significant choices? Important decisions such as those regarding our marital status require an openness to God and His Word to enlighten and empower us to do His will.

IN OUR WORLD SEX IS OFTEN USED TO SELL A PRODUCT. Christians are in need of straightforward words on the topic of human sexuality. We need the Holy Spirit to bring the power of God's Word to bear upon our lives, to enable us to choose purity, and to help us make choices based on the high calling of God's Word, not on the low sexual standards of the world.

In our study of 1 Corinthians 7, we shall sometimes wish for a more specific understanding of the circumstances Paul addresses. There is much to learn, though, as we watch Paul weigh the consequences of certain decisions and as we hear him share principles of Christian freedom and sexuality with the believers in Corinth.

SEX IN MARRIAGE (1 Cor. 7:1-7).

Paul now answers questions the Corinthians have. What is the first issue he addresses? 1 Cor. 7:1-7.

Again deciding which words are Paul's and which we should attribute to the Corinthians is significant. Does it make a difference whether the passage reads "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is well for a man not to touch a woman'" (1 Cor. 7:15, NRSV) or "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (NKJV)?

The clause "It is well for a man not to touch a woman," should be regarded as a Corinthian slogan to which Paul responds. The Corinthians have submitted for Paul's approval a view of marriage that involved abstinence. This is important to understand, for Paul's views of Christian marriage do not match those of his questioners.

True religion was never meant to be used as a convenient weapon for sexual denial. Paul calls for moral and sexual purity, not prudery. Sex is a God-given blessing if used as He intended and directed.

How does the sexual experience in marriage relate to one's spirituality? 1 Cor. 7:2-7.

For Paul, the usual pattern for Christians would be to marry. He is realistic about human sex drives and worries that extended abstinence in marriage, even if motivated by spirituality, might lead to temptation. While he wishes all were single like himself, he acknowledges that God has arranged things differently (verse 7).

In response to the Corinthian slogan "It is well for a man not to touch a woman" (verse 1, NRSV), Paul discusses only sex in marriage. His reason for this is clear—marriage is the only legitimate context for sexual activity. And, if verses 36-38 address the case of the betrothed couple, Paul assumes that the pair do not engage in sexual activity until after marriage.

"If you will only watch, continually watch unto prayer, if you will do everything as if you were in the immediate presence of God, you will be saved from yielding to temptation and may hope to be kept pure, spotless, and undefiled till the last."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 338.

What great advantages are evident today that support the view that marriage is still the only legitimate context for sexual activity?

TO BE SINGLE IS GOOD (1 Cor. 7:8, 9, 25-40).

What counsel does Paul provide to those in Corinth who are pondering the question “Should I marry?” 1 Cor. 7:8, 9, 25-40. Do you agree with his counsel? Why or why not?

Paul addresses his counsel to “the unmarried and the widows” (verses 8, 9, 39, 40); and to “virgins” (verses 25-28; the term may include people of both sexes; compare Rev. 14:4).

A third situation is less clear as Paul’s language discusses a man and his “virgin” (1 Cor. 7:36-38). Most modern translations understand this to mean a man and his fiancée, though it is possible Paul is discussing the case of a father and his betrothed daughter.

In each situation, Paul’s counsel is consistent. He believes it is better to remain single. This does not mean “better” in a moral sense. Both singleness and marriage are good and within God’s desires for humankind (verses 28, 38). But “in view of the impending crisis” (verse 26, NRSV), and the need for full dedication to “the affairs of the Lord” (verse 34), Paul believes singleness is the more appropriate choice if other factors allow it. On the other hand, “Even when all the problems associated with married life during a period of persecution and distress are taken into account (see verse 26), it is better to marry than to be inwardly consumed with the mentally, emotionally, and physically disturbing condition of unsatisfied desire.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 708.

What is Paul’s evaluation of singleness? 1 Cor. 7:8, 25, 26, 32-35, 38, 40.

First Corinthians 7 makes an important contribution to our church: To be single is good. Singleness is both desirable and in harmony with God’s will. It is *not* a second-rate status. To be single is a viable choice for Christians. In fact, Paul describes it as a gift from God (1 Cor. 7:7; compare verse 37). And like his Lord before him, he himself is single and lays bold claim to the gift. While Paul is writing primarily to those who are deciding whether they should marry, his positive evaluation of single life speaks to all singles today, regardless of whether they have chosen such a lifestyle.

How can the church be more inclusive of its adult members who are not married? What can you do personally to make them enjoy a sense of belonging in the body of Christ?

SHOULD I REMAIN MARRIED? (1 Cor. 7:10-16, 39, 40).

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul deals with situations where “separation” seems to be a desirable choice to at least one partner in a marriage. Summarize Paul’s counsel regarding these situations.

Situation 1—Husbands and wives (verses 10, 11)

Situation 2—Believer married to unbeliever (verses 12-16)

Notice that Paul bases his belief in the permanence of marriage on a command from “the Lord.” (See Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12).

Some may have felt that their conversion somehow invalidated their marriage. But Paul argues that the “one body” principle holds and that the believing partner is not damaged by the union. As an unlawful union desecrates (1 Cor. 6:16), a lawful one consecrates. He points to the case of the unbaptized children of believing parents as an illustration of his point. Just as unbaptized children are “holy,” so the unbelieving partner is drawn into the sphere of holiness.

In his book *Caring and Commitment*, Lewis Smedes tells of “Ralph,” who, following his divorce, was struck with remorse. He went to a therapist who soothed his regret with the thought that marriage is for one’s own growth, and that when one has not experienced growth for some time, it is time to leave. Smedes counters, “We do not give ourselves a good chance for growing personally if we keep hankering after our fantasy of the ideal woman. Or man. We grow when we keep renewing our commitment to the only spouse we’ve got. We grow when we stop dreaming of a perfect marriage, and adjust caringly to the one we have. Our best growth comes when we forget about our own growth, and focus on caring instead.

“Here’s a nice twist: instead of giving us a good reason for giving up a lifetime commitment, our need to grow is a prime reason for keeping it.”—New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1992, p. 95.

What are some of the trivial reasons offered for granting legal separation in marriage? Compare with Matthew 5:31, 32.

Unfortunately, some couples enter into marriage on a trial basis depending on how things work out. How can this tentative attitude be the undoing of such unions?

How is the “unbelieving husband sanctified by the wife”? (7:14).

REMAIN AS YOU ARE (1 Cor. 7:17-31).

Why do you think Paul is so persistent in his counsel that converts should remain as they are? How would you apply his words today? 1 Cor. 7:17-24.

Paul invites the Corinthians to examine their priorities carefully. The priority of the Christian is to obey God's will: "Obeying the commandments of God is everything" (7:19, NRSV).

What does Paul mean when he asks for "those who have wives" to "be as though they had none"? 1 Cor. 7:29-31; (compare Heb. 11:13-16).

"... There are many who are losing their souls in this age of the world by becoming absorbed in the thoughts of marriage and in the marriage relation itself. . . .

"God has placed men in the world, and it is their privilege to eat, to drink, to trade, to marry, and to be given in marriage; but it is safe to do these things only in the fear of God. We should live in the world with reference to the eternal world."—*Mind, Character and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 221; see Matt. 24:38.

First Corinthians 7 helps to develop two sets of thought questions. The first is for those who are single and contemplating the possibility of marriage:

1. Has God given me the gift of singleness which I can exercise for the good of His kingdom? (1 Cor. 7:7, 17, 37)
2. Does my proposed marriage partner share my dedication to Jesus Christ? (Note Paul's counsel that remarriage should occur "only in the Lord," verse 39, NRSV.)
3. Will my marriage detract from or enhance my preparation for Christ's return? (verses 25-31)

Thought questions for those who are married include:

1. Am I practicing the degree of mutual respect that seems so important to Paul? (verse 4).
2. Am I deeply committed to my marriage? Do I allow Christ to help me retain loyalty to my mate even though he or she falls short of my ideal? (verses 10-14; compare Mark 10:2-9).
3. How can my spouse and I join in more "unhindered devotion" to the Lord? (verses 29, 32-35).

In view of 1 Corinthians 7, what questions would you add?

SCRIPTURAL VIEWS OF MARRIAGE AND SEXUALITY (Gen. 1:27; Prov. 2:1, 2, 16-19; 5:15-23; 6:20-35; Eph. 5:21-33).

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul responds to more of the Corinthians' questions. His answers are helpful in formulating an understanding of Christian sexuality. But we should also allow other scriptural passages to shape that understanding.

What views of marriage does Paul provide in Ephesians 5:21-33? How do they compare with those he expressed in 1 Corinthians 7?

What do the following verses teach in opposition to the following four lies people today often believe about marriage and sexuality?

Lie 1—Marriage is boring (Prov. 5:15-23).

Lie 2—Adultery shows you are clever and attractive (Prov. 6:20-35).

Lie 3—Adultery adds excitement to your life (Prov. 2:1, 2, 16-19).

Lie 4—Divorce is not as bad as people make it to be (Mal. 2:16).

Commenting on Genesis 1:27, Richard Foster writes: "Our maleness and femaleness, is not just an accidental arrangement of the human species, not just a convenient way to keep the human race going. No, it is at the center of our true humanity. We exist as male and female in relationship. Our sexualness, our capacity to love and be loved, is intimately related to our creation in the image of God. What a high view of human sexuality! . . .

"How much richer and fuller is the biblical perspective! . . . To discuss a great book, to view a sunset together—this is sexuality at its best, for male and female are in intimate relationship. To be sure, genital sex is a part of the total picture, but human sexuality is a far larger reality than merely coitus."—*The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex & Power* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 92.

FURTHER STUDY: Read Isaiah 62:5 and Revelation 19:7-9. After studying this week's lesson, why do you think God used the marriage relationship to symbolize His relationship with the church?

Prayerfully consider one of the following segments: "From the Marriage Altar," *The Adventist Home*, pp. 97-128; "The Builders of the Home," *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 356-362; "Love and Sexuality in the Human Experience," *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 218-239.

"In your life union your affections are to be tributary to each other's happiness. Each is to minister to the happiness of the other. This is the will of God concerning you. But while you are to blend as one, neither of you is to lose his or her individuality in the other. God is the owner of your individuality. Of Him you are to ask: What is right? What is wrong? How may I best fulfill the purpose of my creation?"—*The Adventist Home*, p. 103.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Paul seems careful to qualify his counsel as though he's afraid some might make too much of it or misunderstand his tone as one of command instead of advice (1 Cor. 7:6, 10, 12, 25, 35, 40). How seriously should we take Paul's counsel on Christian sexuality?
2. Paul does not address many situations that are common today. He does not discuss the situation of a single person who senses she or he does not have the gift of singleness but for whom there is no obvious choice of a spouse. What words of counsel do you think Paul would have for this person or others in different settings?
3. React to the following quotation: "Marriage is often presented as having a sacramental quality, that is, an element of grace witnessing to the presence of God in our lives. If marriage is a sacrament testifying to the union of God with us and a metaphor of God's relationship with the church, singleness, too, is a sacrament. It testifies to the power and completeness of God's love."—Beverly Beem, "The Sacrament of Singleness," *Signs of the Times*, October 1990, p. 27.

SUMMARY: We are to make crucial decisions with regard to marriage or singleness in answer to God's call, in the power of the gifts He provides, and in view of Christ's return.

The Faithful Chief

J. H. Zachary

As I stepped into the jungle clearing in the Philippines, I entered a primitive village called Dampaan. The entire village soon appeared to see the foreigner from America. The village chief, Tibulawan, welcomed me. During the visit, the chief made an appeal, "Please send us a teacher."

Several weeks later, two student missionaries from Mountain View College in the Philippines arrived in Dampaan and started a school. The first-grade students ranged in age from 6 to 20, all learning to read and write together. In the evenings, the villagers gathered to listen to the student missionaries lead in Bible studies.

Before that year was over Chief Tibulawan and 26 of his people were ready for baptism. Eventually the entire village followed their chief's example and were baptized as Seventh-day Adventists.

The message of Christ's soon coming spread to other villages in the area. Then funds ran out, and the student evangelists no longer came to teach in Dampaan. Fifteen years passed. Then recently missionaries from Mountain View College visited Dampaan one Sabbath morning. No one knew they were coming. As they neared the village, they heard singing. To their joy they found the villagers worshiping God. Chief Tibulawan preached. Unable to read, he quoted Bible texts that he had memorized. Brother Tibulawan and his people had remained faithful during the long 15 years they were without outside spiritual leadership. Mountain View College has again sent student missionaries to reopen the school in Dampaan, and 100 students now study in grades one through three.

During recent evangelistic meetings held throughout the Philippines, Brother Tibulawan brought more than 20 of his people down from the mountains to be baptized. After the service, Chief

Tibulawan made this appeal. "More than 10 villages in the mountains still are waiting for a teacher to come and tell them about Jesus. Please help us."

How will we answer his plea?

Chief Tibulawan (left) kept his people faithful to God during 15 years without church leadership. J. H. Zachary is director of Evangelism for The Quiet Hour.



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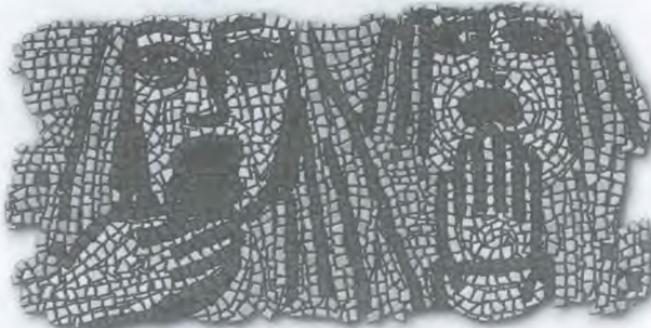
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Food for Thought About Idols



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Corinthians 8; 10:14-11:1.

MEMORY TEXT: “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9).

KEY THOUGHT: Our actions may seem appropriate and ethical. However, as Christians, we are held accountable for the influence our actions have on others.

