

first **Corinthians**



1Corinthians 9:24

C. W. "Abe" Lincoln

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

First Corinthians

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Sunset Institute Press

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ISBN 0-9755183-7-2

Produced Under The Supervision Of
Virgil Yocham
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This Book is Dedicated to

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whose love and generosity
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A companion workbook on the study of First Corinthians by Abe Lincoln is available for purchase through the Sunset International Bible Institute External Studies: 1 (800) 687-2121. **This study is also available on DVD.**

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Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders, and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a video taped course. The voice track of the video tape was first transcribed, then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, to Darlene Morris and the staff of Sunset Translation / Editing Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

This book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible Study Library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders, and grow churches that plant other churches.



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Introduction To 1st Corinthians and the Sin of Division

Acts 18 and 1 Corinthians 1:1–17

Background Material

Paul in Corinth

Welcome to the study of the book of 1 Corinthians, one of the greatest epistles in the New Testament. Introductory and background information about this epistle come from Luke's inspired account of Paul coming to Corinth and preaching in that great city (cf. Acts 18:1–19:1). Paul arrived in Corinth about 50 A.D. and stayed and worked with Aquila and Priscilla. Luke said that Paul spent every Sabbath in the synagogue reasoning with and trying to persuade the Jews and Greeks: "*When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia (and brought support for Paul), Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ*" (Acts 18:5). Many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized (cf. Acts 18:8). The Lord used Paul and his co-workers for eighteen months to establish the church of our Lord. Then in 55–56 A.D. the Holy Spirit directed Paul in writing his letter to the Corinthians.

The History and the Geography of Corinth

During the time that Paul was there, Corinth was a very important city in Greece. It served as the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. It was also a great commercial center. A map can show why Corinth was so important. All the trade

routes went through the southern gate on the Greek isthmus which joined the peninsula to the mainland. Corinth, which was built at the foot of Mount Acrocorinthus, had three harbors. Ancient sailors dreaded the two hundred mile trip around the southern capes, so they would tie ropes to their ships, put logs under them, and then drag the ship across the isthmus. Larger ships had to unload their cargo, transport both the cargo and the ships across the isthmus, then load the cargo back on board before they were ready to sail across the Mediterranean Sea. The canal at Corinth connecting the Aeolian Sea and the Aegean Sea was started in 66 A.D. by the emperor Nero. There have been many attempts since that time to build a canal in the same area. The present canal was begun in 1881 and shortened the distance between the Aeolian Sea and the Aegean Sea by over two hundred miles.

Mount Acrocorinthus served as a fortress for the city because it was over 1800 feet (558 meters) in elevation. The Acropolis (a fortified hill overlooking many Greco-Roman cities, Ed.) is where the Athenians had the pantheon with all their gods in it. From that vantage point, on a clear day you could see forty miles northeast to the city of Athens. In 146 B.C. Corinth was totally destroyed and its art taken to Rome by the armies serving under General Mummius in response to a Greek uprising. Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth a century later in 46 B.C. as a Roman colony and the capital of the province of Achaia. It did not take long for Corinth to grow into a significant first century city. When Paul arrived there sometime in the early 50's, the population included approximately 200,000 free-born citizens and 500,000 slaves. The people of Corinth consisted of descendants of the Roman colonists who had arrived in 46 B.C., Roman businessmen, and members of a Jewish community. The people took great pride in the city and in the marble that was used for their buildings (Corinthian architectural prowess has been recognized for many years). They highly esteemed their pottery and brass industries as well. When Paul arrived he found wealth, luxury, and immorality.

Corinth was a city full of idols. Poseidon, the god of the sea, was the primary god. To “live like a Corinthian” meant to live a life of moral corruption. Throughout the empire of Rome, the women who had loose morals were often called “Corinthian girls.” At the temple of Aphrodite on the Acropolis in Old Corinth, there were a thousand Corinthian girls. They were employed as temple prostitutes. Aphrodite was the goddess of love (the Greek word, *eros*). Worship at the temple involved sexual intercourse with the priestesses or young male homosexuals. This presented a great temptation to the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 5 and 6). This wickedness attracted worshipers from many parts of the Roman world. In fact, many of the disciples had committed these sins before their conversion. Corinth was a very complex, sophisticated, and wicked city. Paul reminded the brethren of Corinth what they once were spiritually when he said:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

The Purpose of the Writing

Purpose of the Epistle

The purpose of 1 Corinthians was to correct serious problems within the church in Corinth. Every church has problems, but there is a right and wrong way to deal with spiritual problems. Following and understanding 1 Corinthians

can help to show the right way to deal with these problems.

Paul's Approach in the Letter

First Corinthians deals with 13 distinct problems:

1. The problem of contentions, quarrels, and divisions (Ch. 1).
2. The problem of carnal nature and immaturity (Ch. 3).
3. The problem of taking pride in immorality (Ch. 5).
4. The problem of taking brethren to court because of covetousness (Ch. 6).
5. The problem regarding marriage and divorce (Ch. 7).
6. The problem surrounding liberty in Jesus (Ch. 8).
7. The problem of idolatry (Ch. 8–10).
8. The problem of women's roles and submission (Ch. 11).
9. The problem of abusing the love feast and the Lord's Supper (Ch. 11).
10. The problem of misunderstanding and misusing spiritual gifts (Ch. 12–14).
11. The problem of the lack of love (Ch. 13).
12. The problem of questioning the resurrection (Ch. 15).
13. The problem surrounding the collection of money for the saints (Ch. 16).

There were numerous problems facing the church at Corinth, and the church today faces many of the same problems because human nature is essentially the same. Christians are either growing in the grace and knowledge of God, or they are becoming weaker each day through the devil's influence. God greatly desires that His people know His abiding love and concern. For this reason God was grieved because of the church

in Corinth, but neither He, nor the Apostle Paul had given up on them. It is important to understand the fact that God does not give up on His children. Considering the sacrifice that God made when He sent Jesus to die on the cross, one can never question God's love for His children.

Paul's Assurance to the Church

The church in Corinth had been disgraced by its sexual immorality, pride, and dissension. Despite all their problems, God still claimed that the church in Corinth belonged to Him. Paul addressed the Corinthian brethren as "*the church of God in Corinth*" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Throughout the book of 1 Corinthians Paul called them "*brethren*," "*God's field*," "*God's building*," and "*the temple of God*." There is always hope for people as long as they listen to the Word of God.

Paul began his letter with:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
(1 Corinthians 1:1–3).

Paul stated at the very beginning that he was "*called to be an apostle*," which means he was uniquely chosen by the will of God. Paul was called by the Holy Spirit when he and Barnabas were "*Set apart . . . for the work to which I have called them*" (Acts 13:2). Paul was **not** a self-appointed apostle. He did not refer to his "calling" when his authority was unchallenged. However, when writing to many of the churches, he felt the need to present evidence of his apostolic appointment and authority.

Paul and Sosthenes wished grace and peace to the brethren

in Corinth. In Acts 18 the synagogue ruler who brought accusations against Paul before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, was probably Sosthenes (cf. Acts 18:12–17).¹

The Nature of the Body

The Local Body — Empowered by God

The word church means “those who belong to the Lord.” The Greek word *ekklesia* means “the called out.” This word was used in the Greek world to denote an assembly of the citizens of a town at city meetings. The citizens were called together to fulfill their civic responsibilities. *Ekklesia* was adapted by the Lord to show that the church is a group of people who have been “called out” to listen to the Word of God. The church is a group of people who have been **called** by the gospel **out** of a wicked world into a new life and transformed into the image of God’s Son, Christ Jesus. God has called them into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:9). He has sanctified them by calling them to be separated from the secular world for a sacred purpose.

Paul continued his letter to the Corinthians by mentioning a portion of his constant prayer of thanksgiving on their behalf. He said:

¹ Editor’s Note: The majority of New Testament commentators who address the question of whether this is the Sosthenes from Acts 18 believe that Sosthenes was converted after he was beaten in Corinth. See Leon Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), 34; Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle To The Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 30-31; Richard E. Oster, Jr., The College Press NIV Commentary: 1 Corinthians (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1995), 42; Roy L. Laurin, Where Life Mature: First Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1987), 14.

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge — because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:4–9).

These conversions and spiritual gifts were clear evidence that the Corinthians belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ. They had been convicted in every spiritual way. They were not lacking in spiritual gifts. Paul said Jesus was faithful to keep them strong to the end and to present them blameless before God on that final day, if each Christian allowed His word to dwell in them. Thus Paul positively reminded the Corinthians of their gifts and the fact that they belonged to God before moving on to address the terrible sin of division.

What has happened to this kind of spirit and prayer in today's churches? If churches would realize the spiritual benefits available to them in Christ their problems would all be taken care of. The church today needs to realize they are called to be different in thought, word, and deed, because they have been set apart for God's special enjoyment and use.

Beginning in 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul addressed the problem of divisions and quarrels in the church. He spent four chapters dealing with the sin of glorifying men rather than Christ and the terrible consequences this had on the church in Corinth. He said:

*I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no **divisions** among you and that*

you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power (1 Corinthians 1:10–17).