ARE WE REALLY ACCOUNTABLE FOR OTHERS? One writer has described our age as “obsessively individualistic” and full of “raging individualism.” He expands: “*My* pleasures, *my* likes and dislikes, *my* gratification rule the day. Forget about the future—the children and the grandchildren—forget about who will pay later, forget about rules, and forget about God. *Don't get in my way!* If it feels good to me, I want it, and I want it now, and I'm gonna get it.” —William Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1995), pp. 24, 28.

To such times as ours, Paul's counsel to the Corinthians that we will study this week comes as shocking news. Even though I know I am right, and even though I do what is right, I may be sinning against Christ! Not only must I keep my own conscience clear, I must watch with care lest my “right” actions harm the spiritual commitment of others. Sobering words, indeed, for an age such as ours!

FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS (1 Cor. 8:1–11:1).

Take a few minutes to survey 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1. What are its major sections? What recurring themes do you observe in this section of the epistle?

Paul begins this section by dealing with two issues: 1. Should Christians eat food that had been part of a sacrifice? (8:1–8); and 2. Should Christians participate in festive meals held in temples dedicated to idol worship? (1 Cor. 8:9–13). He builds a forceful argument that love for others should exert a major influence on our behavior. He supports this by citing his own example (1 Corinthians 9; compare 10:31–11:1). Following a section in which he corrects inappropriate views of baptism and the Lord's Supper (10:1–13; discussed in Lesson 8), Paul concludes by revisiting the two issues regarding idols and food. First he discusses participating in feasts in idol temples (10:14–22), then eating food offered to an idol (10:23–11:1).

Once again, the Corinthians posed questions to which Paul responded. Judging from 1 Corinthians 8:1–13 and 10:14–30, what questions did they ask? What questions would you have asked if you were in their place?

We should applaud the Corinthians for the way they respond to their ethical dilemma. We would do well to follow their example. We should prayerfully turn to God's Word and to Christian friends and teachers in an effort to make sound decisions about our own behavior.

To understand the questions of the Corinthians, we must note that the worship of false gods was an integral part of social and commercial life. In an age where superstition was the rule, such worship extended to every sphere of life. The usual diet would not have included meat that was reserved for special events—weddings, funerals, public festivals, gatherings of associations or clubs, and feasts hosted in temples. Most available meat had, therefore, been part of a sacrificial offering to a pagan deity. At such rites, only a token portion was burned, the remainder going to priests and others who sold what they did not need to the "meat market" (1 Cor. 10:25, NIV).

What ethical dilemmas are you facing? On what basis do you intend to resolve them? What sources of help are available to you in resolving them? If you have resolved an ethical dilemma in your life, come prepared to share with your class how you arrived at resolution.

MEALS AND MARKETS (1 Cor. 8:1-9; 10:23-30).

Where does Paul envision that a Christian might confront the issue of food offered to idols? 1 Cor. 10:25, 27.

Paul understands that Corinthian Christians will confront the issue both in the markets and in the homes of unbelievers. A passage from Plutarch (A.D. 46-120) helps us imagine the latter. Plutarch lived close to Corinth, and he records the following account of a private dinner: "Ariston's cook made a hit with the dinner guests not only because of his general skill, but because the cock he set before the diners, though it had just been slaughtered as a sacrifice to Heracles, was as tender as if it had been a day old."—Quoted in Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, p. 101.

In these settings, what does Paul say should be the Christian's reaction? 1 Cor. 8:1-9; 10:23-30 (compare Rom. 14:13-23). Explain the rationale for his view.

Since idols are "nothing in the world" (1 Cor. 8:4, KJV), meat offered to them is not really tainted by anything. So, in both the case of meat purchased at the market and that of a meal at the home of an unbeliever, Paul advocates a "don't ask" policy. But one must also consider the influence of one's actions on others. Paul suggests that this should figure in one's actions if, in the course of the meal, someone reveals that the meat had been part of a sacrifice.

In these passages, Paul displays a high regard for the conscience. He concludes that we should not lead one to violate his or her conscience, even when the conscience is over-sensitized or ill-informed. He further concludes that if a person's conscience instructs "No" on a morally neutral matter, it should be followed. To go against the conscience would be wrong. While the standard on which the conscience is based may need enlightening, Paul is eager to guard against breaching the conscience.

In this context the issue of not asking refers, as we have seen, to food offered to idols; however, it is still appropriate to ask whether the meat is clean or unclean if the occasion necessitates it.

How can we avoid "defiling" or "wounding" someone's conscience? To what extent are we responsible for the integrity of others? In our carelessness, we may become an offense to a brother's or a sister's conscience. How may we, in loving and understanding ways, remedy such a hurtful situation?

TEMPLE BANQUETS (1 Cor. 8:9-13; 10:14-22).

Where else did Corinthian Christians face the issue of food offered to idols? 1 Cor. 8:10; 10:14-22.

The reality of these texts is seen in a surviving invitation to a feast in honor of the god Serapis: "Chaeremon [the host] invites you to dinner at the banquet of our Lord Serapis in the Serapeum [the temple to Serapis] tomorrow, the fifteenth, at the ninth hour." Can you imagine receiving such an invitation? How would you respond? What if the event happened to be "*the social event of the year*"?

Our ability to appreciate the issue is also aided by excavations at Corinth. Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, was worshiped at his temple in Corinth, the Asclepion. The Asclepion was situated in a pleasant spot with a spacious courtyard and a swimming pool. Serving as a kind of health club and social center, it boasted three dining rooms. Imagine the temptation a "weak" church member would face if invited to celebrate, for example, the marriage of a pagan relative there, especially if it was known that other Christians (the "strong") participated in such feasts! (See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, pp. 161-167.)

In Paul's view, is it a sin to eat meat offered to idols in such a setting? 1 Cor. 8:11, 12. What rationale does he give for his view?

Paul is not interested in how our behavior impacts God in isolation from how it affects our fellow believers. He weds the vertical dimension of our relationship with God to the horizontal dimension of our relationships to others.

"Christianity demands that your right shall not lead others astray, that it shall not do violence to that most sacred and delicate thing—a human conscience."—F. W. Robertson quoted in Ralph P. Martin, *Understanding the New Testament: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians* (Philadelphia and New York: A. J. Holman, 1978), p. 27.

What are some attitudes or behaviors that you may have in living your Christian life that may intentionally or unintentionally hinder another's spiritual growth?

What relationship exists between your self-denial and another person's spiritual development?

IDOLS AND IDOLATRY (Isa. 44:9-21; 1 Cor. 10:14-22).

Review Isaiah's treatment of idolatry. Isa. 44:9-21.

Like Paul, Isaiah recognized that idol worship has a numbing spiritual effect. "A deluded heart misleads him [the idolator]; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?'" (Isa. 44:20, NIV).

What arguments does Paul employ against participation in pagan temple feasts? 1 Cor. 10:14-22.

In partaking of the Lord's Supper, Christians share together in Christ, the "one bread" reflecting the "one body" we form. Likewise, the Old Testament sacrifices were meals with great significance. By participating, the Israelites became "partners in the altar" (1 Cor. 10:18, NRSV). Paul argues that the same is true of idol feasts. However, participating in such a feast does not make one a participant in an idol, itself a nonentity. Rather, such involvement creates "partners with demons" (verse 20, NRSV).

How does the New Testament encourage us to broaden our understanding of idolatry? Col. 3:5; Rev. 2:14, 20. What are some other forms of idolatry that we encounter in our modern world?

"Many who bear the name of Christians are serving other gods. . . . Our Creator demands our supreme devotion, our first allegiance. Anything which tends to abate our love for God, or to interfere with the service due Him, becomes thereby an idol."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, pp. 1011, 1012.

"The idols of the heathen stood between them and their God, obscuring God from their vision. Thus it is today. By the cunning deception of Satan false theories are made a power to rob God. Man's spiritual understanding is darkened by Satan's sophistry. Instead of religion's making men meek and lowly in heart, it works to make them religious zealots, exacting and hard-spirited because their ideas are not met. Their religious ideas do not lead the soul to humble, fervent trust in God."—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 221.

What modern activities or ideas that seem nonthreatening may, in fact, make us "partners with demons"?

THE WEAK AND THE STRONG (1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:14-30).**Who are “the strong”? 1 Cor. 8:1-6; 10:14-30.**

The strong possess accurate knowledge about the nonexistence of idols. But they are acting on this knowledge in ways that are misleading others. They deserve an “A” in Bible doctrines, but an “F” in practical godliness. The “strong,” however, are weaker than they think! Based on an inaccurate understanding of the Lord’s Supper and baptism (see Lesson 8), they believe themselves invincible and able to participate in temple feasts.

There are two types of “strong” church members implied in Paul’s treatment. The “weak strong” succumb to the beguiling power of their knowledge and act out what they “know” to be right, to the detriment of others. The “strong strong,” on the other hand, can refrain from behaviors that, while not necessarily wrong, could lead someone else astray.

Who are “the weak”? 1 Cor. 8:7-13; 10:27-29.

The “weak” earn the title for two reasons. First, the weak church member has a “weak” or oversensitized conscience and thus makes decisions on irrational grounds. Second, “weak” members are “weak” because they succumb too readily to the example of others. While none of the Corinthians had been a Christian for long, the “weak” were probably newer members. Or, at least members who struggled with the pull of their old life. “We cannot underestimate how difficult it must have been for people accustomed to believing in the reality of many gods suddenly to transform those years of deeply entrenched religious conviction into a monotheistic framework.” —Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 95.

These passages invite us to be especially thoughtful of those who are new in the faith and at risk of being drawn once again to harmful former associations and habits. It is the responsibility of their new family members to watch over them. We should refrain from any behavior, however “right,” that will strengthen the old life.

Our churches have sometimes appointed “spiritual guardians” for newly baptized members. Paul reminds us that all of us should function in this way. What can you do to encourage a newly baptized member? How would a spiritual partner enhance mutual encouragement and spiritual growth?

FURTHER STUDY: For additional material from Paul on the theme of worshiping the true God, see Acts 17:16-33, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10.

The issues revolving around idol-food may seem far removed from our time and culture. Ellen White, though, regards these passages as especially appropriate to us:

"Paul urged his brethren to ask themselves what influence their words and deeds would have upon others, and to do nothing, however innocent in itself, that would seem to sanction idolatry, or offend the scruples of those who might be weak in the faith. . . .

"The apostle's words of warning to the Corinthian church are applicable to all time, and are especially adapted to our day. By idolatry he meant not only the worship of idols, but self-serving, love of ease, the gratification of appetite and passion. A mere profession of faith in Christ, a boastful knowledge of the truth, does not make a man a Christian. A religion that seeks only to gratify the eye, the ear, and the taste, or that sanctions self-indulgence, is not the religion of Christ."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 316, 317.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians relate to the command against consuming food offered to idols in Acts 15:19-21, 28, 29 and Revelation 2:14, 20?
2. Paul seems willing to accept more than one perspective on the issue of food offered to idols. He imagines that the church will harbor both members who believe it appropriate to eat such food and those who do not. On what basis do we distinguish between acceptable diversity and harmful division?
3. How can you help your local church or Sabbath School class more effectively serve its new members?

SUMMARY: Helpful Christian behavior requires both sound information and sensitivity to the spiritual well-being of others. Encouraging those around us, especially those young in the faith, should be a high priority.



All Are Precious in His Sight

David Ferraro

How large is your church? 50? 100? 500? When was the last time the church held a baptism? Are members talking about enlarging the church?

In Niger [Nee-JAIR], a Muslim country south of the Sahara Desert in the heart of Africa, the church has 54 members—in the entire country!

Sharing the gospel in Niger is difficult. A person who wants to become a Christian faces serious problems. New believers often are treated as lepers, isolated from their families and loved ones. But God is working in Niger, and exciting things are happening.

Adamou lives in a small town 90 miles south of the capital city of Niamey, Niger. He became a Christian in 1988. In 1994 he learned of the Adventist church in Niamey. He contacted Pastor Zakari and requested a visit. The pastor came and began Bible studies with Adamou and some of his friends. Adamou was excited about the message of the Sabbath and other truths he was learning. He joined the Adventist church.

Adamou, like many young people of Niger, had problems finding work. That meant he had lots of time to share his new beliefs with others. He is so successful in stirring up interest in God, that Pastor Zakari established a small company of believers in his village. They meet in a small hut on Sabbath mornings. Several new believers were baptized, and the little group grew to about 13 people. When the pastor visited, he brought great joy—five Bibles, so the believers would not all have to share Adamou's Bible.

Each member of the little congregation has stories of pain and victory. One young man was disowned and faced starvation until the believers gave him a large bag of rice. A young girl, ready to be baptized, is pleading with her father to allow her to become a Christian. But her father, a teacher of the Koran, has threatened to disown her if she identifies with Christians. Still she waits and hopes and prays that he will change his mind.

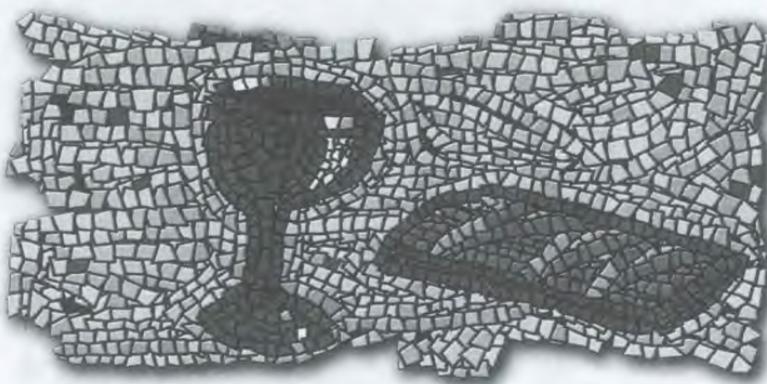
The believers have outgrown their little hut-church, and the mission is looking for a larger meeting place for them.

The church in Niger is small, but each member is precious in the sight of God. Pray for the spirit of God to be poured out on the faithful believers in Niger. Pray for Adamou and his outreach efforts, and for the young girl who risks everything to follow the precious truth of God.

David Ferraro is president of the Niger Mission in West Africa.

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At the Lord's Table



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Cor. 10:1-13; 11:2-34.

MEMORY TEXT: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

KEY THOUGHT: Christ gathers us to His table, where we drink from one cup and eat from one loaf in thoughtful contemplation of the provisions of God's grace. From this vantage point of God's family table we are to ponder our relationship with our crucified, risen, and soon-returning Lord, and our relationships with one another.

THE RISEN LORD INVITES YOU TO SUPPER AT HIS TABLE. "The ordinances will be celebrated next Sabbath." What is your response when that line appears in the church bulletin? Does any unwelcome, negative reaction rise in your mind? Is the first thought, "Again, so soon?" Many of us, perhaps even most of us, have a great need to deepen our appreciation for sitting at the table with our Lord.

That the Christian believers at Corinth were experiencing considerable difficulty with the Lord's Supper brings us peculiar comfort. Compared to the gluttonous neglect of destitute church members displayed in the pages of 1 Corinthians, our own lack of appreciation may seem a minor fault. However, Paul invites us, along with those erring believers, into the Upper Room to watch the Lord at the Last Supper. If we watch closely and listen carefully, we shall never be the same.

ANCIENT SINS (1 Cor. 10:1-13).

What ideas about Christian ceremonies do you think Paul attempted to correct in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13?

In treating erroneous views of the Lord's Supper and baptism, Paul lists four sins of God's people as examples of "what not to do." For each sin, Paul recalls a specific incident in Israel's wilderness experience:

Sin	Biblical Event
Idolatry (verse 7)	Worship of the golden calf (Exod. 32:1-6)
Immorality (verse 8)	Plague for immoral worship of the Baal of Peor (Numbers 25)
Putting Christ to the test (verse 9)	Plague of serpents resulting from impatience (Num. 21:4-9)
Complaining (verse 10)	Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; the ten spies (Numbers 16; 13; 14)

The references to these stories are seen as examples for those "on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:6, 11, NRSV). Paul's reference to the end time makes the principle all the more appropriate to us!

What parallels existed between the experience of ancient Israel and the Christians in Corinth? What parallels could be traced to our own experience?

The sins of ancient Israel are paralleled in the experience of the Christians in Corinth. Paul deals with idolatry (8:1-13) and will do so again (10:14-22). Likewise, he has warned them against immorality and noted that they are "arrogant" about it (5:2, NRSV; Num. 25:6). The Corinthians are "putting Christ to the test" by linking their participation in the Lord's Supper with their involvement in idol feasts (1 Cor. 10:14-22). And, in their failure to follow Paul's directives (for example, 1 Cor. 5:9, 13) and their complaints against his leadership, they are reflecting the rebellion of ancient Israel.

"God would have His people in these days review with a humble heart and teachable spirit the trials through which ancient Israel passed. . . ."—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 293.

CONFIDENCE, FALSE AND TRUE (1 Cor. 10:1-13).

What earmarks of false spiritual confidence were in evidence at Corinth? 1 Cor. 10:1-5, 12.

Some seem to have developed a strong and misplaced confidence in their spiritual invincibility. They apparently touted their participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper as providing spiritual security. They believed themselves "safe" even if they were immoral (6:12-20) or participated boldly in idol feasts (8:10; 10:14-22). Paul debunks this false sense of security. He argues that the Israelites had also been "baptized" and had eaten spiritual food and drink but were anything but "safe."

What is the nature of true Christian confidence? 1 Cor. 10:13. Compare 1 John 3:18-22; 5:11-13.

Paul reveals the true source of Christian confidence. It is not participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper, but God's faithfulness and the divine provision of refuge. True Christian confidence, while keeping us fully aware of our susceptibility to temptation, assures us that God is faithful and eager to help us in our weakness.

Some of the Corinthians erred in making "too much" of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In what might we err in making too little of these ceremonies? What might be the negative consequences in committing such an error?

Paul in no way demeans the ceremonies of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He calls Christians back to their baptism as the pivotal event of their experience (Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12). And his respect for the Lord's Supper is evident (1 Cor. 10:14-22; 11:17-34). Ellen White writes of the Lord's Supper, "It is the means by which His [Christ's] great work for us is to be kept fresh in our minds . . . It is at these, His own appointments, that Christ meets His people, and energizes them by His presence."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 653-656.

"Strong faith in a weak plank will land you in the river, but weak faith in a strong plank will get you across."—Paul Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 112.

STARVING AT THE LORD'S TABLE (1 Cor. 11:17-22, 27-34).

What would it have been like to attend a "fellowship luncheon" and the Lord's Supper at Corinth? 1 Cor. 11:17-22, 33, 34.

A house dating from Paul's day has been excavated in Corinth. The house of a well-to-do Corinthian citizen, it likely reflects the type of houses in which the churches met. A small dining room could accommodate up to nine people, while an adjoining court could hold thirty to forty. The host, then, would recline in the dining room with an inner circle of friends, while others would be seated outside in the courtyard.

To this architectural difference may have been added a difference in menu. Roman custom called for serving different types of food based on social status. The host's friends, people of considerable social status, would have had leisure time and could arrive early to enjoy large portions of excellent food. Members of lower classes, especially slaves, would have to complete their duties before participating as second-class citizens in the church gathering. (See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, pp. 153-161.)

The scene, then, is not a happy one. The class structures of the world have invaded the table of the Lord. One group gorges themselves with rich foods, while another struggles to satisfy their hunger.

What remedies does Paul suggest for the situation at Corinth? 1 Cor. 11:22, 27-34.

In the KJV, 1 Corinthians 11:27 reads, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Paul's real concern is that the believers not participate "in an unworthy manner" (see NKJV, NIV, RSV, etc.). Paul does call for self-examination (verse 28). Such examination will bring realization of how unworthy we are of God's grace. We can never be worthy except in His worthiness. Seeing our lack of worth is what should compel us to seek His grace at His table. One way that we can be unworthy to approach the Lord's table is to feel that we are somehow worthy to do so and more deserving than others.

Can you think of ways in which the social structures of the world continue to invade the church? What remedies are available? What positive and practical steps could you take?

IN REMEMBRANCE . . . UNTIL HE COMES (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and imagine yourself to be a participant at that first supper.

The situation at Corinth is so serious that their ceremony no longer deserves the title "the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). Paul obviously hopes that they will once again gather for a true Lord's Supper. To that end he ushers them into the upper room, inviting them to recline around the table and watch Jesus host that first Christian supper. In its true form this event is to be repeated again and again until that day when the saints join in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

What did Paul hope his readers would learn by recalling the upper room? What thoughts are uppermost in your mind when you participate in the Lord's Supper? What would you have said or done if you were a participant at that first supper?

Our understanding of the upper-room story is enriched by recalling the context in which Paul shares it. The selfish hoarding of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:21, 22) must cease in the light of two events: Christ's death and His coming. Christ's sharing of bread and cup contrasts with the selfish practices displayed in Corinth. And Christ was not just sharing mere food and drink, but offering Himself! In addition, Christ's coming implies a future judgment at which we will be called to account for our behavior (see 1 Cor. 11:29-32; compare Matt. 25:31-46).

Seventh-day Adventists do not believe, as some groups teach, that the emblems actually become the body and blood of Jesus. Instead, we hold that the bread and wine are rich symbols. Among the reasons is a simple one. When Jesus offered the Supper to His disciples in the upper room, He was physically present with them. They could not have mistaken the emblems for Him! However, the elements *are* significant, for they represent the body and blood of our risen Lord. Christ invites us to His table and offers us in the celebration of the ordinances His own presence, forgiveness, power, and life.

The upper-room story is one with a purpose. For Christians, the repetition of that story is not simply a pious ceremony. It provides a potent reminder of Christ's self-sacrifice and a call to self-denial and ministry. It points toward a coming Lord who will call us to accountability for our treatment of one another.

THE UNVEILING (1 Cor. 11:2-16).

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. What situation do you think motivated Paul to share this counsel?

Paul commends the Corinthians for following “the traditions” he has shared with them. Verses 3-16 suggest, though, that Paul wishes to address one instance where some clarification was needed. Some Christian women in Corinth seem to have felt that they no longer needed to follow time-honored customs. They were participating in public worship unveiled. Paul’s central concern is for the good name of Christianity. He does not wish for the fledgling movement to be “disgraced” by adopting a dress code that others would judge immodest or immoral (see verses 5, 6).

In what ways may we correctly apply 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?

In most parts of the world, the wearing of veils is no longer practiced, and this passage may seem irrelevant. However, there are thoughts here that should not escape our notice. Among these is a principle applicable to any society and time. Christians are to display a modesty and decorum that will allow the good news about Jesus unimpeded access to those who observe their behavior.

Also, note that women *are* praying and prophesying in worship (verses 5, 13). Paul does not counter their participation as such, but only the fact that some are doing so unveiled.

In addition, Paul seems uncomfortable moving too far from the principle of interdependence between men and women. He pauses to restate it in a most vivid way: “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God” (1 Cor. 11:11, 12, NIV). As in the Lord’s Supper, where the rich should not shame the poor, here neither men nor women are to lay claim to priority and so be “contentious” (verse 16).

“The opinion and conduct of the large body of believers was to be respected, and not opposed by a few self-opinionated members of the church at Corinth. This principle is always true; one individual or a few individuals should not feel that their ideas are superior to the general opinion of the church as a whole, and seek to impose those ideas on the majority.”—SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 759.

Are there ways in which your behavior is impeding the access of the message of a returning Lord?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Psalms 105, 106. Ellen White, having quoted 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, writes: "The experience of Israel, referred to in the above words by the apostle, and as recorded in the one hundred fifth and one hundred sixth psalms, contains lessons of warning that the people of God in these last days especially need to study. I urge that these chapters be read at least once every week."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 98, 99. What do you think are some "lessons of warning" that we need to hear from these passages today?

First Corinthians 11 alludes to the treatment of the poor in our midst. On this theme see Matthew 25:40-46; James 1:22-27. Ellen White discusses the theme in *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 24-37. "It is not the abundance of your meetings that God accepts. It is not the numerous prayers, but the rightdoing, doing the right thing and at the right time. It is to be less self-caring and more benevolent. Our souls must expand."—p. 36.

Paul's is the earliest account we have of the "Lord's Supper." Compare it to the accounts in the Gospels: Matt. 26:26-30; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:14-23.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How could you help to make the next Communion service at your church a more deeply spiritual experience?
2. How could your class or congregation minister more effectively to the poor?
3. What issues is your local church facing just now that are, at least in some ways, similar to the issues of abuses of the Lord's Supper and veiling in 1 Corinthians? Does Paul's handling of these situations suggest solutions?

SUMMARY: We do not live the Christian life in isolation, but in community. In worship and in the Lord's Supper the Lord's family gathers. At these occasions, as always, the risen Christ is concerned about how His family members relate to one another and their witness to the world. These important gatherings should express the unity and love of members for one another and should help to advance the Christian mission.



Keeping The “Mission” in Mission Schools

Margaret Nathaniel

Traditionally the church has thought of mission schools as simple schools, often little more than a thatch-roofed hut, where a missionary or national worker teaches reading and writing as a way to introduce a group of people to God. While some of these schools still exist, many “mission” schools have made impressive strides, and now are large, well-staffed institutions. But they still are mission schools in the truest sense.

In India, for instance, God still works through mission schools to draw students who otherwise are resistant to Christianity into an environment where Christ is honored and worshiped. The city of Madurai [MAH-do-ray] in Southern India is strongly Hindu. But four Adventist mission schools are effective soul-winning institutions. Each school enrolls more than 1,000 students, and each is known for its academic excellence.

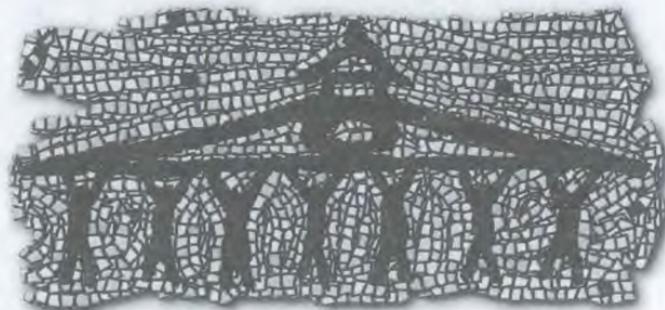
One of these schools, Madurai North SDA High School, enrolls nearly 3,000 students. It ranks at the top in academic performance, and carries on an active spiritual ministry as well. In fact, the students and staff have so many different outreach activities, that the school recently voted to hire an evangelist to coordinate their evangelistic efforts! He incorporated several existing activities to plan and prepare Vacation Bible School programs in five previously unentered villages near the school. Each VBS enrolled at least 100 eager children, and drew enough interests to follow through with Branch Sabbath Schools. In one village a Hindu woman offered her home to conduct the Branch Sabbath School. Within a few months the first eight believers were baptized in this town.

The following year the school conducted VBS in five more villages, and followed up by inviting more than 300 children to experience summer camp. Most children had never been camping, and they loved it! These Hindu children learned more about the love of Jesus as they experienced the love of the volunteers who directed the camp. So far, 13 people have been baptized as a result of the second year of VBS outreach.

The staff and students of Madurai North High School plan to conduct VBS outreach in another five villages this summer. It's little wonder that the school has a reputation for excellence in spiritual and intellectual fields. They take seriously the “mission” in “mission school.”

Margaret Nathaniel is children's ministries director in the Southern Asia Division.

One Body, Many Parts— One Church, Many Members



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Corinthians 12.

MEMORY TEXT: “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

KEY THOUGHT: The health of the church requires the proper function of the gifts the Holy Spirit has given to each member. We all must commit ourselves to discovering and utilizing our own gifts and appreciating those God has granted to others.