Division has always been a problem among God's people, and for this reason many of the New Testament epistles deal with this topic in one way or another. Paul addressed this problem by earnestly pleading with the Christians in Corinth to agree with one another on the basis of the name of the One who is Lord of all, Jesus Christ. They needed to agree that there is one body over which Christ alone is head. The Old Testament says Jehovah is One (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4; quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:29–32). He is perfectly united — single in purpose, objective and goal. The God-head is seen in three persons, but God's mind, will, heart, actions, and purpose are absolutely undivided!

However, Paul was not saying that Christians have to agree on every issue of life. He was making the point that our judgment must be subordinate to the authority of the New Testament for the love of brethren, for the accomplishment of peace, for doctrinal purity, and for building one another up. There needs to be the unity that Jesus prayed for when he prayed for His disciples (cf. John 17:6–26). This passage

especially applies to the speaking of God's word. Agreement in the church gives assurance against divisions within the church. The Greek word for "divisions" is ***schismata*** (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10), which means to split or tear apart with violence. In secular usage the word ***schismata*** once described cleaving someone's head with an ax or "the action that happens when the sea breaks a ship to pieces. When forces within a congregation create the kind of contention that is described by this word, the ultimate result puts the body of Christ in real danger.

"*Perfectly united*" comes from the Greek word ***katartizo*** which means to put something in order or to fit perfectly together. The same word is used in Mark 1:19 when James and John were mending their fishing nets. In non-biblical writings, this word was used to describe the knitting of broken bones back together perhaps after being set by a doctor, so that the broken pieces might be one again. The idea is to repair something and restore it back to its original condition so that it can be productive and useful once more.

If Christians practice the sin of division (cf. Galatians 5), they must repent of that sin and work diligently to repair the God-given unity. Unity will not come about until it has been restored in both the mind (attitude) and in thought (understanding). The quarrels among the Christians in Corinth were very typical of some that many churches have today. These quarrels were centered around personalities and ministries by emphasizing the human messengers rather than **the Messenger**. The Corinthians had taken their eyes off the Lord and instead had looked to the Lord's servants. The messengers at that time were Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, but these men had had no desire to cause such division. The same things cause quarrels in the Lord's church today. It may be that a preacher or an elder does not get his way, or some of the members are upset over a decision to spend money in a way that is not unscriptural but goes against their own judgment in the matter. Whatever the reason, when division occurs,

churches can become a spectacle before the world causing members to fall away from the faith.

Paul did not elaborate on who belonged to Chloe's household, but their courage and devotion should be commended. They had seen a problem and had gone to the apostle Paul for a solution. Paul says that the solution is in the unity of Christ. It is amazing that when a problem became evident, Paul returned to the basic concepts of the gospel. He talked about the unity of God and Christ. He referred to the nature of the gospel and immersion into the Lord. Paul asked the meaningful question, "*Is Christ divided? . . .*" (1 Corinthians 1:13). The verb "**divided**" (*merizo*) was used to portray the idea of dividing something up and handing out parts to different people. Christ is One, and He cannot be divided into factions. Focusing on the thought in this question presents a terrible picture of disunity.

Paul asked about crucifixion and immersion: ". . .*Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?*" (1 Corinthians 1:13). Paul made the comment that he was thankful that he had not baptized many of the Christians in Corinth because of the arguments in the church over who immersed whom. Baptism into the possession of Christ binds the one being immersed for the remission of sins (cf. Acts 2:38) to Jesus as his Lord. Baptism does not bind the person being baptized to the person who is performing the act of immersion. Paul was **not** sent to do all the baptizing; others could and did baptize. Paul had **preached** on the necessity of being saved by faith at the point of baptism and then had done the actual immersing himself for at least three of the Christians there in Corinth. Paul realized that many in Corinth failed to understand the purpose and significance of baptism. Some Christians try to use this verse today to discourage baptism, but that is contrary to the meaning of this verse.

Redemption is what Jesus did on the cross for all mankind. Salvation comes through **His** crucifixion and resurrection from the grave. The New Testament is very clear on the issue of

baptism. To be redeemed, one must believe in Christ and be immersed into Christ. To make the person who is doing the immersing the central issue of redemption, however, is giving the glory to man and emptying the cross of Christ of its great power. Christ is the source of man's wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30). Paul was sent to preach Christ and to have Christ as his source of blessings by keeping Christ's commands and being immersed into Him. Christianity stresses the fact that Christians are immersed **into Christ**. Christians do not glory in the commandments of Christ, but in Christ **the Commander**.

The ultimate remedy to division, which is rooted in pride, is proper appreciation and application of the gospel of Christ. Preaching a crucified Savior **does not** create pride, arrogance, and division. May God assist us in staying focused on preaching Christ crucified and staying united on that point.

Revelation of God's Wisdom For Redeeming Man

1 Corinthians 1:18–2:13

Introduction

Jesus was not the kind of Savior the world wanted. They wanted a savior who would demonstrate a spectacular display of power. Satan tried to tempt the Lord into jumping off the temple as a display of the kind of Savior the Jews wanted and the kind of signs they wanted Him to perform (cf. Matthew 4:5–7). The Greeks, on the other hand, wanted wisdom, human knowledge, and skill separated from God. They were obsessed with philosophical speculations in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle. They wanted to believe that salvation would come through such knowledge and the wisdom of man.

The Contrast Between the Wisdom of God and the Wisdom of Man

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate” (quoting Isaiah 29:14). Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish

the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:18–31).

"The Word of The Cross"

This passage from Paul gives the very essence and nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel message did not originate with, and does not depend upon, human accomplishments. It is a message of divine ministry. Christ was horribly sacrificed on a shameful cross, and that redemptive act of our Lord saves mankind from sin. Man was lost and could not save himself. Man's wisdom has never brought man to a right relationship with God. In his own wisdom man has never come to know God. God worked through the "once for all"

death (cf. Hebrews 10:10) of His Son to save man. Man is saved by grace through faith, and not by good works which would justify pride (cf. Ephesians 2:89). The American Standard Version translates 1 Corinthians 1:18, “*For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.*” The word “foolishness” in the Greek is **moria**. This is the same word that “moron” comes from, which refers to something that makes no sense. The church cannot mix God’s wisdom (along with Jesus and the cross) with man’s wisdom.

The Jews’ Concept of The Messiah

The Jews stumbled over the cross because it appeared to be weakness rather than strength. The Jews did not understand their own Scriptures. The Old Testament predicted the rejection, suffering, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah (cf. Isaiah 53). The Old Testament also predicted His glorious resurrection (cf. Psalm 16:7–11; 73:23–25), but the Jews did not understand how God, in His wisdom and power, took care of the problem of sin while at the same time showing His superb righteousness.

The Greek’s Evaluation of a Messiah

The Greeks looked at the cross from a human point of view, but had they seen it through the eyes of Jehovah they would have discerned the wisdom of God. The weakness of God in the cross is stronger than men (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:25). Paul said, “. . . *God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached, (Christ and Him crucified) to save those who believed*” (1 Corinthians 1:21b). The “**word of the cross**” is the final, complete, and perfect revelation from God. To those who are continuing to perish, however, the doctrine of the cross is stupidity even in our day.

The Powerlessness of Worldly Wisdom

The Power of God's Wisdom

Philosophers view the substitution of Jesus on the cross as a sacrifice for man as immoral. Since the Lord paid the debt for sin they think that man must somehow atone for his own sins. Man must respond by faith to the gospel of Christ and use the benefits of a free gift, but he has done nothing to deserve or merit his salvation by receiving the free gift of life. Paul said that the Lord was pleased to save people (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:21). Paul resolved to preach the message of the cross to save people.

God's Ways Contrasted With Man's Ways

Paul quoted Isaiah 29:14 referring to a time in the Old Testament when God's people did not know God. Their reverence for God had not been from the heart. They had honored God with their lips, but their hearts had been far from Him (cf. Isaiah 29:13). The political rulers had urged alliances with foreigners to save Jerusalem. They had paid Assyria and Egypt secretly, thinking that they were so wise. They had used their own wisdom rather than God's and for this reason were very foolish. Isaiah had asked which of the wise Egyptians could tell what God was about to do (cf. Isaiah 30:1–5; 31:1–5). God had sent His angel and had defeated the Assyrians (cf. Isaiah 37:36–37). Paul used these Old Testament references to show the futility of man's wisdom in dealing with spiritual concepts.

What about the wise Greeks in Corinth during the first century? What about people today who think they have worked everything out with their own wisdom? Man's wisdom is foolishness. The love of God is the most powerful force on earth for man's salvation. Man's love, faith, self-control, and all the benefits from the spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22–23) are all the things that the world calls weaknesses. To the proud, to the lost, and to the world, financial success, power, recognition, self-sufficiency, and even unbelief are the things that are

important. These are the things that the “worldly-wise” esteem as powerful. God has shown in Christ and His death that His sovereign wisdom is far superior to any wisdom of man. He has put everything that the world sees as powerful to shame through the power of the cross (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27). Only the good news of Christ can transform people of the world into faithful, kind, peace-loving servants. All of the combined wealth, fame, and political clout has never been able to make that kind of transformation, and it never will.