“GOD CALLS FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY AMONG HIS PEOPLE. Life in nature objects to uniformity. In the branches of the vine there is unity in diversity. There is a variety in a tree: scarcely two leaves are just alike. And this variety adds to the perfection of the tree as a whole. In the human body, from the eyes to the feet there is variety. And all these members are dependent upon one another to make a perfect whole. In all the variety composing the human body, there is harmonious action, in conformity to the laws controlling the being. There is an unseen, conscious, invisible unity, keeping the bodily machinery in action, each part working in harmony with every other part.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, article 41, 1900; reprinted as “Unity in Diversity,” *Adventist Review*, February 17, 1994, p. 14.

In this lesson we will explore how in our diverse spiritual gifts we may experience such harmony for building up the body of Christ.

UNWRAPPING GOD'S GIFTS (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30).

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul begins his treatment of the theme of spiritual gifts and continues to chapter 14. In chapter 12 he underlines the need for a diversity of gifts and ministries, all of which are given to the church by the unifying power of the Holy Spirit. Then he points his readers to "the most excellent way" (12:31) of love and compares the relatively passing nature of spiritual gifts with the eternal durability of love (1 Corinthians 13). In chapter 14, Paul turns to the gift that had proved especially problematic in Corinth—the gift of tongues. This week we consider chapter 12; the next two weeks, 13 and 14.

Compare the three lists of gifts and ministries provided in 1 Corinthians 12. What remains consistent and what varies in the lists? (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30).

VERSES 8-10	VERSE 28	VERSES 29, 30
1. Wisdom	1. Apostles	1. Apostles
2. Knowledge	2. Prophets	2. Prophets
3. Faith	3. Teachers	3. Teachers
4. Healing	4. Miracles	4. Miracles
5. Miracles	5. Healing	5. Healing
6. Prophecy	6. Helps	6. Tongues
7. Discerning of Spirits	7. Governments	7. Interpretation
8. Tongues	8. Tongues	
9. Interpretation of tongues		

The lists in 1 Corinthians 12 are by no means complete. For further study we could include those in Romans 12:3-8 (the gifts of ministry, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy), Ephesians 4:11 (evangelists and pastor-teachers), and 1 Peter 4:10, 11 (which mentions only speaking and service). Paul's concern is not to give an exhaustive list of gifts. His concern is that the Christians in Corinth avail themselves of the Holy Spirit's rich variety of gifts that will fully equip the church for ministry. There will always be some differences among church members, yet that should not hinder their unity in laboring for Christ.

All "should seek to be in perfect harmony. And yet no one should feel that he cannot labor with those who do not see just as he sees, and who do not in their labors follow just his plans. If all manifest a humble, teachable spirit, there need be no difficulty. God has set in the church different gifts. These are precious in their proper places, and all may act a part in the work of preparing a people for Christ's soon coming."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 481.

YOU ARE A GIFTED CHILD (1 Corinthians 12).

Among the ideas Paul shares on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, which ones would you judge to be most important today? Why?

Paul writes to troubled Corinthian Christians who are experiencing difficulties with spiritual gifts. We can be grateful for Paul's treatment of those ancient problems, for they leave us with many helpful concepts. Among the ideas especially important today are: 1. All members of God's church are gifted (verses 11-13, 27; Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:7, 16); 2. It is presumed that the church as a body will be healthiest when each part is working in the way God designed (verse 18). An important implication of these thoughts is that we should make an effort to determine how God has gifted us to function in the church. "Strive for the spiritual gifts" (1 Cor. 14:1, NRSV).

Think of three possible ways in which you might determine your spiritual gifts:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

British preacher Charles Spurgeon once visited a woman who lived in a London poorhouse. He noticed, hanging on the wall of her shed, a framed document. He asked about the certificate and the woman told him that it had been given to her by an aged and invalid gentleman for whom she had cared. In appreciation for her care, the man had scribbled on the paper and presented it to her. She framed the piece and hung it on her wall. After considerable persuasion, Spurgeon was finally able to take the document to the local bank. The manager exclaimed, "We've been wondering to whom the old gentleman left his money!" (Source unknown.) Living in poverty, she held deed to a fortune. Could the same be true of us? Has the Spirit given you treasures that lie unknown and unused?

To the degree that we "choose not to (or simply neglect to) recognize, develop, and exercise our gifts, the church is less than it could be. Less than God intended it to be."—Don Jacobsen, "What Spiritual Gifts Mean to Me," *Adventist Review*, December 25, 1986, p. 12.

THE GIFT OF DISCERNMENT (1 Cor. 12:10).

Paul, writing to the youthful pastor Timothy, urges him to “stir up the gift of God, which is in thee” (2 Tim. 1:6). With Timothy, each of us has a responsibility to rekindle or, perhaps, discover for the first time the ministry God has entrusted to us. Among helpful ways to explore one’s gifts is to study carefully the Bible’s descriptions of the various gifts.

The first quarter of 1997 was devoted entirely to the study of spiritual gifts. To refresh your mind, you may refer to those Sabbath School lessons.

Given the wide variety of spiritual phenomena in the modern world, the church today has a special need for the gift of “discerning of spirits” to be manifested in our midst (1 Cor. 12:10). Could it be that God has granted you this gift? This gift is generally understood by specialists in this field to be the ability granted by the Holy Spirit to some members of the church to know with certainty whether a teaching or behavior is truly inspired by and approved of God.

Why is the gift of discernment important? (1 John 4:1).

Are there any guidelines that are helpful in exercising the gift? (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 John 4:2, 3).

Read Hebrews 5:14 in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 2:14; 11:29. If all those who are spiritually mature are able to distinguish good from evil, why does the church need people gifted with “discerning of spirits”?

When it comes to discernment, we often think of others’ behavior; but according to 1 Corinthians 11:31, who would be an appropriate target for the gift of discernment? (Note: 1 Corinthians 12:10 uses the Greek noun *diakrisis* to describe more closely this gift of discernment, rather than the idea of judging. The corresponding verb *diakrin* is used in 1 Corinthians 11:31 and 14:29.)

Based on Hebrews 4:12, what should serve as the basis on which the gift of discernment operates?

How might this gift of “discerning the spirits” function in a helpful way in your class?

ONE BODY, MANY PARTS (1 Cor. 12:12-19).

How does Paul illustrate the “unity in diversity” of the church?
1 Cor. 12:12-19.

Paul uses an example that would have been familiar to his audience, for it had been used frequently by Greek and Latin authors. These writers seem to have drawn on the Aesop fable, *The Belly and the Feet*: “The belly and the feet were arguing about their importance, and when the feet kept saying that they were so much stronger that they even carried the stomach around, the stomach replied, ‘But, my good friends, if I didn’t take in food, you wouldn’t be able to carry anything.’ ”—Lloyd W. Daly, *Aesop Without Morals* (New York & London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), p. 148.

Paul’s use may also reflect a feature of the local Asclepion, the temple where Corinthians worshiped the Greek god of healing, Asclepius. Those who felt they had been healed by Asclepius would sometimes bring a small clay image of the body part thought to have been healed as an offering to the god. Many of these replicas of hands, feet, arms, legs, and the like have been found among the temple’s ruins. The prominent display of these “severed” body parts in Corinth may have given Paul’s image of a living, unified body special force for his readers.

How would you summarize the themes that Paul is trying to highlight in 1 Corinthians 12:12-19?

Many tend to think of “unity” and “diversity” as two opposites, two extremes. If one stresses unity too much, diversity is surely harmed. If diversity becomes the watchword, unity is threatened. The two must be held in delicate balance. The genius of Paul’s body metaphor is to expose the fallacy of such thought when applied to spiritual gifts and ministries. Reflect on this statement and see how well it describes your congregation: Just as the human body is both marvelously unified and incredibly diverse, so ideally is the body of Christ. A failure to foster the appropriate diversity of gifts actually threatens unity (verse 19). The one body has many parts. The varied parts join together to form one body (verse 12).

“God’s living Church has parts, but it has no parties.”—James Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (New York & London: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 159.

HONOR TO THE HUMBLER PARTS (1 Cor. 12:20-26).

What plan has God followed in arranging the parts of His body, the church? 1 Cor. 12:20-26.

An electrical outlet is usually obscured by furniture or other objects in a room, while a light fixture is displayed in a prominent place. The "humble" outlet is of no less importance than the beautiful light fixture. For without the outlet's function, no dazzling light can be produced. They are indispensable to each other as the electrical current flows from one to the other.

There are some members of Christ's body who enjoy serving "behind the scenes," while others bask in the "limelight." Where do you enjoy serving most, and why?

What is the spiritual implication of investing greater honor to the parts of the body less honorable as alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12:23, 24? In what affirming ways may we give recognition to the unrecognized diligent members?

Unfortunately, there are occasions when dedicated church members who serve tirelessly are not made to feel appreciated by the ones serving in the "spotlight." Yes, various tasks are essential to be accomplished behind the scenes, but let us not take for granted our brothers and sisters serving us in this way. Why not take some time today to express appreciation verbally or to send a note of thanks.

What are the specific spiritual benefits that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 12:25, 26 in connection with honoring members whose service is not so obvious?

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' or the head to the feet, 'I do not need you.' Quite the contrary: those parts of the body which seem to be more frail than others are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we regard as less honourable are treated with special honour. The parts we are modest about are treated with special respect, whereas our respectable parts have no such need. But God has combined the various parts of the body, giving special honour to the humbler parts" (1 Cor. 12:21-24, REB).

FURTHER STUDY: Outside of 1 Corinthians, the major passages that deal with spiritual gifts or ministries are: Rom. 12:1-8; Eph. 4:1-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11. In addition, on the idea of the church as a body, consult the following passages: (Do they all actually discuss the church as body? What do they add to the thoughts in 1 Corinthians 12?) 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:29; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:14-16; 3:6; 5:21-33; Col. 1:15-20; 2:18, 19; 3:15; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 445-447.

"God wants His people to be united in the closest bonds of Christian fellowship; confidence in our brethren is essential to the prosperity of the church; union of action is important in a religious crisis. . . . Jesus would have His followers subject one to another; then God can use them as instruments to save one another; for one may not discern the dangers which another's eye is quick to perceive; but if the undiscerning will in confidence obey the warning, they may be saved great perplexities and trials."—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 446.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How could we shape the way we select "church officers" to reflect more adequately the New Testament discussions of spiritual gifts and ministries?
2. Does God customize the gifts He gives His people for a given era or culture? Should we expect all of the gifts mentioned in the New Testament to be functional today? Will any others be operative?
3. The Corinthians faced a twofold problem. Some gifts, especially tongues, seem to have been overly active or improperly employed while others may have been underemployed (however, see 1 Cor. 1:7). Is the same true today? What gifts are most needed to spread the good news of Christ's return in your culture?
4. What impact would it have on your congregation if the members really believed that each one is gifted and is invaluable to the spiritual health of all?

SUMMARY: In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul highlights both the unity and the diversity of the human body to underline the need for a variety of spiritual gifts and ministries in God's church. We must be active in taking up the inherent challenge in the chapter—to discover and affirm our own gifts and those of others in the body of Christ.



He Came to Argue

Christian Aliddeki

Thomas Mukasa came to the evangelistic meetings to argue, but God had other plans for him.

Thomas had heard about the young people who had camped outside his village. He had seen some of them working on a road and others helping his neighbor with his crop. He had heard that they were clearing wells—and even washing clothes and cooking meals for old people. He wondered why these young people were working so hard for people they did not know. Then he learned that they were building a mud-and-wattle church in the village. So that was it! They were trying to convert people! Well, he thought, they weren't going to convert *him!*

One evening Thomas heard singing from the direction of the new church. He saw people walking toward the building and wondered if the young people were going to start preaching now. He was not interested in religion; he found comfort in his bottle of *waragi*, Ugandan beer. But by the second week of meetings, Thomas decided to go to the church and investigate. And if the preacher said something about his drinking, he would start an argument. He fortified his resolve with plenty of *waragi*, and tucked a spare bottle into his old bag. Then he staggered into the meeting.

An usher seated Thomas up front, but Thomas was so drunk he fell asleep, waking only when the youth sang the closing song. The next evening he came again, still intending to argue with the preacher. He was not so drunk, and did not fall asleep, but the meeting ended before he could interject his opinion. He continued attending the meetings, but each night he was a little more sober.

One night the speaker appealed for those who wanted to follow Jesus to stand. Several people responded, including Thomas. When the preacher called for believers to keep the Sabbath and be baptized, Thomas again responded. By now he was sober. He began studying the Bible and was baptized with 100 others.

Now, instead of arguing with the preacher, Thomas is helping to build a permanent church. The believers have made burned bricks for the walls, but they have no money for sand or cement for mortar, or for timber or iron sheets for the roof. Pray that God will supply their needs as they seek to reach out to others with God's love.

Christian Aliddeki is president of the Uganda Union in Eastern Africa Division.

High Praise for Love



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Corinthians 13.

MEMORY TEXT: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

KEY THOUGHT: There can be no greater pursuit in the Christian life than seeking to have the love of God find hands and feet and voice through us. First Corinthians 13 invites us to participate in sharing God’s unconditional love.

EXPERIENCE THE LIFE-TRANSFORMING POWER OF LOVE. The glowing words of 1 Corinthians 13 are impressive. Writers seem to compete to grant honors. The chapter has been called “the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote” (Adolf Harnack). Others expand the compliment by calling it “the most wonderful chapter in the whole New Testament.” Ellen White exhorts: “The Lord desires me to call the attention of His people to the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. Read this chapter every day, and from it obtain comfort and strength. . . .” [The chapter will teach us] “that Christlike love is of heavenly birth, and that without it all other qualifications are worthless.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1091. Savor this magnificent chapter every day this week, and prepare to share your experience with your class. Experience the life-transforming power of love!