Contrast Between God’s Choosing and Man’s Choosing

Nobility of Birth Not Required Worldly Wisdom and Strength Not Required

Think about the things that God has chosen in contrast to the things that man chooses. God chose a pure and lovely woman betrothed to a Jewish carpenter to be the mother of Jesus. God decided that His son would be born in a feeding trough. The Savior’s friends here on earth were publicans and harlots, people who were hated by the world. He selected His ambassadors to the world from a group of fishermen, a tax gatherer, and common servants. His Apostles were men who were of low birth and men who were held in contempt by the world. They were “nothing,” as far as the world viewed them. Paul said, *“He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him”* (1 Corinthians 1:28–29). These men were chosen to overthrow the existing order. Their redemptive message of Christ turned the world upside down (cf. Acts 17:6). In reality these men turned the world right side up by showing that the wisdom of man is totally deficient, and that the Word of God brings people into a right relationship with Him and into fellowship with Christ.

Action on Man's Part Not Required

God, because of His love and mercy, gave salvation as a gift so that no human might boast of his own glory. Salvation is by faith (trust) in the redemptive work accomplished by God through Christ not by any merit of man. Man must have a faith that obeys the gospel, but man does not deserve the forgiveness of his sins. Man accepts a salvation through Jesus that he does not deserve. His sins have been paid for by Jesus' death on the cross. Man cannot compare himself to others and boast of his goodness, or self-righteousness, as the Pharisees did. In another letter to the Corinthians Paul said:

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you (2 Corinthians 10:12–13).

This was apparently a common sin in Corinth. They boasted and compared themselves to others. If Christians compare themselves to the wise and righteous Son of God they will find nothing to boast about. It is human nature to compare one's self to someone who is weaker and to boast in self-righteousness. Christians are in Christ Jesus because of God's actions and wisdom. God made Christ their righteousness. He made Him their holiness and redemption. Christ is the source of the Christian's salvation because He willingly became those things. God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ on the cross:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no

longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:14–21).

God made Christ to be sin for His children, so that they might become righteous. They become righteous through the righteousness of their Lord. The Father willed from the foundation of the world that His Son would vicariously ransom His children from their sins. Jesus is the source of their sanctification. Man could never be good enough on his own to be made a saint. Man's glory comes from the glory of the Lord. Man must put his trust completely in Jesus' perfect sacrifice and accept his redemption from Him. To be able to do this, Paul asked the people of Corinth to remember what kind of people they once were:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things... (1 Corinthians 1:26–28).

Paul did not say that none of them were wise, strong, or influential. He said “*not many*” were powerful individuals or of noble birth when they were called to be saved by God. This is because the pride of the noble and powerful would not allow them to be poor in spirit and to become servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not many of the people judged to be wise by human standards were called to be brought into fellowship with God. God actually chose those who were poor in spirit, those whom the world called foolish, and He made them people of God.

The gospel has the power to transform God’s people into a redemptive kingdom of love, a kingdom of ministry and purity that comes out of the unsophisticated and weak people of each community. The gospel has the power to bring the worst of sinners into the kingdom of Christ. To those being saved the word of the cross is both the power and the wisdom of God. Paul makes it plain that the disciples have nothing to boast about except the grace of God (cf. Romans 3:9–31). Paul told the Romans:

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (Romans 3:27–28).

In the system of grace and in the message of redemption, which involves faith and the law of faith, all boasting has been excluded. Salvation must be understood as God’s grace, otherwise God does not receive the glory. This is the truth that God wanted His church at Corinth to see because they were glorying in men (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:21), dividing the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:22), and destroying the temple of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16–17). If Christians glory in men, even good men like Peter and Paul, they are robbing God of the glory and honor that He alone deserves.

Paul's Manner of Preaching

Simple, Straightforward, and Not With Superiority of Speech

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (1 Corinthians 2:1–5).

Keep in mind that the first four chapters deal with the dominant sin of glorying in men instead of Christ and the terrible consequences this sin had on the body of Christ in Corinth. Paul emphasized the fact that the Spirit inspired and revealed this message through the Apostles of Christ. If the Holy Spirit of God makes the message known, why glory in the messenger? Why not glory in the Spirit of God who gave it? These are the concepts Paul covered in chapter two; however, Paul continued in this context to emphasize the cross as the center of the gospel. He reminded the church of his initial reproach when he came to the city of Corinth. His coming was without display of fine words and wisdom.

William Barclay describes the Greek people as a people who loved spellbinding lecturers. They were intoxicated with rhetoric and eloquence². Paul was preaching the love of Christ and His death in simple direct words using the historical facts

² See William Barclay, The Letters To The Corinthians (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1954), 22.

of Jesus Christ. This would have been considered crude and uncultured by those who loved the wisdom of men. Paul, however, was not interested in sophistry. He was true to the message of the gospel, and he resolved to think of nothing but Jesus and Him crucified. The message was a solemn proclamation. The gospel does demand an obedient response. The gospel is simply what God did in Christ on the cross for His children. Christians must preach all the truth concerning their Lord, but the core of the message is Christ crucified.

The Source of Paul's Message

The word “*crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:2) is a perfect participle in the Greek, which means that something was completed in the past, but has continuing results in the future. That was the message Paul preached everywhere. Paul was preaching about a past event, but the cross had present results. Christ’s death on the cross was unlike all other deaths from Adam onward. Christ’s death on the cross continues to offer salvation and hope to everyone who will be obedient through faith. The Lord appeared to Paul while he was in Corinth and said, “*Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city*” (Acts 18:9–10). Paul said that when he came to Corinth he was nervous and shaking with fear. Perhaps that was because of the enormous task ahead of him, and he knew that people would emphasize his human weaknesses and insufficiencies and not listen to the redemptive message that he was preaching.

Paul did not try to trick or seduce men into their faith. Paul renounced all cunning and distortions of the Word in his teaching (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:2). Paul did not depend on wisdom or eloquence to gain followers as the philosophers did. He simply declared the gospel in the power of the Spirit. Paul depended on the demonstration of the Spirit’s message and power, so that the people’s faith would not be based upon feelings and speculation. The facts of the gospel of Christ —

the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord — are not speculation (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1–58). These are historical facts. If Christians really believe the facts, they will be more militant and fervent in the preaching of the gospel today. Paul was not saying that man's preaching should be poorly done. He was not saying that using the proper words are not important. Proper words are important to make the message clear, but, depending on the speaker's natural abilities to preach the gospel effectively, focusing too much on proper word usage may limit the message. Christians should depend upon God's power through the death of His Son on the cross to bring redemption to mankind.

Inspiration and Revelation

The Revelation of God's Wisdom

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6–10).

Paul reminded the Corinthians that the gospel originated in the mind of God. Therefore, it is sinful to glory in any human messenger, like Paul, Apollos, or Peter. Those who are mature are the ones who have reached certain goals in their lives and the ones who have honestly accepted the message of Christ by faith. The immature turn away from the message of the gospel and accept man's wisdom. The need for maturity is stressed

throughout Paul's letters. Paul told the Colossians that he proclaimed Christ, “. . . admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). He wanted them to “. . . stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (Colossians 4:12). Spiritual maturity is a goal toward which each servant ought to be striving.

The Nature of God's Wisdom

The redemptive message of the Lord was once hidden as a secret in the sense that it had not yet been revealed so that people could understand the mind of God. God's wisdom was a wisdom that was hidden even though He destined His children for glory before time began. Paul wanted the Corinthians to fully understand the nature of the “word of the cross.” “God's secret wisdom” was not something that could not be understood. It was not something that was mysterious, but it had not yet been revealed, so it was unknown for a time. A secret can only be known once it has been revealed. Paul discussed this same thought with the Ephesians when he said:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:2–6)

Paul was talking about that which was previously unknown, but was made known when God revealed it through

the Holy Apostles and prophets with the Spirit. Paul described the same basic concept to the Romans as he explained that what was previously unknown is —

. . . now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him — to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen (Romans 16:26–27).

The only thing that was required for God's secret will to be revealed was for the Apostles and prophets of the first century, who were led by the Spirit, to reveal it in human language.

The Rejection of God's Wisdom

Paul commented on the fact that none of the rulers of the first century accepted God's message. Some of them did not know God and some even chose to be ignorant of Him. Peter told the people who had seen the crippled beggar healed:

Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer (Acts 3:17–18).

He was talking about the things they did to the Lord on the cross. The Old Testament predicted the kind of Messiah Jesus would be: that He would come, be rejected by men, suffer, die, and then be raised. Men somehow disregarded all of the "Suffering Servant" passages in the book of Isaiah. If they had the desire to know the truth they would have accepted the Apostles' teaching. Their message results in the glory of the church. This hidden wisdom of God was planned from the very beginning. It was ordained to bring full glory to man, but it did not originate in the mind of man. The gospel message is greater than anything that man has seen, heard, or even imagined. It

was prepared by God for those who love Him. The verse in 1 Corinthians 2:9 has been mistakenly applied to heaven, but in this context it is actually referring to the gospel message. This gospel message was revealed by God's Spirit.

Inspiration and Spiritual Discernment

But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men know the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. That is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:10–13).

The Holy Spirit and Revelation

The wisdom that Paul preached was made known by the Spirit. The Spirit as a member of the God-head knows all things. Paul said the Spirit has revealed the deep things of God, His redemptive measure of grace through the Apostles. Everything that pertains to life and godliness was revealed (cf. 2 Peter 1:3), meaning that there will not be any more revelations of God's purpose beyond what has been written by the Apostles and prophets. There will not be any "latter day revelations" made because all truth has been revealed.