Check off your daily meditation of 1 Corinthians 13:

Sabbath <input type="checkbox"/>	Monday <input type="checkbox"/>	Wednesday <input type="checkbox"/>	Friday <input type="checkbox"/>
Sunday <input type="checkbox"/>	Tuesday <input type="checkbox"/>	Thursday <input type="checkbox"/>	

AGAPE LOVE (1 Cor. 12:29-31; 13).

How is the New Testament's love song introduced? 1 Cor. 12:29-31.

"By all means covet the best gifts . . . as an artist would wish to be deft with all his limbs and quick with all his senses; but above all, cherish love, as that same artist would cultivate the pure taste which lives and breathes within him—the secret spring of all his motions, the faculty that prompts his skill."—Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), vol. 7, p. 196.

For Paul, how is "love" demonstrated and where is it most clearly seen? Rom. 5:6-8; Eph. 2:1-7.

Cicero, the great Roman orator who lived before the time of Christ (106-43 B.C.), shares the following anecdote: "What cheers there were . . . all over the theatre at a passage in the new play of my friend and guest Pacuvius; where the king, not knowing which of the two was Orestes, Pylades declared himself to be Orestes, that he might die in his stead, while the real Orestes kept on asserting that it was he. The audience rose *en masse* and clapped their hands." Cicero comments, "And this was an incident in fiction: what would they have done, must we suppose, if it had been in real life?"—*The Harvard Classics*, vol. 9 (New York: Collier & Son, 1909), pp. 16, 17.

Cicero, of course, had not seen the fictional become real in the life and death of Jesus who said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Paul's understanding of *agape* (the Greek word for "love" that he uses in 1 Corinthians 13) as expressed in Christ's self-sacrifice is the basis for his love song. Christ dies, not just for His friends but for those who are His enemies—the ungodly and sinners, among whom are counted all humankind. What would Cicero have said?

Christians think of love as "that quality we see on the cross. It is a love for the utterly unworthy, a love that proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished on others without a thought whether they are worthy or not. It proceeds from the nature of the lover, not from any attractiveness in the beloved."—Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 177.

LOVE AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1 Corinthians 13, especially verses 1-3).

Paul's love song falls naturally into three parts. Verses 1-3 compare love to spiritual gifts with this thought emphasized: any spiritual gift, without love, is valueless. Verses 4-7 describe the workings of love—what it does and what it does not do. Verses 8-13 again compare love and spiritual gifts, this time contrasting the relatively passing nature of the gifts to the eternal permanence of love.

Our appreciation for this grand chapter is enriched by recalling the context in which Paul crafts it. Paul does not isolate himself for a decade or two and then write this exalted praise for love. Paul addresses these inspiring words to a specific context—the divided and sometimes clamorous congregations at Corinth. 1 Corinthians 13 is not meant to be taken as a theory. It applies to a very real situation and speaks to our lives today.

What specific gifts and acts are listed as being “nothing” in the absence of love? 1 Cor. 13:1-3.

The “more excellent way” of love is eternal, for God is eternal. No gifts or acts are worth much unless they are immersed in love. This fruit of love must propel the exercise of any gift. Love has to do with our state of being, while gifts relate to our state of doing. Only the love of Christ in the heart can transform who we are into what we do.

“When love fills the heart, it will flow out to others, not because of favors received from them, but because love is the principle of action.”—*The Mount of Blessing*, p. 38.

Of the gifts cited by Paul in verses 1-3, “tongues” and “knowledge” seem to have been especially prized by the Corinthians. Are there gifts or qualities that you prize so highly that they may obscure the excellence of love?

Imagine how you feel when you hear gifted preachers waxing eloquent about love in their sermons, yet in their contacts with others they seem cold and uncaring. We all need the Holy Spirit to purify our motives so that He may empower us to possess the love that we profess. May this be our prayer: “Dear God, we offer back to You the gifts You have given. We confess that our motivation to exercise them often seems mixed. The sweet movings of Your Spirit are so often corrupted by our own selfish ambitions. Grant us fresh use of these gifts of Yours, inspired more purely by that self-giving love You so clearly displayed on Calvary. Amen.”

THE WORKINGS OF LOVE (1 Corinthians 13, especially verses 4-7).

Verses 1-3 challenge us to examine motivations that drive our actions and our exercise of spiritual gifts. Verses 4-7 challenge us in a different way. Every human heart cringes before the standard sketched in these short verses. Love does not insist on its own way. But we often do! Love is not irritable or resentful. But we sometimes are! Love hopes all things. But hope so often fades from our hearts. We at once thrill at the heights of pure love and despair of ever providing an adequate reflection of it.

In sharing such an exalted picture of love (verses 4-7), does Paul mean to discourage or encourage his readers? How can this be discouraging in aspiring to reach this ideal?

Just as gifts and ministries are given by God's Spirit, so is love. It is impossible for us to generate so sublime a thing in our own lives. As with spiritual gifts, we find ourselves recipients, not manufacturers. Paul does not mean to entice the Corinthian Christians with a love that they cannot experience. Rather, he pleads for their actions to be prompted by the greatest of God's gifts, the "more excellent way" of love. The appropriate response to Paul's high-powered words on love is not despair. It is, first, to confess how consistently we have failed to express such love. And, second, to pray for open hearts to receive God's gift of love that we might truly bless those around us.

Which of the "workings of love" described in verses 4-7 do you most need to have expressed in your life just now? How can you start making this a reality in your life today?

With regard to Paul's phrase, "Love is not resentful," Lewis Smedes writes: "The power of agapic love drives us to a new beginning. Love lets the past die. It moves people to a new beginning *without* settling the past. . . .

"We are enabled by a love that keeps no accounts since they were settled by Christ at his cross. From the cross, God moves on to new history. . . .

"Love is the power that drives us toward the *other* who has done us wrong because it is able to tear up every moral scorecard. This is reconciliation, and reconciliation is love's ultimate goal"—*Love Within Limits: A Realist's View of 1 Corinthians 13* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 71, 72.

THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE (1 Corinthians 13, especially verses 8-13).

In the final section of this great chapter, Paul contrasts the permanence of love with the comparative impermanence of spiritual gifts. What a superb tactic for people so focused on the exercise of spiritual gifts that they have missed the surpassing importance of love!

Do verses 8-13 suggest how a Christian should relate to “time” and “eternity”? What are some consequences of focusing only on one to the exclusion of the other? Compare Matthew 24:36-44.

Paul does not suggest that Christians should forget about spiritual gifts, even though they will not last beyond time. He argues that God’s gifts provided for time must be authenticated with that grand gift of love furnished for eternity. We should have God’s eternal kingdom as our primary goal. But this does not mean we should ignore the resources given for this age. We should use the present to prepare for God’s future—a service of love till Jesus comes.

How does our current knowledge compare with the knowledge we shall be granted in God’s eternal future? 1 Cor. 13:9-12. How does this fact help you live with some unanswered questions?

Corinth was noted for producing some of the finest bronze mirrors available. When Paul says “we see in a mirror, dimly” (verse 12, NKJV), he probably does not refer to a distorted image so much as an indirect one. The revelations of God in Christ are *not* inaccurate, but our understanding of them is limited.

What are among the things we can know now? Eph. 1:18, 19.

The Christian must not claim to know more than God has revealed. Nor should one underestimate and demean the precious truths God has made known. “Thank God we do know; but let it check our conceit, we know only in part. Beloved, the objects we look at are distant, and we are nearsighted. The revelation of God is ample and profound, but our understanding is weak and shallow.”—Spurgeon, *Treasury of the Bible*, vol. 7, p. 196.

AGAPE AT WORK AND HOME (1 Corinthians 13).

It is all too easy to allow Paul's lofty words on love to miss their mark. He is interested in God's eternal love as expressed in Jesus Christ actuating our lives as we interact with others. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, we must apply these words to our lives today. First Corinthians 13 is not just to be enjoyed in quiet moments of contemplation. It is to be lived out in the hustle and bustle of life, amid the mix of demanding children, dirty dishes, and everyday life.

How can we invite God's love to transform us? How can God's patience and kindness replace our own irritability and resentment?

By reading 1 Corinthians 13 every day this week, you've established a great habit! 1. Read verses 4-7 a second time. 2. Ask God to deal with that counterpart to love (envy, arrogance, boasting, rudeness, etc.) that is troubling you the most just now. 3. Ask God to grant you that positive quality of love (patience, kindness, etc.) that you feel is most needed in your life. 5. At the close of the day, reflect on those times when divine love has come to your aid. Thank God for His great love in Christ. Only through Him, living within us, we may manifest His traits of love.

"In many of our homes there is a hard, combative spirit manifested. Critical words and unkind actions are offensive to God. Dictatorial commands and haughty, overbearing manners are not acceptable to Heaven. . . . The love of Christ must control our hearts, and the peace of God will abide in our homes. Seek God with a broken and contrite spirit, and you will be melted with compassion toward your brethren. You will be prepared to add to brotherly kindness, charity, or love. Without charity we will become 'as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.' Our highest professions are hollow and insincere; but 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' We shall be found wanting, if we do not add charity that suffereth long and is kind; that vaunteth not itself, that seeketh not her own."—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 21, 1888.

In which of your relationships do you need God's love to become especially evident? Pray for that to happen.

Can you think of a gifted area in your life that needs to be submitted to and purified by God's love?

FURTHER STUDY: The word *love* is prominent in all of Paul's letters. Use a concordance and explore other occurrences of *love* or *charity*. If you wish to broaden your search, explore the word in John's Gospel and letters. One interesting theme suggested by 1 Corinthians 13 is the connection between "love" and "Christ's Return." On this idea see Phil. 1:9, 10; 1 Thess. 3:12, 13.

On the theme of love in the home, read "Security Through Love," chapter 31 in *The Adventist Home*, pp. 195-199.

"Love's agencies have wonderful power, for they are divine. The soft answer that 'turneth away wrath,' the love that 'suffereth long, and is kind,' the charity that 'covereth a multitude of sins'—would we learn the lesson, with what power for healing would our lives be gifted! How life would be transformed and the earth become a very likeness and foretaste of heaven!"—*The Adventist Home*, p. 195.

"The love of God in the heart will lead us to speak gentle words. . . . [1 Cor. 13:4-7 quoted.] Shall we not remember this? If the love of God is in our hearts, we shall not think evil, we shall not be easily disturbed, we shall not give loose rein to passion; but we shall show that we are yoked up with Christ, and that the restraining power of his Spirit leads us to speak words that he can approve. The yoke of Christ is the restraint of his Holy Spirit; and when we become heated by passion, let us say, 'No; I have Christ by my side, and I will not make him ashamed of me by speaking hot, fiery words.' "—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Jan. 25, 1898.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In your life, who has provided the clearest example of God-like love? How did you respond? What impact does that still have in your life?
2. In what practical ways can you apply the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 in your home, place of work, and community?
3. How would you go about sharing with children the things you have learned in your study this week?

SUMMARY: The cross shows the great love of God acting on behalf of His enemies. That love draws us to the cross and sends us forth again into the world to reflect rays of divine love toward others. Meditation and prayer based on 1 Corinthians 13 can be an important aid in helping us to fulfill this noble mission of love.



Sabien's Faith, Part 1

Belinda Kent

Sabien limped into the clearing and sat down. A large tropical ulcer on his leg caused him obvious pain. It was our first Sabbath among the Iwam people on the May River in Papua New Guinea.

After Sabbath, my husband, John, invited Sabien to the clinic, where he treated his wound. Gradually his sore healed, and Sabien's gratitude overflowed.

Sabien came faithfully to church, and eventually joined the baptismal class. He was making wonderful progress. Then one day a few weeks before the baptism, Sabien told John that he felt he should not be baptized just yet. Surprised, John asked him why. Then Sabien explained that his father was building a house, and when it was finished his father would give it to him. According to local custom, when a house is completed, the entire village comes to a feast given by the homeowner. Sabien's father expected him to attend the ceremony. But beer and betel nut would be served, and Sabien did not feel right joining the feast after being baptized.

John and Sabien prayed about the situation, then John explained that the devil was using this ceremony to keep Sabien from following Jesus in baptism. Sabien decided he wanted to follow Jesus now, and not wait until after the feast. We prayed earnestly that God would be with Sabien as he told his father of his decision.

Later Sabien returned to our home. He told us that his father had become angry when he learned that Sabien would not drink the beer and chew betel nut at his father's feast. He told Sabien not to come to the feast, that he would not give Sabien the house as he had planned. So Sabien, who had looked forward to living in the new house, was forced to move his family into a tiny, one-room house. But Sabien was not discouraged. He had decided that it was better to follow Jesus than to have a nice house.

Sabien was baptized. But that was not the end of his tests of faith.

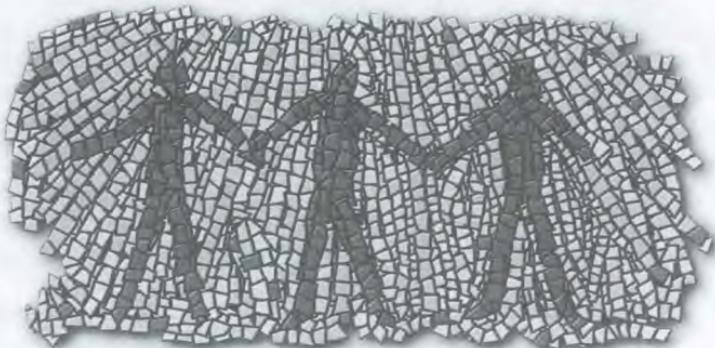
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Belinda Kent, her husband, John, and their four children serve as missionaries in Papua New Guinea under the auspices of Adventist Frontier Missions.

Inside Story

Worthwhile Worship



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Corinthians 14.

MEMORY TEXT: “Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12).

KEY THOUGHT: The way we employ our gifts in public worship must bow to the great law of love. Our spiritual gifts must be used in ways that build others up in Christ.

WHAT ARE THE TRUE MARKS OF THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE? Since the summer of 1994, the so-called “Toronto Blessing” has swept through many Christian circles. The movement has been marked by a variety of phenomena including spasms, “resting in the Spirit,” glossolalia, animal-like noises, and, especially, infectious laughter. Rodney Howard-Browne has led in the “laughing revivals.” Calling himself the “Holy Ghost bartender,” Howard-Browne serves up his “new wine” of “holy laughter.” Using characteristic gestures, pumping hands up and down above someone’s head or scooping the air in a sideways motion toward a would-be recipient of “the blessing,” ministers who have drunk Howard-Browne’s wine pass it along to others. Thousands have been supposedly blessed.

If the Holy Spirit were to make Himself known in a worship service, what would be the expected results? How does a congregation ensure that they are participating in Spirit-led worship? What are the true marks of the Spirit’s presence in one’s life? Paul’s ancient counsel speaks to these significant questions, which remain crucially important to us today.

PROBLEMS WITH TONGUES (1 Corinthians 14, especially verses 1-5).

How does the gift of tongues compare to that of prophecy?
1 Cor. 14:1-5.

In 1 Corinthians 12–14 Paul is especially concerned with the misuse of the gift of tongues. While the direct treatment of the issue occurs in chapter 14, Paul has already prepared the way for his corrective comments. Paul's first mention of the gifts is congratulatory and this provides a positive framework for the later discussion. The Corinthian Christians are “not lacking in any spiritual gift” (1:7, NRSV). When Paul returns to the topic of spiritual gifts in chapter 12, he underlines the principle of diversity. That is, the church needs a wide variety of gifts. No one gift should be required of all and become the criterion for spirituality (Paul's discussion suggests that the gift of tongues is being used in some such way at Corinth).

Paul invariably mentions tongues last in lists of the gifts (1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30). In two of the three lists he couples it with the gift of “interpretation of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:10, 30), a gift he will later require to be exercised whenever tongues play a role in public worship (1 Cor. 14:27). Finally, he has expressed the need for love in the use of the gift of tongues and has described the gift as transient rather than permanent (1 Corinthians 13).

Apart from the discussion in 1 Corinthians, the New Testament mentions “speaking in tongues” in several places. What is the main idea you learn from each passage?

Mark 16:14-18 _____

Acts 2:1-12 _____

Acts 10:44-48 _____

Acts 19:1-7 _____

It is true that in becoming too cautious to avoid false spiritual manifestations, we may not avail ourselves fully of the Spirit's genuine manifestations. Yet Satan's deceptions are becoming more subtle than ever. We need the infilling of Spirit to give us true spiritual discernment.

What evidence do you have of the Holy Spirit in your life?

TESTING TODAY'S TONGUES, PART I (1 Corinthians 12–14).

What principles does Paul share in his treatment of spiritual gifts that can help us identify counterfeits of the Spirit's work? Review 1 Corinthians 12–14.

Throughout 1 Corinthians 12–14 Paul is interested in shaping the use of the gift of tongues at Corinth. In addition to the principle of diversity (1 Corinthians 12) and the law of love (1 Corinthians 13), Paul provides eight helpful directives. Today we will list three of them, Tuesday the other five.

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1. The gift of prophecy should be prominent (1 Cor. 14:1, 5; see also 12:28–31).
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Why does Paul rate prophecy so highly? 1 Cor. 14:1–5, 23–25.

How does Revelation teach about the presence of the gift of prophecy among the last-day followers of God? Rev. 12:17; 19:10.

The spiritual gift of prophecy is generally understood by specialists in this area to be more than predictive in nature, for it also brings God's words of encouragement, instruction, and exhortation to His people. It is expressed in ways that are recognized by the church as Christ-centered and biblically-based, which foster spiritual growth, harmony, and the building up of Christ's body. No wonder Paul encouraged the Corinthian Christians to desire especially such a gift.

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2. Spiritual gifts that are used in public worship should edify and encourage others (1 Cor. 14:1–5; 1 Corinthians 13).

3. Public worship should be intelligible (1 Cor. 14:6–12).
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According to Jesus, how should Christian prayer contrast with Gentile prayer? Matt. 6:7, 8.

In what ways could your prayers to God resemble heathen prayers? How can this be remedied?

TESTING TODAY'S TONGUES, PART II (1 Corinthians 14).

4. The gift of tongues, if used publicly, requires interpretation (1 Cor. 14:5, 13, 27, 28).
 5. Those who speak in tongues should be able to practice self-control (1 Cor. 14:13-19, 28).
 6. When unaccompanied by interpretation, the gift of tongues detracts from mission (1 Cor. 14:16, 17, 20-25).
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"There is a great work to be done in our world. Men and women are to be converted, not by the gift of tongues nor by the working of miracles, but by the preaching of Christ crucified. Why delay the effort to make the world better? Why wait for some wonderful thing to be done, some costly apparatus to be provided?"—*My Life Today*, p. 219.

Some "have an unmeaning gibberish which they call the unknown tongue, which is unknown not only by man but by the Lord and all heaven. Such gifts are manufactured by men and women, aided by the great deceiver."—*Testimonies*, vol.1, p. 412.

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7. The number of participants should be limited (1 Cor. 14:27).
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In 1 Corinthians 14:23, KJV Paul critiques a worship service in which "all speak with tongues." While Paul suggests this as a hypothetical situation, it may reflect the misuse of tongues in Corinth. Instead, Paul rules that: 1. Only two (or on rare occasions, three) should speak in a tongue; 2. They should do so successively rather than in unison; 3. The contributions in tongues should be interpreted. Paul gives similar guidelines for the gift of prophecy (verses 29-33).

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8. Christian worship should be marked by orderliness and peace (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).
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Does Paul include the gift of tongues in his other lists of spiritual gifts? Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11.

For Paul, the gift of tongues should neither be required (1 Cor. 12:30) nor forbidden (1 Cor. 14:39). Is it possible that God would choose to revive a true expression of the gift?

MORE ABOUT TONGUES.

Which of the following statements is true? Why?

1. The gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians is the same as that in Acts 2—the Spirit-given ability to speak human languages one has not learned. Paul writes to counsel the Corinthians with regard to this gift, which is being over-emphasized and misused. Acts 2 should be used to interpret 1 Corinthians 14.
2. The gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 is a gift of ecstatic utterance given by the Spirit. Paul both affirms and regulates the use of the gift in the context of public worship. The gift may have served only a temporary function in Corinth and may not be reflected in modern glossolalia. One must attend carefully to the context of 1 Corinthians 14 before comparing it to Acts 2.

In his book *Speaking in Tongues: Biblical Speaking in Tongues and Contemporary Glossolalia* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1991), the late Gerhard Hasel argued for the first position above. Roland Hegstad, treated the topic in *Rattling the Gates* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1974). He provided an even-handed review of the arguments and admitted uncertainty about the nature of the gift in Corinth (see pp. 52-77). He adds an important note. Any ambiguity about the nature of the gift “is far from saying that we are left without criteria by which to identify modern tongues as Biblical or non-Biblical” (p. 69).

“They give themselves up to wild, excitable feelings and make unintelligible sounds which they call the gift of tongues, and a certain class seem to be charmed with these strange manifestations. A strange spirit rules with this class, which would bear down and run over anyone who would reprove them. God’s Spirit is not in the work and does not attend such workmen. They have another spirit.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 414.

Which of the directives provided by Paul do you think is most important today?

It may be less important to come to determine the precise nature of the gift of tongues at Corinth than to ponder carefully the correctives offered by Paul. These provide boundaries by which we may judge what is misused or false and concepts to help evaluate our public worship.

HOW TO WORSHIP (1 Corinthians 14).

It has been argued that 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 provides the earliest account of a worship service. As you read the account, what do you think such a service was like?

Two features of Paul's portrait of public Christian worship are very significant. Paul envisions:

1. A high degree of participation (1 Cor. 14:26).

In fact, the level of participation may have gotten out of hand! Nonetheless, inviting broad participation is important. Are you a spectator or a participant in worship?

2. A high degree of concern for the "outsider."

What negative effects might uninterpreted tongues have on "outsiders" in worship? 1 Cor. 14:13-17, 23.

What positive effects would prophecy have on "outsiders"? 1 Cor. 14:24, 25.

Paul has exalted hopes for the visitor who enters Christian worship. He dares to hope that such a one will be "convinced by all that he is a sinner" (verse 24, NIV) and join in the worship of God. Do we have such goals for our services? Do we envision them as times when nonbelievers may come to know the sweet joy of worshiping God? Do we plan worship services that will be accessible and inviting to non-members? Or are we only concerned about our own appetites for worship?

"Our meetings should be made intensely interesting. They should be pervaded with the very atmosphere of heaven. Let there be no long, dry speeches and formal prayers merely for the sake of occupying the time. All should be ready to act their part with promptness, and when their duty is done, the meeting should be closed. Thus the interest will be kept up to the last. This is offering to God acceptable worship. His service should be made interesting and attractive and not be allowed to degenerate into a dry form. We must live for Christ minute by minute, hour by hour, and day by day; then Christ will dwell in us, and when we meet together, His love will be in our hearts, welling up like a spring in the desert, refreshing all, and making those who are ready to perish, eager to drink of the waters of life."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 609.

FURTHER STUDY: See *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, pp. 362-378, for a report of Ellen White's counsel to a couple who claimed that God had given them the gift of tongues.

In 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, Paul argues that wives should be silent in the church assembly. The placement of the passage suggests that women were, in some way that is not explained, involved in the abuse of the gift of tongues. The passage requires careful examination if we are to apply it appropriately to our modern settings. As you study the passage, keep the following points in mind:

1. Paul's counsel is limited in that it does not concern all women, but only wives of Christian men who are also present in the assembly. Additionally, it is focused on how women learn rather than on ways in which they minister (verse 35). The concern was that women learn about theology in ways that did not cause disturbance in worship.

2. The counsel is addressed to an ancient culture that had very different standards for the behavior of wives than hold in many places today. Plutarch says that a virtuous woman "ought to be modest and guarded about saying anything in the hearing of outsiders" and that "a woman ought to do her talking either to her husband or through her husband."—Leon Morris, *Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 197 (quoting Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom*, pp. 31, 32).

3. Since Paul has confirmed the public praying and prophesying of women (1 Cor. 11:5, 13) and since women possessed the gift of prophecy (see Acts 2:17, 18; 21:8, 9), the rule against women's speaking in worship is not absolute. Seventh-day Adventists, after all, believe that God granted the gift of prophecy to Ellen White.

4. We must recall the early Christian house-church setting in which there were no neat divisions between "Sabbath School" and "church." If Paul's prohibition were taken directly to apply to all Christian women today, women would need to be silent in all gatherings for spiritual purposes, not just in the "church service."

5. There is much to be learned from the passage. Paul is again (as in 1 Cor. 11:6) concerned about the good name of the young Christian movement. He does not wish it to be "disgraced," but to move forward in its mission. Do you value Christian mission as highly? And, are you behaving in church gatherings in a way that facilitates the ability of others to learn, worship, or come to faith?

SUMMARY: Paul's treatment of spiritual gifts provides important criteria by which the Christian can evaluate modern claims of the Spirit's gifts. It also challenges us to invite the Spirit truly to renew our public worship.



Sabien's Faith, Part 2

Belinda Kent

Sabien faced fierce tests of his faith even before he was baptized in Papua New Guinea. But his tests taught him a lot about prayer.

Sabien's family needed a garden in which to raise sweet potatoes, bananas, green beans, and pumpkins to eat and to sell. As he cleared the land and prepared the ground for his garden, he thought about the wild pigs that often destroyed the villagers' gardens. Many times the people planted and tended their gardens all season, only to have the wild pigs trample over the plants and eat their fill.

After Sabien planted his garden, he knelt down on the edge of the plot and told God how he needed the food from his garden to feed his family. He asked God to watch over his garden and protect it from the wild pigs.

The plants in Sabien's garden grew well in the fertile soil. But anguished wails of villagers' told that another garden had been destroyed by the wild pigs. Each time Sabien heard of another garden destroyed, he prayed that God would protect his garden. And when harvest time came, Sabien's garden was bountiful, while other gardens lay in waste. Sabien's family shared their food and their faith with those who had lost their gardens, and many others learned of God's care for His children.

Many women in the remote villages of Papua New Guinea have never attended school, and cannot read. I started a reading class for these women. Together we learned to read and write in Pidgin, the trade language of Papua New Guinea. We used the Pidgin Bible as our textbook. Within a few months Manau, Sabien's wife, was reading the Bible. How her face shone when she was asked to read the scripture passage in worship. Now she can read with her children and guide them in their spiritual lives.

With access to short-wave radio and air strips, life is changing for the isolated peoples of Papua New Guinea. They need a solid foundation of faith and knowledge to keep them from falling prey to the charms of the modern world. Pray for the new believers in Papua New Guinea, and for those who have never heard the message of God's love.



Belinda Kent and her family serve with Adventist Frontier Missions in Papua New Guinea.

The Reality of the Resurrection



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Corinthians 15.

MEMORY TEXT: “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52).

KEY THOUGHT: Neither Christ's resurrection from death nor that of believers at Christ's return is to be reasoned away. The first is the foundation of our faith and the second the goal of our hope.

THERE IS NO RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD? Human beings possess a craving for immortality. One group, CBJ (the initials of founders Charles, BernaDeane and James), headquartered in Scottsdale, Arizona, purports to train its adherents to live forever. CBJ's disciples, mostly college-educated people in their thirties and forties, pay significant sums to attend the annual “convergence” in their quest for immortality. They hear the message, “Will yourselves to live forever” and believe they experience “cellular awakening” and a dawning awareness of physical immortality. With a mailing list of twelve thousand in eighteen countries, CBJ is growing rapidly.

The same drive for immortality led some Christians at Corinth to revise radically their understanding of the resurrection. They argued that “there is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:12, NRSV) and instead sought immortality elsewhere. Paul corrects this train of thought by arguing strongly for the future, bodily resurrection of believers who have died.