The Holy Spirit and Discernment

The Holy Spirit and The Mind of God

The Holy Spirit knows everything God knows, even the deepest areas of God's mind and heart. What the Apostles have written is everything that the Spirit gathered from the Father's mind. In the same way that we are unable to tell what others are

thinking or feeling, man is also unable to know the mind of God without revelation. Without revelation, the only entity that can know God's mind is His own Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and Inspiration

One of the problems in Corinth was the rejection of Paul's teaching because it did not sound as if it was divinely given from God. It was not full of the words of the orators of Corinth. Paul states that he preached in words taught to him by the Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:13). The Spirit taught Paul and other inspired men spiritual truths with spiritual words. The Apostles claimed full verbal inspiration in their speaking and writing. In the original texts and manuscripts, the Apostles did not make any mistakes. God was able to teach Paul the exact message He wanted Paul to teach others, using his own experiences and vocabulary. Paul's teaching was a perfect expression of God's mind and His will. Paul told Timothy that "*All scripture is God-breathed . . .*" (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus talked about living by every word which proceeded out of the mouth of God (cf. Matthew 4:4). We need to dwell upon the significance of what the Bible claims and proves about inspiration.

Promises Made By Jesus Regarding Inspiration

Jesus told the Twelve before he sent them out, "*But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you*" (Matthew 10:19–20). When He was comforting His Apostles as He was preparing them for His departure, Jesus promised to send them ". . . another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16–17). The Apostles claimed to be speaking by direct influence, inspiration, and revelation of the Spirit. Their claims of inspiration were authenticated by the signs and wonders done by their hands (cf. Hebrews 2:2–4). Paul told the Corinthians, "*The things that mark an apostle — signs, wonders, and miracles — were done*

among you with great perseverance.” (2 Corinthians 12:12). The Apostle John said:

You, dear children, are from God . . . and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood (1 John 4:4–6).

Those who listened to what the Apostles wrote and taught were listening to God the Father, because the Apostles spoke for God through their inspiration. It is important for every Christian to believe and understand this. The vehicle of apostolic revelation is not a subjective feeling, it is truth that must be believed.

Understanding About Preachers

1 Corinthians 2:14–4:1

**Glory Not in Earthly Wisdom,
Glory in the Lord**

Introduction

Apostolic revelation did not come from subjective feelings or experiences or emotions. Paul told the Corinthians, “*We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us*” (1 Corinthians 2:12). Inspired men were taught what was on God’s mind about salvation by God’s Spirit, in human language as it was spoken and recorded for Christians. When the church listened to what an apostle had written, it was being taught by the Holy Spirit of God. Jude said, “. . . contend for the **faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints**” (Jude 3). Jesus told his Apostles, “*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come*” (John 16:13). There is nothing else the Spirit intends to say to us about salvation in Christ Jesus. The Apostles and the prophets have said it all. Only the Apostles and other first century servants were privileged to directly receive the Spirit’s message and be directly empowered by the Spirit.

The Necessity of Spiritual Reception of God's Word

The Natural Man

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:14–16).

Paul was talking about the reception of God's wisdom by the “*man without the Spirit*,” who is the “natural man” in comparison to the “*spiritual man*.” The “natural man” is one who is wise about the things of the world and is unconverted. He rejects the Spirit’s message and regards it as foolishness. The “*spiritual man*” is the one who fully accepts the Spirit’s teaching. Thayer says that the “*spiritual man*” is one who is governed and filled by the Spirit of God.³ If the church at Corinth fully understood the cross and the redemptive message that came from the Spirit of God, then they would not have chosen to glory in men and cause such division. That is what Paul was trying to emphasize to the church at Corinth. This is also very relevant to the church today.

1 Corinthians 3 covers a number of topics. **First**, Paul looked at the evil of carnality. **Second**, he covered the role of preachers and teachers in God’s service. **Third**, he talked to the Corinthians about the fact that Christ was the only foundation

³ See Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D., The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 523.

for their lives and for the church. **Fourth**, he mentioned the sin of destroying God's temple, and, **fifth**, Paul discussed the issue of pride in man.

The Evil of Carnality

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building (1 Corinthians 3:1–9).

Their Carnality Hindered Paul’s Instruction

Paul reminded the church in Corinth that they were babes in Christ. They were “babes” because of their baptism into Christ which made them children of God. All Christians have this same privilege — they become children of God at their baptism. Paul tenderly fed these babes in Christ with the milk of God’s Word. As young disciples they were once “worldly,” not because they desired the world, but because they were still young in Christ and trying to overcome the weak tendencies of the flesh. At the time of his writing, Paul told them they were still controlled by the flesh because they were pursuing worldly

things. The word “*worldly*” in verse three is a different form of the same word “*worldly*” or “*carnal*” that is used in verse one. The latter use of the word “*worldly*” means they were being controlled, or even totally consumed, by their worldly desires. They considered themselves to be self-sufficient and independent from God.

Their Carnality Resulted in Following Men

The Corinthians had been feeding upon the philosophies of men rather than the Word of God, which caused them to be dominated by the flesh. Paul said that they were “*acting like mere men*” rather than acting like children of God. The Christians in Corinth were not careful as “*mere infants in Christ*” about what they were feeding themselves. They needed to be feeding on the Word of Christ because Jesus is the bread of life: “. . . Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty’” (John 6:35-36). Because they were not feeding on the Word of God, they did not have any spiritual substance in their lives. Jesus fed His mind continually and based His life on the Father’s will. He said, “*My food . . . is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work*” (John 4:34). Even Jesus’ disciples did not understand what He was telling them on this occasion.

Christians need to be like the Lord. To become spiritual they must set their minds on the things of the Spirit (cf. Romans 8:5-8). These things have been revealed through the teachings of the Apostles. God’s mind works in an objective way, dealing with facts rather than feelings. Man’s mind tends to work in a subjective way dealing with feelings. If man wants to receive the mind of God into his mind and life, he must digest the objective Word of God. When Christians keep the commandments of God, something which is necessary for their salvation (cf. 1 John 2:24), they put into practice the things of the Spirit. God’s Word must be read, understood, and practiced.

Spiritual maturity comes slowly just like man’s physical

growth. Every effort must be made to see that a child eats the proper food, learns and exercises so that his body will grow properly. The same is true for spiritual growth. This was not happening in Corinth. There was a problem in determining which of the Corinthians were the “feeders” and who was “being fed.” Paul said they were still not ready for solid food. Their jealousy and quarreling proved that they were “*worldly*” minded. They were even approaching their work in the church in terms of pride and human superiority.

Paul wrote to the Galatians concerning the works of the flesh (cf. Galatians 5:19-21). Almost all of the works of the flesh listed in Galatians were evident in the church at Corinth. Paul wrote to the Colossian and Ephesian brethren about these same types of problems (cf. Colossians 3:1-17; Ephesians 4:14-32). He urged them to work hard to crucify or put to death the old man and to put on the new man. If this is not happening, if man does not destroy his old self, then he does not know God. This is very clear when Paul said, “. . . *put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator*” (Colossians 3:10).

The Place of Preachers and Teachers in God’s Service

Ministers Are “Instillers of Belief” Believers Become God’s Building or Field

The church in Corinth must have been questioning the position Paul and Apollos were in at this time. They were ministers who were executing the commission of another, just as the word “**minister**” or “**deacon**” suggests. They were “. . . *servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task*” (1 Corinthians 3:5). Paul did not want the Christians in Corinth to believe **in** him, he wanted them to believe **through** him or **because of** him as their teacher. Paul and Apollos were the messengers for the message

of God. They were sent to serve, not to be glorified. They were simply workers in God's garden. They were helpers who were working on God's building. If the servants of the Lord and His church are not helping others to believe, then they are not being proper servants for the Lord. The servants of the Lord at Corinth needed to repent because they had an improper attitude. If any man today is not being the kind of servant that helps others grow in the faith, then he should also repent because he is not doing his assigned work properly.

Paul said,

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

The Greek tense for the words “planted” and “watered” is the aorist tense, which refers to a single action that has been completed in the past. The phrase “made it grow” is in the imperfect tense which means that God is causing growth to happen from one point in time with a continuous action of growth. It is not the one who plants or the one who waters who is important. God is the one who gives the growth, and the growth is what is important. There are two parties involved in building the Lord’s church. God is one and those who plant and water are the other. Those who plant and water all have the same purpose and the same aim. Christians are involved in the same work, and the result of their motivation and the power of their work are identical.

The Local Body — Man’s Workmanship

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder (Paul was a wise master builder), and someone else is building on it. But each one

should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:10–15).

Paul, The Wise Master Builder

By God's grace Paul laid the foundation of Christ as an expert builder. The Greek word **architekton** used here for "expert builder" is the same word that the English word "architect" comes from. It originally meant a superior skilled craftsman, which is what Paul said he had become by the grace of God. He said each one should be careful how he builds. Christians are building with a cause. The cause which they should be committed to is the local church. They should be committed to building up the body of Christ. That is a task that needs to be done carefully. The Christian's work with Christ demands the very best skill in the selection and use of materials. Paul stated that he had already laid a foundation of Jesus Christ for their lives. The Apostles and prophets laid the foundation of Jesus. Ephesians 2:20 says, "*Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*" Jesus is to be the foundation on which the church is built. No other foundation is to be used.