OF FIRST IMPORTANCE (1 Corinthians 15, especially verses 1-11).

To what events does Paul point as the foundation of the Christian hope in the future resurrection? 1 Cor. 15:1-11.

As Paul nears the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, he takes up yet another difficulty, a doctrinal one about the resurrection. Paul asks, “How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor. 15:12).

It is difficult to know just what prompted such a view. It may have been a return to ideas of their Greek culture about the immortality of the soul and thus the impossibility of physical resurrection. Or it may have represented a spiritualization of the concept of resurrection. Does not conversion to Christian faith represent a “resurrection”? Isn’t the one who is baptized resurrected to walk in newness of life? (Rom. 6:1-4). On this basis they may have argued that the resurrection had already occurred.

Paul responds at length, and this thorough treatment leaves us in his debt. How many have been heartened by Paul’s deep convictions about the Christian hope?

Which of the appearances of the resurrected Lord described by Paul are also mentioned in the Gospels? 1 Cor. 15:5-8. Compare Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20, 21.

Paul’s account of Christ’s appearances after His resurrection, probably the earliest in the New Testament, is a treasure trove. It mentions an appearance to “five hundred” (Is this the same event as mentioned in Matthew 28:16-20?). It also describes an appearance to James that is not described in the Gospels and one to Cephas (Peter) that is only briefly alluded to in Luke 24:34. And Paul includes himself as one who has seen the risen Lord. He is presenting what he hopes will be convincing evidence that Jesus Christ is indeed risen from the dead.

The appearance to James is probably to James, the Lord’s brother, who became a prominent Christian leader (Acts 15:13-21). Earlier in Christ’s ministry he was not a believer (John 7:5). Did he become one as a result of Christ’s appearance to him? (In Acts 1:14 Jesus’ brothers are already worshiping with the believers.)

Has your life been transformed by the reality of the risen Christ? Share a brief testimony of your experience with the class.

IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION, THEN WHAT? (1 Cor. 15:12-19).

A friend at work asks, "Do you really believe that Christians who have died will be resurrected?" How would you respond? How did Paul respond in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19?

Paul is writing to his Christian converts, and so he adapts his arguments about the resurrection for them. He argues that if there is no future, bodily resurrection of believers, the following would be true: 1. Christ would not have been raised (verses 13-17; the first verses of the chapter have already provided Paul's arguments to the contrary); 2. the work of Paul (and other Christian missionaries) would be both futile and deceptive (verses 14, 15); 3. their own Christian experience is useless and they are still in the grips of sin (verses 14, 17, 19); 4. directly to the point, those believers who have died have no future (verse 18). Paul is trusting that none of this will sound like very good news to his audience! And, hopefully, this realization will lead them to reconsider their views.

In what different ways is the view that there is "no resurrection" popular today? How dangerous is such a perspective?

A flood of television programming and movies proclaims in ways both subtle and deceptive the world's enticement for the teaching of reincarnation. Blending the thought of Eastern religions, ancient traditions, and New Age concepts, the media proclaim that human life does not end, it endlessly reappears. Without watchfulness, this popular support for reincarnation may begin to corrupt our own faith in the Christian hope. The idea of reincarnation is, in total, contrary to the concept of resurrection.

Others today adopt a secular-humanist perspective and strongly hold to the idea that death is the end. There is nothing more. And many of our Christian friends, with their views of the immortality of a disembodied soul and an ever-burning hell, offer an alternative that is neither biblical nor appealing.

How can Seventh-day Adventists play a vital role today in proclaiming with fervor the Christian hope of a future, bodily resurrection founded on faith in the risen Lord? How can the certainty of this hope have a transforming impact in your life today as you relate to your family members and others around you?

CHRIST THE FIRST FRUITS (1 Cor. 15:20-34).

What does Paul mean when he calls Christ “the first fruits” (verses 20, 23).

Paul draws on the Old Testament offering of the first fruits of the harvest: “When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall raise the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance . . .” (Lev. 23:10, 11, NRSV). Christ is “the first fruits,” the promise of a future harvest. The fact that He has been raised from the dead ensures that all who died in Him will, likewise, be raised. In Christ the harvest is begun, but it is not finished.

What do you think Paul means by his mention of baptism “for the dead”? 1 Cor. 15:29.

Various responses have been given in explaining 1 Corinthians 15:29. Yet as we consider carefully the language and context of this verse, this likely explanation emerges: people in Corinth were apparently involved in the practice of baptizing for the dead, and Paul uses this to bolster his argument of the resurrection. The very fact that they were baptizing for the dead shows clearly that they believed in some form of resurrection of the dead. And because the people already had such belief, Paul tries to redirect it to believe in the glorious resurrection of Christ and His followers.

Paul by no means supports the idea of baptism for the dead. That would not be consistent with the context of 1 Corinthians 15 and the rest of Scriptures. Baptism requires a personal decision of repentance from sin and faith in Christ. (See Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-41; Ezek. 14:14, 16.) In a similar way Jesus used the story of the rich man and Lazarus, not to endorse the erroneous teaching of immortality of the soul, but to show that only in this life do we have the opportunity to prepare for the life to come.

What link should exist between a correct view of the resurrection and Christian behavior? 1 Cor. 15:32-34.

Our understandings of “the end” shape the way we behave now. If there is no resurrection, no heaven to win, or hell to shun, we may appropriately quote the proverb, “Let us eat and drink: for tomorrow we shall die” (Isa. 22:13).

IMPERISHABLE BODIES (1 Cor. 15:35-50).

The advocates of “no resurrection” may have argued in this way: Who would want to have these sinful, deformed bodies of ours raised? For them, resurrection life would only be prolonging the agony of earthly existence.

Among the illustrations provided by Paul to describe the difference between present bodies and resurrection bodies, which is your favorite? Why? 1 Cor. 15:35-41.

In the continuing discussion, verses 42-50, Paul draws contrasts between present bodies and those given by God at the resurrection. At the resurrection, God’s saints exist in bodily form—the age to come is not for disembodied spirits! But the bodily existence of the future age will not suffer the limitations and pain of our current lives. What God has in store is dramatically different. Consider these contrasts highlighted in verses 42-50:

Current Life/Body	Resurrection Life/Body
perishable	imperishable
dishonor	glory
weakness	power
natural	spiritual
First Adam	Last Adam
of earth	of heaven

Comparing the two columns is a bit like being asked which of two automobiles you would prefer to receive as a gift—a dilapidated, ancient model in disrepair or a new, state-of-the-art model.

What do you find most attractive about the biblical teaching of the resurrection?

“I confess openly, that I am not persuaded that they [dead Christians] be already in the full glory that Christ is in, or the elect angels of God are in. Neither is it any article of my faith; for if it were so, I see not but then the preaching of the resurrection of the flesh were a thing in vain.”—William Tyndale as quoted in *The Great Controversy*, p. 547.

"WHERE, O DEATH, IS YOUR STING?" (1 COR. 15:51-58, NIV).

When does the dramatic shift from present existence to resurrection life occur? 1 Cor. 15:51-57.

Paul wants to inform his readers of the timing of the change from the perishable human body of the present to the imperishable body of the resurrection. The climactic change in the Christian's wardrobe, from "wearing" a perishable, mortal body to "wearing" an imperishable, immortal body occurs "at the last trumpet" (verses 52, 53; see 1 Thess. 4:13-18). It is at the Second Coming of Christ that the believer receives a resurrection body.

As Paul concludes his ringing affirmation of the resurrection, he again calls for corresponding Christian behavior. With what words does he motivate Christians to live as resurrection-bound people? 1 Cor. 15:58.

What response do these additional passages invite from Christians who await the blessed hope of the resurrection?

Titus 2:11-14 _____

Acts 24: 15, 16 _____

Phil. 3:10 _____

"Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: 'Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!' Throughout the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 644.

What one word best expresses your emotion as you read this paragraph?

FURTHER STUDY: The Corinthians were not alone in thinking that "there is no resurrection of the dead." Compare the erroneous views described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Timothy 2:16-19. How do we avoid such views today?

"Suppose that the trump of God should sound tonight, who is ready to respond with gladness? How many of you would cry, 'Oh, stay the chariot wheels; I am not ready?' Of how many would it be written, as it was written of Belshazzar, 'Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting?' To be wanting in that day is to be wanting forever; for when Christ shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, we must be all ready to be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Your only safety is in coming to Christ, and ceasing from sin this very moment. The sweet voice of mercy is sounding in your ears to-day, but who can tell if it will sound to-morrow?"—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, Aug. 29, 1892.

"The earth mightily shook as the voice of the Son of God called forth the sleeping saints. They responded to the call and came forth clothed with glorious immortality, crying, 'Victory, victory, over death and the grave! O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' Then the living saints and the risen ones raised their voices in a long, transporting shout of victory. Those bodies that had gone down into the grave bearing the marks of disease and death came up in immortal health and vigor. The living saints are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and caught up with the risen ones, and together they meet their Lord in the air. Oh, what a glorious meeting! Friends whom death had separated were united, never more to part."

—*Early Writings*, p. 287.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What Christian relative or friend, now dead, do you most long to see on resurrection day? Why? What do you imagine doing or saying when you meet again?
2. How can Seventh-day Adventists share more effectively the biblical truth of the resurrection? How can you as an individual do so?

SUMMARY: The biblical view of the resurrection is not a meaningless doctrine that meets no human need. It answers our human quest for immortality in the way God plans, and it motivates us toward loyalty to our risen Lord as we await the grand day of reunion with believers who have died.



Witness Unaware

Edwin Ludescher

In some countries of Eastern Europe people still stand in line to buy daily necessities. An Adventist woman stood in a long line to buy milk. When she finally reached the front of the line, she gave her order and paid the clerk for her milk. But the clerk gave her too much in change. When she tried to return the extra money, the clerk brushed her aside; she was busy with another customer. The woman waited quietly until the clerk had finished with the customer, then called her attention to the overpayment. The clerk took the money, thanked her curtly, then turned to the next customer. The Adventist woman smiled and turned to leave the store.

Two students standing in line had watched her. They wondered why this woman returned the money. Most people would have been glad for some extra change!

The following day the woman stood near the front of the same line when a weary young mother carrying a little child in her arm approached the front of the line. When the clerk saw her, she scolded her sharply and demanded that she wait in line like everyone else. The Adventist woman felt sorry for the weary young mother and offered her place in line. Then she walked to the end of the line and began her wait all over.

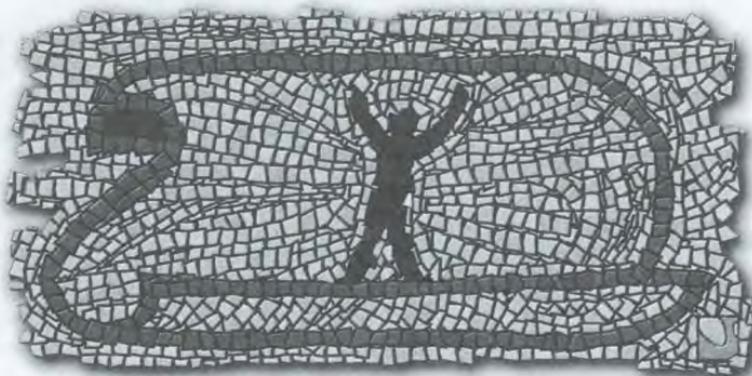
The same two students who had seen the money incident the previous day, watched in amazement as this Christian woman again acted generously to a stranger. They decided they had to know what motives prompted such unusual behavior. They followed the woman home and explained that they had seen her in the market. They wondered why she was so different. She invited them into her home and answered their questions. During their conversation, she shared her faith in Jesus. As the students were leaving, she invited them to come back again.

The students returned several times. In time they asked if they could attend church with her so they could learn more about Jesus, who made such a difference in her life.

We never know when we are being a testimony to others. Through our prayers we can strengthen others as they witness to their faith. Through our offerings we support the work others are doing. And through our actions we can witness to our own faith, and help others find the way to Jesus.

Edwin Ludescher recently retired as president of the Euro-Africa Division.

Praise and Promises



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 3:21-23; 6:19, 20; 10:13; 13:12.

MEMORY TEXT: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: It is through claiming God's promises and participating in His praise that Christians are able to access the resources of heaven.

CHRISTIANS NEED NIGHT VISION. Every spring half a million sandhill cranes, *en route* to points north, roost on the Platte River in the United States. In their conservation efforts on behalf of the cranes, biologists needed to see the invisible—thousands of cranes gathering in the river at night. The Nebraska Air National Guard came to the rescue. Aircraft, equipped with infrared sensors, were able to “see” the cranes and aid in understanding their habits.

In this dark hour Christians need to be able to see what is real but invisible to our unaided sight. The praise and promises of God's Word provide “infrared sensors” that allow us access to spiritual realities. In spite of the difficulties at Corinth, Paul finds reasons for praise to God and opportunities to share powerful promises of His grace. In doing so he provides each of us with our own “night scope.” No matter how dark the night, we can be equipped to see the light!

GOD IS FAITHFUL (1 Cor. 1:4-9).

As Paul begins to craft 1 Corinthians, he is fully aware of the problems he will tackle in the letter—factions, spiritual elitism, immorality, lawsuits among members, abuses of the Lord’s Supper, twisted uses of spiritual gifts, and wayward views of the resurrection. Yet he models an important perspective for Christians who, with him, face problems. He grounds his attempts to deal with them in praise to God.

Paul looks toward the Second Coming and believes that the members of the troubled congregations at Corinth will then be found “guiltless.” What fuels Paul’s confidence? 1 Cor. 1:4-9.

Given the depth and variety of the problems in the churches of Corinth, Paul must have been tempted to feel that his work for them had been pointless. If so, Paul yields his own judgment to the Divine One. For he cannot deny that God has blessed and endowed the Corinthians. Whatever he may be tempted to think of them, the bestowal of grace and gifts confirms God’s own judgment of their worth. This feeds an additional idea that grips his mind and drives his hope, a thought that motivates him to continue to admonish and correct and to believe that those he addresses in Corinth are, in fact, slated to be citizens of God’s eternal kingdom: “God is faithful!”