The Regular Builders

Christians are to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up (cf. Ephesians 4:12). Everyone in the church is to be a builder. The building is to be done by the local church upon Jesus Christ and the truth that is

in Him. Christians must **build up** rather than **tear down** God's body, the church. After Paul left Corinth, something happened that produced jealousy and contention among the brethren to such an extreme that they were tearing down the body of Christ. There are two kinds of building materials that Paul referred to in this context. There are two kinds of disciples: some are fireproof and others are flammable. Some brethren will be able to withstand pressure and being tested by fire. Other brethren will be destroyed by fiery trials and the pressure of living a Christian life.

The Result of Proper Construction

Paul discussed the work of teachers and their effect on the disciples' lives. A day of testing comes to every member of the church in every age. For those in Corinth, Paul may have been referring to the "*present crisis*" (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:26) or other pressures to their faith. The trials or pressures of the Christian life will prove whether a disciple is Christ-centered. If the disciple is Christ-centered that is what will enable him to pass the test. It will also prove how careful the teacher has been in his building. A teacher builds through his teachings: "*His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work*" (1 Corinthians 3:13). A test of fire will expose the nature of the teacher's work. Every Christian parent, every teacher, elder, and preacher who has taught the Word will have his own work tested (1 Peter 1:7; 4:12–13). During His ministry, the Lord taught about some who, having heard the Word, would in the time of testing fall away or let the Word be choked out by the cares of the world, by deceitfulness of riches or by the lust of other things (cf. Luke 8:5–15).

When Paul referred to the materials of gold, silver, and precious stones, he was referring to a Christ-centered member who receives the Word with a good and honest heart. This member is steadfast in the Word. He brings forth the fruit of another person who is devoted and faithful to the Lord. If a

teacher's work survives in Christ-centered lives, then he is rewarded because those who were taught become the teacher's joy and crown (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20; Philippians 4:1). When Paul referred to the materials of wood, hay, and stubble, he was referring to the kind of Christians who fall away. When this happens, the teacher suffers the loss of seeing one of his students fall away from the Lord.

Assurance for the Teachers

Paul said, "*If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames*" (1 Corinthians 3:15). The teacher will suffer loss when he sees someone he has taught fall away. If the teacher remains faithful, the teacher will be saved. The teacher's salvation is not dependant on the trustworthiness of his disciples. A teacher's salvation is dependant on his own faithfulness to Jesus. The teacher must be aware of the materials he uses. He must use materials like gold and silver that will endure the test of fire. The teacher, as a devoted builder, will be saved even if some of his students do not endure. Any teacher who is glorifying men and boasting about his own teachings, as many were doing in Corinth (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:21), is deliberately destroying the church of Christ, God's holy temple (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16–17), and will be destroyed as well.

The Local Body — the Holy of Holies

Divine Judgment Promised

Take note of the warning Paul gave:

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

Paul was talking to the congregation as a whole in these verses because the word “*you*” is plural. He was telling the congregation that they were God’s temple. They were sacred. The brethren Paul was talking to were those worldly minded brethren who were dividing the body in Corinth into factions. They were following men rather than Jesus. God will not tolerate those who destroy His church through division. A Christian must either be a church builder, or he is a church wrecker. Jesus told His followers that they would either gather or scatter abroad (cf. Matthew 12:30). This is as true today as it was in the first century.

Dangerous Practices — Pride in Men

Paul had already warned the Corinthians in regard to the sin of glorying in men and the dividing up of the body of Christ. Now he warned them about the dangerous practice of pride. He said:

*Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a “fool” so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness” and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” So then, **no more boasting about men!** (This is a key passage.) All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God (1 Corinthians 3:18–23).*

Paul said that the person who thinks that he is following God by dividing the church into factions is deceived. The word “deceive” has a very strong connotation here. It means one who is completely and totally caught up in deception. He is thoroughly deceived to the point that he is cheating himself out

of God's fellowship and blessings. Being wise in the wisdom of the world is not acceptable. It is foolishness in God's eyes. Anyone in or out of the church who refuses to accept God's word does not know true wisdom. What the world would call foolishness is the only true wisdom. The world considers one who follows Jesus and accepts His wisdom to be a fool. The Christian who loves, serves, lives and acts like Christ, and who lays up treasures in heaven (cf. Matthew 6:19–21) is the foolish one according to this world. The world depends on the influence of money, important people (as the world estimates people), prestige, and promotion. The world says, "Keep your money and invest it wisely for your own future." The person who does this is considered to be wise.

Paul said that all the wisdom of this world, which is not centered on knowing God and doing His will, is foolishness. God traps the wise in their own cunning, and He knows that the arguments of the wise are useless. A crafty person thinks that he is clever, but he is deceived. The one who lives by deceit and dishonesty is caught in a trap of shame, guilt, and hopelessness. The Christian does not need what the world calls wisdom to feel loved and secure since he has the imperishable Word of God as his only hope.

Christians depend on prayer, faithfulness to God, sacrifice and service. The early disciples had none of the world's secrets of success that seem to be so important today. They had no great buildings that the church owned. They had no privileged access to government officials. They did not have a lot of money, and yet they turned the world upside down with the gospel of Christ. Read the book of Acts. The church today has many different attendance contests and ways to entertain people, but those things are not important or significant to God. He is interested in people being saved. This chapter teaches that the world thinks Christianity is foolish. Christians are looked upon as nothing of importance, but Paul says that they have everything. Every good and perfect gift comes from God (cf.

James 1:17), and all these gifts belong to the church to use to glorify God.

The Christian is the only person who knows the purpose of everything that God has given him. The “worldly-wise” who reject God and His Son do not understand the things that God has made. They use God’s gifts to produce sin and evil. After God created everything, He said that it was all very good (cf. Genesis 1:31). He intended that all the things He created be used for man’s benefit.

Some in the Corinthian church were sinfully saying, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to “Cephas.” The truth was that they all belonged to the church. Each of the Apostles and faithful servants belonged to the church and were servants for Jesus’ sake. Paul said, *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake”* (2 Corinthians 4:5). The world belongs to Christians to be used in glorifying God in their service to mankind and in the life they lead for Christ. They must live their lives to the fullest in obedience to God’s will. Even death belongs to the Christian because in death he gains Christ (cf. Philippians 1:21). The fact that God has given His children victory over life and death, the present and the future, and everything in between should humble each Christian. Much of the time, however, Christians live beneath their privileges. God has given each Christian so many blessings in His service. This is a powerful chapter that all Christians should heed.

Pride and Sexual Sin

1 Corinthians 4:2–5:6

Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul continued his discussion about the place of preachers and teachers in the church. He covered four different topics. **First**, he dealt with the sin of partiality in connection with glorifying in men. **Second**, Paul urged the Corinthians to stop being inflated with pride. **Third**, he contrasted the Corinthians and the way they viewed themselves with the Apostles of Christ, and **fourth**, Paul made a personal plea to his beloved children in the faith at Corinth.

The Humble Place of Preachers

So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God (1 Corinthians 4:1–5).

Paul continued his discussion concerning teachers in the church saying, “ . . . *men ought to regard us* [teachers] *as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God*” (1 Corinthians 4:1). The word “servant” used here in 1 Corinthians 4:1 is different than the word “servant” that was used in 1 Corinthians 3:5. This is the only time Paul used the Greek word **huperetas**. In the first century, this word was used to apply to a common sailor, an “under-rower.” This “servant” was the one who was down in the bottom of the ship with an oar in his hand. Paul used this comparison to cause the Corinthians to question whether one under-rower was greater than another. Each rower was a necessary part of getting the ship to go where it needed to be. The Corinthians would have understood this naval terminology and the type of work that was involved. This word, **huperetas**, should have humbled them to think about their work in the church as no other word could have. The church in Corinth needed to be humbled at this time.

The Leaders of God

The New International Version translates 1 Corinthian 4:2 as follows: “*Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful,*” but other versions use the word “stewards” in the place of “*those who have been given a trust.*” The American Standard Version translates the verse like this: “*Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful*” (1 Corinthians 4:1–2). It is interesting that man is a **steward** of the mysteries of God. A steward was a servant who had been entrusted with the daily administration of his master’s work. Even as a servant, he had authority over other servants such as assigning them the jobs they were to do. The steward was always accountable to the master and was required to be faithful and trustworthy in his duties. He was not required to be the most brilliant or the most famous person in the country. Paul used

the word “*steward*” when he is talking about those who are teachers. It is natural that a person might have a preference for one teacher over another teacher, but the situation at Corinth was such that they were sinning by exalting some servants (stewards/teachers) and rejecting others.

Leaders in Relation To Man’s Judgment

Paul told the Corinthians it did not really matter how he was judged by them or by any human court. The word “judge” means to examine or interrogate. It was used to refer to the judicial examination before a final verdict was given. Paul, in this context, said that it was pointless to judge himself. His conscience was clear, but that did not make him innocent. The Lord is the only qualified Judge, and the time for judgment will be when the Lord comes. The Corinthians were making judgments when it was not their place to do so.

Leaders and Their Followers

Their Humility — Exemplified in Paul and Apollos Being Puffed Up To The Point of Causing Division

Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? (1 Corinthians 4:6–7).

Paul knew that only the Lord could bring to light what the darkness hides and disclose man’s inward motives at the time when each one receives the praise he deserves. He used himself and Apollos as examples that the brethren could learn from

them. He did not use the names of the men in Corinth, but instead applies the saying, “*Do not go beyond what is written*” to himself. He wanted those who were teachers in Corinth to learn from the inspiration of the Word and the authority of the Apostles of Jesus Christ. There were boundaries they needed to stay within. Paul sharply rebuked them for boasting of one man over another. Other translations use “*puffed up*” in place of “*take pride in.*” This is the Greek word which means to inflate or blow up. The English word “bellows” comes from this idea.

The System of Grace Presented In One Question

Paul used irony (an expression in which the intended meaning of the words is the opposite of or different than their usual meaning, Ed.) when he asked: “Who makes you so important? **What do you possess that you did not receive?** Why do you take the credit yourself?” Paul wanted the Corinthians to think about the things that they were boasting. They were making themselves more important than they really were. Paul sharply rebuked the Corinthians for their boastful pride. They had forgotten from whom everything comes!

Their Suffering

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings — and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When

we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world (1 Corinthians 4:8–13).

The Christian Perception — Paul’s Statement of Reality

Paul continued to rebuke them for their attitude of pride by using sarcasm (a taunting remark that uses irony, Ed.), comparing their achievements to that of the Apostles. These brethren considered themselves to have reached the goal of spiritual maturity by being wiser than others and exalting one man above another. They considered their righteousness to be above all others. Even though Paul had proven to them that this was causing divisions among them, it seemed that each division looked upon the others as unspiritual and immature. Paul compared their pride and superior attitudes with the actual life and experiences of the Apostles.

Paul said that the Apostles seemed to be “*. . . on display at the end of the procession like men condemned to die in the arena.*” William Barclay explains that this phrase referred to the procession in a Roman triumph.⁴ When a Roman general returned from a great victory, he was allowed to parade his army through the streets. If he returned to Rome, that was the highest honor he could receive. The whole procession was called a “triumph,” and he would march with all his trophies to demonstrate his triumph and achievement. At the end of the parade, there would be a group of captives who were doomed to death. They were men who had been captured and were being taken to the arena to fight the beasts and die. Paul compared the Corinthians to a general displaying his trophies and the Apostles to the captives who were doomed to die. Paul offered his service humbly to God and was ready to die for the Lord.

⁴ Barclay, 44.

Paul was telling them that if they wanted to gain a great reputation from the world by claiming to be one of the Apostles, their reputation would be like that of a fool following a fool. Men thought by using worldly ways and human wisdom and following parties of men who had elevated positions, they would be looked on as kings who were strong and worthy of great honor. The world looked at the Apostles and Christians as weak, foolish, and ridiculous people. God used Paul's weaknesses and his "thorn in the flesh" to make Paul stronger. Paul said:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, . . . Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).

The Lord uses the weaknesses of His servants to demonstrate His power and wisdom. As servants of God, Paul, Apollos, and others had gone hungry, and had been in rags, homeless and persecuted. They had been insulted and verbally abused. Manual labor was something that the Greeks despised. Yet the Apostles had to work to the point of exhaustion. They had been made a "spectacle to the whole universe." Paul told the Philippians:

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do

everything through him who gives me strength
(Philippians 4:12-13).

Paul had been treated like “*the scum of the earth,*” and yet he gloried because the suffering he experienced was for Christ.

The proud Greeks looked upon humility and the devotion of the Apostles as a character defect. They considered them to be the very lowest part of society. They were looked upon as the garbage that was scraped off a plate and given to the dogs. The Corinthians thought that by choosing one apostle over another they would appear wise in the eyes of pagan unbelievers, unbelieving friends and lost companions. Paul told them they were not assessing what it really meant to belong to Jesus.

Leaders and Their Honor

I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?
(1 Corinthians 4:14–21).

Paul's Great Sense of Love For The Corinthians

Paul was making a very personal, loving appeal to his beloved brethren, his children in the faith. Paul did not write to shame them but to warn and correct them through admonition. Paul was actually talking to them as a parent would talk to his children, just as he urged fathers to bring up their own children “. . . *in the training and instruction of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4). Paul used the same word in verse 14 when he said “*to warn you, as my dear children.*” Paul wanted to lovingly break their spirit of pride without harming them spiritually. Paul wanted to warn them just as a father would warn his children when they are wrong.

Paul said they could have had thousands of “*guardians in Christ,*” but he had become their “*father through the gospel.*” Paul used the word *pedigogos* which literally means “a leader of the child.” This person was usually a slave and involved in the instruction and discipline of the child. The guardian might do some of the things a father would do with a child, but the guardian could never become **the father**. Paul had converted them through the gospel of Christ. They had experienced the spiritual birth of water and the spirit, and they were children of the Lord (cf. Acts 18:8; John 3:3-21). The Corinthians had responded to the gospel’s saving message. The message Paul had preached in Corinth, he preached in every place, in every church, and in every location: the message of Christ. The basic message of redemption is found in Jesus and the cross over and over again in the book of Acts as people everywhere responded to the same message to which the Corinthian church had responded.

Paul's Plea to The Corinthians

As the spiritual father of the Corinthians, Paul exhorted them to imitate him. He sent Timothy to Corinth so that he could remind them of the way Paul had lived and taught. Paul could ask them to imitate him because he imitated Christ. Paul lived what he taught. Christians today need to be this kind of example for others to follow.

The Proof of Paul's Influence

Some of the Christians in Corinth were filled with arrogance because they believed that Paul was not going to return to Corinth. They obviously thought that Paul would never return and exercise his authority. He said that if it was the Lord's will, he would come soon and find out how the arrogant were talking and the power they had. Paul's apostolic authority was in the power of the gospel message which was rooted in the historical facts of Christ's atoning death. Paul did not threaten to use physical power; he was going to use his apostolic power in contrast to the philosophies of the carnal men who were brethren at Corinth. Their power was simply talk. The kingdom of God is not just a matter of talking. People can talk all they want to, but the power of the gospel is seen in the cross of Christ. The power and the wisdom of God are seen in the redemptive message of Christ and Him crucified. Paul left the choice up to the brethren: "*What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?*" (1 Corinthians 4:21). If they did not repent, then Paul was going to come with a whip to further admonish them in a spiritual way so that he could change their minds.

Summary

Throughout the past four chapters, the primary problem that Paul has addressed is the fact that the church in Corinth gloried in men instead of Christ. Paul wanted to influence them in a positive way so that they would repent of this sin. This problem was the most significant because it was the basis for many other problems that Paul knew existed in Corinth.

This is a very helpful study for the church today because it deals with corrective church discipline, which applies today just as it applied in the first century. The Bible talks about instructive discipline in admonishing the disorderly (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–22; James 3:14–16; 2 Corinthians 12:20–21), but when people persist in sin there are times and circumstances that require the church to deal with sin in a

corrective way. 1 Corinthians 5 teaches the nature of certain sins which, if practiced, need to be dealt with in a corrective manner. Chapter 5 shows the design and purpose of discipline and the good effect it can have on the church. Paul talks about the good effect disciplinary action had on the church in Corinth when he writes to them again (cf. 2 Corinthians 2 and 7). The church repented in godly sorrow and made a spiritual change.

Scandal in the Church

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality [fornication] among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? (1 Corinthians 5:1–2).

The Extent of the Sin

Notice the **nature of the sin** that Paul referred to. He said, “*It is actually reported . . .*” which means that the sin was known by others. The Greek form for the verb “*reported*” is the present passive indicative tense which means that the report had been heard and was continuing to be heard. Paul was saying that everywhere he went he had heard about the sexual immorality among them.

The Nature of the Immorality Practiced

The Greek word ***pornea*** is where the English word “pornography” comes from. The nature of pornography is **“pornea”**— sexual immorality! The word here actually refers to every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse. Sexual desire is a God-given desire (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1-7), but when it is fulfilled outside of the marriage union of a husband and wife, then it is sin. There are many kinds of unlawful sexual

relations: adultery, incest, bestiality and homosexuality. Paul states the sexual immorality being practiced specifically as “. . . *A man has his father’s wife*” (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul is amazed that the church in Corinth was allowing this type of sin to happen among them because that kind of immorality was not even accepted among the pagans. In the Old Testament, according to the Law of Moses, this same sin was severe enough to warrant the death penalty (cf. Leviticus 18:6-30; 20:10-21). The sin of incest literally means “not chaste or pure.” This kind of sin is detrimental to the social order. To say that the church permitted and practiced something that even the pagans in Corinth did not tolerate is unimaginable. History records that this type of incest was practiced among a few of the more decadent Gentiles, but it was an abhorrent sin for most. Even the sinful Corinthians had some limitations.⁵

The Attitude of the Church — Arrogance

Not only was the church in Corinth allowing this sexual immorality to take place among them, but they were also proud (puffed up) about it. Paul said, “. . . *A man has his father’s wife.*” This was not a problem that had happened only once, it was a continuous and shameful relationship. Being a Christian does not isolate a person from temptation, but a Christian must not continue in the relationship if it is sinful. In this case, the church had become like the world. They were indifferent to the relationship. In fact, rather than being grieved about the situation, they were proud of it. Paul used the perfect tense verb form for “*proud*,” meaning that they had been puffed up in the past and were continuing to be proud up to the point of his writing. That indicates that the sin of the man and the sinful attitude of pride and indifference within the church had been going on for some time.