Paul finds cause for praise and confidence in God’s faithfulness. Whatever the lapses of human behavior and belief, God has been in the believers’ experience from the start (verse 9), sustains them in the present (verse 7), and promises to strengthen them until Christ’s return (verse 8).

What similar promises are contained in the New Testament? Phil. 1:6; 1 John. 3:1-3. What other promises would you like to add?

“We are not to look within for evidence of our acceptance with God. We shall find there nothing but that which will discourage us. Our only hope is in ‘looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.’ Hebrews 12:2. There is everything in Him to inspire with hope, with faith, and with courage.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 199, 200.

Think of someone you know well who is facing strong spiritual challenges. On that person’s behalf, offer your praise to God and lay claim to the divine promises.

ALL THINGS ARE YOURS (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

The Corinthian Christians have identified with specific teachers. What mind-set does Paul suggest as a replacement for this cliquish mentality? 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

There are few grander statements of the privileges of the Christian than 1 Corinthians 3:21-23. Recall the setting of Paul's buoyant words. Paul had received the report (1 Cor. 1:11) that Corinthian Christians were banding together under the banner of one preferred teacher or another. They professed a smug loyalty to this chosen leader at the expense of Christian community. With a superior air, they demeaned those who followed others.

Behind every dark cloud, so the saying goes, is a silver lining. Paul is moved by the theological cliques that have formed to provide an energizing statement of Christian privileges. He cleverly points to an inversion of truth by the Corinthians. They have claimed, "I belong to teacher X." Paul says, "You have it wrong. It is not you who belong to a teacher. That teacher, and every teacher, belongs to you!" In attaching themselves to one proclaimer, they have destroyed their Christian privileges.

The phrase "all things" (or "everything"), figures prominently in many Bible promises. Review the following promises:

Mark 9:23; 10:27 _____

Rom. 8:32 _____

Phil. 4:13 _____

2 Peter 1:3 _____

As becomes evident in 1 Corinthians, it was possible to misuse the claim to "all things" (see 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). Paul reminds them that all things belong to believers because they themselves belong to Christ. For those who belong to Christ, Paul's promise is sweeping. Notice the wide array of categories Paul includes in "all things."

In what ways might you be taking too narrow a view of your privileges as a Christian? What has God given you in Christ to which you have failed to lay claim? Is the cause of this failure the result of not giving to Christ "all things" in your life?

THE INSIDER (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

Among the issues that Paul takes up in 1 Corinthians are difficult ones dealing with sexual immorality. With clear views of God's grace and power, Paul is once again able to find inspiration in the most difficult of situations. He has accepted God's gift of vision in the night! Aside from the promises themselves, we have much to learn from such faith.

**What striking reminder does Paul issue to erring Christians?
1 Cor. 6:19, 20.**

Some in Corinth had apparently been demeaning the body, suggesting that what one did with it did not matter. Paul's view provides a vivid contrast. The Christian's body is not worthless but priceless. The believer is the purchased dwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is the only passage where Paul refers to the *individual* believer as the temple of the Holy Spirit (compare 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21).

To appreciate the power of the promise we must refresh our understanding of the identity of the Holy Spirit. "From eternity God the Holy Spirit lived within the Godhead as the third member. The Father, Son, and Spirit are equally self-existent."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 61. What would be the result if we could truly grasp the incredible privilege we have of sharing life with a divine Companion?

Compare other Bible passages that emphasize the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: John 14:16, 17; Rom. 8:9-11; Eph. 5:18.

In discussing the paradoxical quality of the Christian life, one author writes that the Christian "loves supremely One whom he has never seen, and though himself poor and lowly he talks familiarly with One who is King of all kings and Lord of all lords, and is aware of no incongruity in so doing."—Warren W. Wiersbe, ed., *The Best of A. W. Tozer*, (Harrisburg, Penn.: Christian Publications, 1978), p. 9. Christians share life so completely with the Ruler of all things that He may be described as dwelling within us.

" . . . Paul endeavored to show them Christ's power to keep them from evil. He knew that if they would comply with the conditions laid down, they would be strong in the strength of the Mighty One. As a means of helping them to break away from the thrall of sin and to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, Paul urged upon them the claims of Him to whom they had dedicated their lives at the time of their conversion."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 306.

VISION IN THE NIGHT (1 Cor. 10:13).

What thoughts should give strength to the tempted Christian?
1 Cor. 10:13.

Paul does not write 1 Corinthians 10:13 in a vacuum, a spiritual environment free of any real temptations. He writes the promise with an audience in view. And the members of his audience are “tempted” in very real ways. In the rough and tumble of their daily lives they are drawn toward divisiveness and spiritual one-upsmanship. They are tempted to find their Christian identity in criticizing rather than in upbuilding. They feel the pull of sexual allure. The social and religious life of idolatry draws them. This is not a promise for the ones living in ivory towers but for those struggling in the trenches of spiritual battle.

What similar thoughts are expressed in 2 Thessalonians 3:3; James 1:2, 12; 1 Peter 4:12, 13?

With other passages in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 10:13 exposes the anatomy of the great controversy as it affects each of God’s saints. In the temptations pressed by Satan, Paul invites his readers to perceive the overruling power of God. The tempter would press his temptations with no regard to the spiritual resources of his victim. The tempter would start a fire and then block the exits. God will provide a way of escape. “God is not simply a spectator of the affairs of life; he is concerned and active. Believers can count on his help. He will always make *a way out*. This word (*ekbasis*) may denote a mountain defile [canyon]. The imagery is that of an army trapped in rugged country, which manages to escape from an impossible situation through a mountain pass.”—Morris, *The Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 142.

First Corinthians 10:13 itself constitutes an important contribution to the Christian’s arsenal against temptation. While the pressure of the temptation may seem unbearable, the promise declares that it is bearable. While we may not see the way of escape, it is there. In the darkness of a night battle of the soul, we have the infrared vision of the promise. We can see the realities of God’s grace, which Satan seeks to hide in his demonic gloom.

How can we take hold of this victorious experience next time we face a temptation? 2 Thess. 3:3, NIV.

FULLY KNOWN (1 Cor. 13:12).

Imbedded in Paul's exalted praise of divine love is another promise to be treasured and claimed.

What heartening thoughts does Paul share in 1 Corinthians 13:12?

Among the encouraging ideas of 1 Corinthians 13:12 is that in eternity we will not suffer from limited knowledge. Those things that haunt us now will not trouble us then. Crisis, trauma, pain, and injustice. How will they appear in the full knowledge of eternity?

If you had to choose just one mystery or troubling event that you could have explained to you, what would it be?

First Corinthians 13:12 does not just offer a hopeful word about our future knowledge. It offers an equally heartening reminder of God's present knowledge. While our knowledge now is limited, God's is not. Though we do not know God fully, He knows us completely and employs that knowledge to our best good.

What does each of the following passages teach about God's understanding of us?

Job 7:17, 18 _____

Matt. 10:29-31 _____

1 John 3:18-20 _____

"When men go forth to their daily toil, as when they engage in prayer; when they lie down at night, and when they rise in the morning; when the rich man feasts in his palace, or when the poor man gathers his children about the scanty board, each is tenderly watched by the heavenly Father. No tears are shed that God does not notice. There is no smile that he does not mark.

"If we would but fully believe this, all undue anxieties would be dismissed."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 86.

The grandest news of all is this: knowing us thoroughly, God nonetheless longs for us to be part of His eternal kingdom! As the song says, "The One who knows me best, loves me most."

FURTHER STUDY: Using a Bible concordance or computer search program, look up the words *praise(s)* and *promise(s)*. How important are “praise and promises” to joyously living as a Christian?

The book of Revelation provides us with a window onto heavenly worship and gives us hymns of praise that ascend before God’s throne. Read Revelation chapters 4 and 5 and note carefully the heavenly atmosphere of praise. We are called to join in the heavenly praise of the Creator: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4:11, NRSV).

Read Testimonies, vol. 5, pp. 315-319.

“If in the providence of God we are called upon to endure trials, let us accept the cross and drink the bitter cup, remembering that it is a Father’s hand that holds it to our lips. Let us trust Him in the darkness as well as in the day. Can we not believe that He will give us everything that is for our good? ‘He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?’ Even in the night of affliction how can we refuse to lift heart and voice in grateful praise, when we remember the love to us expressed by the cross of Calvary?”—page 316.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Which of the words of praise and promises discussed in this week’s lesson is the most precious to you? Why?
2. First Corinthians contains other promises and words of praise than those that have been the focus of this lesson. Which promises or words of praise would you add?
3. Looking back over 1 Corinthians, what are the most important lessons it has to teach modern Christians?
4. How important is praise in your own devotional life? How central a place does it play in your congregation’s public worship? How could you make praise a more important element in both private and public worship?

SUMMARY: To modern Christians comes the incredible challenge of living the Christian life amid the gathering gloom of the end. To meet the challenge, God has provided powerful promises and granted us the capacity for praise. By using both we are able to look beyond problems and difficulties to find strength in the Lord of all things.



The Power of God's Word

J. H. Zachary

The Philippines is a land of 87 different tribal dialects. Bibles are available in the major languages, and Bible translators from the Wycliffe Bible Translators, at great personal sacrifice, spend years living in remote villages, learning the culture and language of a tribe, in order to produce at least a portion of God's word in that language. It is a great day when a tribe receives the first copy of a Bible portion in its own language.

Pastor Albert Gulpfan, secretary of the Central Philippine Union Conference, is a member of one of the minority tribes in the Philippines. His tribe numbers only about 300,000, and speaks a language called Masbateneo [Mahs-beh-ten-AY-o].

Brother Gulpfan yearned to hold evangelistic meetings among his own people. Some of the villages had resisted previous attempts by various denominations to evangelize their areas. They threw a rain of stones on the roofs of their meeting halls, and otherwise disrupted their meetings.

Brother Gulpfan arranged for teams of laymen to enter the area and lay the groundwork for the evangelistic series. Suspicious villagers watched their every move. They were impressed with the Adventists' friendliness and courtesy. When the workers announced a Vacation Bible School, mothers took their children, but stayed, ready to take their children home if they did not like what they heard. Soon, however, the mothers felt safe leaving their children to enjoy the meetings.

When Pastor Gulpfan arrived for the meetings, he brought with him the first portion of the Bible printed in the Masbateneo language. The audience fell silent as they heard the words of God read in their own tongue—by a preacher from their own tribe! Resistance faded. Attendance at the meetings grew. And at the close of the meetings 40

persons were ready for baptism. An additional 50 are attending baptismal classes, including one man who is an official in the municipal government.

Pastor Gulpfan praises God for the power of His word, and the faithful translator who hopes to complete translation of the entire Bible into Masbateneo this year.

Pastor Albert Gulpfan (left) J. H. Zachary is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour.



Lessons for Second Quarter, 1998

The second quarter Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, entitled "Happy Are You!" are based on the Sermon on the Mount.

Lesson 1: The Kingdom of Heaven.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 5:1, 17-20; Luke 17:20, 21; John 1:11; Matt. 13:33; Exod. 20:19.

MEMORY TEXT: James 2:5.

KEY THOUGHT: The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes it has been entrusted with special last-day truth about God.

OUTLINE:

- How to read the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1).
- Recognizing our responsibility (Matt. 5:19).
- The kingdom of God is here (Luke 17:20, 21).
- Dimensions of the kingdom—Part I (John 1:11).
- Dimensions of the kingdom—Part II (Matt. 13:33).

Lesson 2: The Poor in Spirit.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 5:3-11; Luke 4:18, 19; 6:20; 14:21; 2 Cor. 8:9; James 2:5.

MEMORY TEXT: Matt. 5:3.

KEY THOUGHT: In the Beatitudes Jesus sought to outline the prescription for true happiness.

OUTLINE:

- Object of the beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-11).
- Blessed are the poor (Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20).
- Good news to the poor (Luke 4:18, 19).
- Those invited to the feast (Luke 14:21).
- Jesus, our example (2 Cor. 8:9).

Lessons in Braille

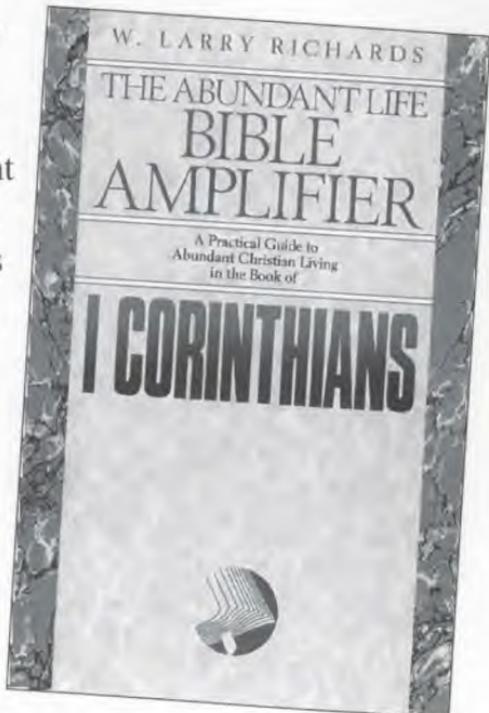
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You Have Mail!

At first glance this letter, written 2,000 years ago, may seem far removed from issues that are important for Christians today. But take a closer look. Consider this your mail too.

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Unions	Churches	Membership	Population
Central India	247	91,597	245,192,000
Northeast India	128	23,486	35,326,000
Northern India	149	28,015	520,867,000
South India	477	88,123	148,236,000
Andaman and Nicobar Island Region	1	117	278,000
Himalayan Region	4	483	24,000,000
<i>Totals June 30, 1996</i>	1,006	231,821	973,900,000

SOUTHERN ASIA DIVISION