⁵ See Richard E. Oster, Jr., The College Press NIV Commentary: 1 Corinthians (Joplin, MO: College Publishing Company, 1995), 122.

The Attitude of Paul

Paul was shocked by the attitude of the church. He admonished and instructed them: “*And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?*” (1 Corinthians 5:2) The word that Paul used for “*grief*” in this verse means to express deep sorrow as in mourning for the dead. If this had been their attitude, instead of pride, they would have surely removed such a man from their midst. Their sinful attitude led them to allow the immorality to continue within the church. The attitude for any sinner needs to be that of mourning. Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted*” (Matthew 5:4). The attitude of any church toward sin needs to be the attitude of grief.

The attitude at Corinth was one of pride for how broad-minded and considerate they were. “They were so open-minded that their brains had fallen out.”⁶ Sin had persuaded them to be intimidated by their pagan friends so much that it affected the way they reacted. This is what happens when the church is concerned about human wisdom and how the world will react when it is faithful to Jesus. This led the church to assume a sinful, puffed-up attitude. They chose to boast about something that should not have occurred. The church today must be aware of the same problem with open-mindedness and toleration of the sins of the world.

The Solution — Judge the Sin

Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and

⁶Abe Lincoln, as a teacher at Sunset school of preaching, was known for statements like this that came to be known as “Abe-isms.”

I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:3–5).

Paul was not with them physically, but he was present in the spirit. He urged the Corinthians to “*hand this man over to Satan.*” He had already made a judgment on the situation. If the church in Corinth had displayed the proper attitude toward sin, they would have had no problem removing this man from among them. Paul knew that this one sin needed immediate attention because of the affect it was having on the church. The church today also needs to be aware of sin that causes such destruction to the body of Christ.

The Church and its Discipline

1 Corinthians 5:7–6:11

Introduction and Review

Sin has a terrible effect on a person's heart and life. William Barclay said:

An easy going attitude toward sin is always dangerous. It has been said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked at it. Carlyle said that men must see the infinite beauty of holiness and the infinite damnability of sin. When we cease to take a serious view of sin we are in a perilous position. It is not a question of being critical and condemnatory. It is a question of being wounded and shocked and hurt. It was sin that crucified Jesus Christ; it was to free men from sin that Christ died. No Christian man can take an easy-going view of sin.⁷

Paul's attitude toward one specific sin that was occurring in Corinth was dismay. Even though he was not present in Corinth, he had heard the report of a particular man's sin, and had judged him guilty. Paul had also judged the church to be guilty of a sinful attitude toward the sin. When Paul said, "*And I have already passed judgment . . .*" (1 Corinthians 5:3), he

⁷Barclay, 49.

used the perfect tense for “*passed judgment*” meaning that he had already completed his judgment in the matter. Paul apparently had all the facts he needed from a reliable witness. It does not take long to judge such matters if all the facts are given.

Instructions for Dealing with this Problem

How to Administer Church Discipline

Remember that the New Testament speaks of instructive discipline which involves faithfully teaching the Word and admonishing the disorderly. Paul told the Thessalonians to “. . .warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else” (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15). These things are part of the total program of training and encouragement that is given throughout the New Testament that must be practiced in order for Christian growth to occur. The New Testament also gives instructions for public corrective discipline whenever certain sins continue to be practiced. Paul said, “When you are assembled **in the name of our Lord Jesus** . . . hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

Notice that this corrective discipline was to be done when they were assembled together. Paul did not say whether this should have been done during a regular assembly or in a special meeting of the church. The more expedient thing to have been done by members of the body of Christ might have been to have a special meeting. There is an example of this happening when the Apostles called the whole church together to settle the problem of the daily distribution of food to the Hellenistic Jews (cf. Acts 6:1-2). The same thing would apply to the church today.

In 2 Corinthians, it is important to note the success of congregational discipline (cf. 2 Corinthians 2). Paul said that

the punishment was administered by the majority which proves that not everyone in the church must understand and agree before the church can act in such matters. If a congregation has elders, then they should be the ones who take the lead, with the majority of the congregation being in favor of the discipline, or the discipline will fail. To accomplish the desired results, this serious action must be done with sufficient authority. It must be done by the authority and “***in the name of our Lord Jesus.***”

Paul instructed, “*When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus . . . hand this man over to Satan . . .*” (1 Corinthians 5:4–5). The word “assembled” in the Greek is ***sunago***, which is where the English word “synagogue” comes from. There are other passages in the Bible that deal with withdrawing from someone and give insight into how to do it in the best manner. Paul told the Thessalonians:

. . . to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. . . . If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14–15).

Discipline must be done in brotherly love and with kindness. Delivering this impenitent brother to Satan was an acknowledgment by the congregation in Corinth of what he had already done. He had made the decision by his actions to live his life according to Satan’s will and wish. This type of withdrawal is used for someone who has taken themselves away from the fellowship of Christ by the way they live. Since this brother had already rejected Christ as his Lord and given his allegiance to Satan, the public action by the church would have reminded him of the terrible nature of his sin and delinquent spiritual relationship with God. Public action was

needed to shock this man into repentance concerning the nature and consequences of his sin.

In Leviticus 18 when the LORD was giving Moses instructions concerning “*these detestable things*,” God said, “*Everyone who does any of these detestable things — such persons must be cut off from their people*” (Leviticus 18:29). There are very explicit commands from God concerning unlawful sexual relations. God said: “*Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God*” (Leviticus 18:30). In the Old Testament, whenever a person was cut off from the congregation, it severed all their privileges and rights of the covenant.

Paul told the Corinthians to “*hand this man over to Satan*.” To deliver a person over to Satan showed the depth of the church’s love for such a sinner. It did not mean that the Lord and the church had given up on this man or that they expected him to remain “out of their fellowship” permanently. The action was taken to destroy the sinful nature of the man so that his spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord. When the church understands that by his actions the sinner is “out of fellowship” with the body of Christ, and they acknowledge that he is now loving and serving Satan rather than the Lord, then they must take this firm, but loving, disciplinary action with the desired result of bringing the sinner back into fellowship. In this particular case in Corinth, it worked (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:5–8). Paul says that they need to forgive and comfort this man so that he will not be consumed by excessive sorrow. They need to reaffirm their love for him. Paul also said, “*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death*” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Satan has numerous devices to keep people under his power. He places any circumstance available before the sinner to keep them locked in the sin and destruction that comes with a sinful attitude. Paul was talking about destroying the sinful

attitude. Public action will show the sinner the consequences of accepting a sinful life style. It takes great spiritual love and courage to practice corrective discipline in such a way that the impenitent really knows that God and His children genuinely care for him. It takes the love and concern of a congregation to bring about the repentance, forgiveness, and restoration of such a sinner. When such action is done quickly and impartially by spiritual leaders in today's church, that congregation will be much stronger spiritually and numerically.

Change of Attitude in the Church

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?

Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:6–8).

The church in Corinth was guilty of sinful indifference. They were boasting about their open-mindedness and tolerance of this sin. It may be hard to believe that brethren would boast about such a horrible sin occurring among them, but their tolerance and self-satisfaction concerning this sin left the church in Corinth vulnerable to destruction. Sin had persuaded them to be intimidated by the world. This is what happens when the church becomes indifferent to sin. Paul said that a little yeast would affect all the dough. A little bit of corruption will affect the whole congregation. Yeast (leaven) is commonly used in Scripture to portray sin and the power it has to contaminate and influence the greater portion for either good or bad. An evil influence may cause an entire congregation to be destroyed, especially if the church is proud of its tolerance for

sin as they were at Corinth. Paul commanded the church to “*get rid of the old yeast.*”

The Course of Action for the Church

The church has to thoroughly clean out the wickedness to be cleansed of this disease. “*Purge*” is *catharsis* in the Greek (which is where the same English word comes from). In the Greek it is an effective aorist tense that means to purify or “*get rid of*” the sin completely. The fact that this word is in the aorist tense suggests the urgency and effectiveness of this method of cleansing. The God of the Old Testament is our Father. He is not any more tolerant of sin today than He was in the Old Testament’s days of Israel. The church needs to listen carefully to what the Spirit said through Paul. By becoming a Christian, a person becomes a citizen of the new covenant. Paul compares the Christian life to a “*Festival*” that every Christian participates in because he is a part of the new covenant. Jesus Christ is the Passover lamb for every Christian. He is perfect without blemish or defect because He fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies. The Old Testament Passover celebrated God’s deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians and their separation from evil by being called into a new relationship with God under Moses. They had a new covenant in which all the Jewish houses had to be searched with great care for the existence of leaven (yeast). The leaven symbolized the old life, or corruption, and the bondage in Egypt. If any leaven was found it had to be purged from the house (cf. Exodus 12:1–20).

Notice the sin at Corinth on this occasion. Paul said: “*Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Christ is the Passover lamb that has already been offered. The Corinthians were trying to celebrate the “*Festival*” and live the Christian life with the old leaven of sin remaining within their houses. They needed to remove the “*yeast of malice and wickedness.*” This refers to bad quality and moral inferiority. Their whole attitude was bad.

They had a vicious disposition when it came to each other. They allowed wickedness to influence the whole congregation through the wicked deeds of one man. Paul said they needed to have the “*bread of sincerity and truth.*” The Christian must live his life with sincerity and truth.

The Christian Relationship to Those Without

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you” (1 Corinthians 5:9–13).

In 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul mentioned a previous letter that has not been recorded, so obviously the church today does not need it. Some people refer to it as a lost letter, but that suggests that it was something that was once available and became lost. The contents of the previous letter can not be lost; it is just not something that was made available. Its contents are known from this passage of Scripture. Paul had previously urged them **not to associate** with any brother who was living a life of sinfulness. Some of the Corinthians misunderstood Paul’s instructions thinking that he was telling them to withdraw from all ungodly people, which would mean they had to withdraw from the world. They could not have withdrawn from the world itself and still have been able to influence the world for Christ. Paul urged them not to even eat with **any brother** who was

living a life that involved sexual immorality, greediness, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, or swindling. This passage of scripture shows that inspired instructions can be misunderstood.

The message for the church today is not to withdraw from unsaved sinners. The church cannot isolate itself from the world. The church needs to be insulated by faith, so that it does not conform to the world, rather than becoming isolated from the world. Jesus did not avoid the unforgiven. He welcomed sinners and ate with them. He commissioned His Apostles to go into the world in order to save it (cf. John 17:18). When Jesus associated with the “*tax collectors and ‘sinners,’*” the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered and complained (cf. Luke 15:1–2). The church cannot save the lost of this world if it chooses to stay away from them. It needs to love, serve, and help the “sinners” in anyway it can.

When Paul says, “. . . *with such a man do not even eat . . .*” (1 Corinthians 5:11), he was not talking about the Lord’s Supper. The “sinner” Paul was talking about in this chapter was no longer in fellowship with the Lord, so it was impossible for him to have communion with Christ in the Lord’s Supper without repentance taking place. If a man is not in fellowship with Christ because of his sinful lifestyle, he can eat a whole box of unleavened bread and drink a gallon of the fruit of the vine, and he will still not be in communion with the Lord. Communion with the Lord can only happen for those who can remember Christ on the cross as their Savior, recognize the body of their Lord, and participate with the right attitude (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:17–34).

Paul was talking about not eating with a person who had once known Christ but had fallen away. He was telling the church not to share social activities or a common meal of dining together with someone who “. . . *calls himself a brother, but is . . .*” living a life that serves Satan rather than God (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:11). This kind of person makes no pretense of being a part of the body of Christ because of his sinful nature.

The church in Corinth had this person in their midst, and he needed to be taken out of fellowship with the brethren. In 1 Corinthians 10:27, Paul said, “*If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.*” A Christian ought to love his neighbor and show interest and concern for them. Paul was not telling the Corinthians to avoid a sinful neighbor.

What should a wife and children of such a one do in a situation like this? Is she to disregard some very basic and primary commands given by the Lord? I do not think so. These primary responsibilities would not be eliminated by this particular passage, although there would be obvious difficulties in applying this teaching.

Sins That Require Corrective Action by the Church

Paul listed a number of sins which, if practiced, would cause a church to need to administer corrective discipline. He listed “. . . *sexually immoral, or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler*” (1 Corinthians 5:11). The King James Version translates these words as ‘*fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. . .*’ Notice the following words that describe five specific kinds of sin:

First, the word “*covetous*” or “*greedy*” describes the sin of fixing the affection of the mind on more and more material things. It becomes an uncontrolled desire for the things of this earth or for something that the person does not own. When Jesus was asked by the rich fool to tell his brother to divide the inheritance with him, Jesus said, “. . . *Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*” (Luke 12:15). Then Jesus told the parable about the rich farmer who built barns to store up his riches. This parable shows that anyone who is greedy is the person who is rich for his own good and not rich toward God (cf. Luke 12:16-21). This is one of the best explanations of what it means to be covetous. This person takes what little

he has and uses it to gain more for himself. He does not give anything to the Lord. He may become rich in material goods but is not giving anything back. The Lord blesses His children with many inexpressible gifts. Christians need to show their love and esteem for Him by giving a liberal portion to Him to be used for His cause.

Christians can lose their relationship with Christ if they become covetous. How can the elders of a congregation determine who is covetous? Would it be possible for the elders of a congregation to read 1 Corinthians 5:11 and ask for everyone who was guilty of being covetous to hold up their hand? The elders could announce that they know who the covetous people are and say that they are going to take corrective action next Sunday if the appropriate ones do not repent. Obviously, this is not the way to handle the situation. It is an interesting thought to think that every church might be offering fellowship to such sinners in the church today. When is the last time you heard about a congregation who practiced corrective discipline toward a covetous person?

Second, the word “*idolater*” refers to one whose mind is against God and who has placed his esteem and affection toward an idol. The sins of the flesh are associated with a lack of one’s acknowledgment of God and a lack of gratitude toward God (cf. Romans 1:21-23). An idolater is a slave to the depraved ideas that his idols represent. Idolatry describes the soul’s devotion to any object that usurps the place of God.

Third, the word “*reviler*” or “*slanderer*” means one who attacks another person with abusive language. It is a person who verbally abuses others. This sin can be used to destroy the character and the reputation of someone else to the point that it lasts for a lifetime. Public action is necessary against anyone who practices this kind of sin in order to bring about repentance.

Fourth, the word “*drunkard*” applies to one who becomes intoxicated or one who is addicted to excessive or uncontrollable drinking. It is interesting that Peter mentioned

not only drinking but drinking parties as well (cf. 1 Peter 4:3). The New English Bible translates this word as “*tippling*,” which means to drink habitually. This would involve social drinking as well.

The **Fifth** sin that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 was “*extortion*” or “*a swindler*.” This describes the act of plundering or robbery in order to seize from or to cheat another person. It is easy to see how this sin is the result of covetousness. One who becomes consumed by wanting material things will do anything to gain them.

Paul said that judging those outside the church was not the church’s “*business*,” and he also said: “*Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you’*” (1 Corinthians 5:12b–13). Think about how lonely and sorrowful a person would feel being expelled from the warmth, encouragement, strength, and fellowship that comes from being a part of a spiritual family. If this action is not carried out, the impenitent brother might think that he is accepted within the fellowship, whether he repents or not. If this action of expulsion is not taken that exposes faithful brethren to a seductive atmosphere of love and acceptability, and presents a message to the world and the church that being a disciple of Christ is not any different from being a part of the world. The world sees the way the church practices morality as being the same whether you are a Christian or not. It is important for the church today to use these corrective measures to cleanse out the corruption and influence of sinful men within the church.

Lawsuits, Living and Liberty

1 Corinthians 6:1–15

Introduction

1 Corinthians 6 covers two problem areas in the church and the solutions to those problems. This chapter begins with a discussion about brethren taking each other to court (cf.1 Corinthians 6:1–11), then Paul deals with immorality in conjunction with idolatry (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:12–20). There were many problems in the early church, but there were workable solutions to all those problems. Paul did not just cover the problems and condemn the church; he presented the solutions by giving them the proper spiritual method to work through the problems.

Brother to Brother Disputes

Taking Brethren to Court

Several sources speak of the litigious (to handle a dispute in a lawsuit, Ed.) nature of the Greek people in the first century. William Barclay told of their desire to go to court against their brethren even though this was not a normal practice for the Jews. The Jewish people usually handled their problems before the elders of the Synagogue. Their justice was usually settled in a family atmosphere rather than in a legal courtroom. Jewish law forbade a Jew to go to court at all in a non-Jewish court, but going to court was an integral part of Greek life. They were

naturally and characteristically a litigious people.⁸ It is amazing to read about their interest and desire to be a part of the Greek court system. It did not take a huge amount of money for men to charge each other and to use this type of action to bring financial gain to themselves.

Paul Butler, in his book Studies in First Corinthians, gives an interesting background to the problems and practices of the Corinthians. It helps to get a cultural view and have some historical background on the first century.

We do know that by the middle of the first century A.D., Rome had saturated Achaia (Corinth was the capital of this province) and all of its subjected provinces with Roman law and its procedures. Of all ancient peoples the Romans were the most prone to litigation. Any man could make himself a prosecutor in a Roman court. Each party to a litigation deposited with the magistrate a sum of money (called *sacramentum*), which was forfeited by the losing party to the state religion. The defendant also had to give bail (*vadimonium*) as security for his subsequent appearances. The magistrate then turned over the dispute to a person qualified to act as a judge. If the defendant lost, his property — sometimes his person — could be seized by the plaintiff until the judgment was satisfied. Problems with regard to ownership, obligation, exchange, contract, and debt took up by far the largest part of Roman law. Material possession was the very life of the Roman empire and its provinces. This would be especially true in cosmopolitan and commercial Corinth.⁹

⁸ Barclay, 55.

⁹ See Paul T. Butler, Studies in First Corinthians, (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1985), 98-99.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul said:

*If any of you has a dispute with another, **dare** he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another — and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers (1 Corinthians 6:1–8).*

The word “*dare*” is *tolma* in the Greek. It suggests an audacious or presumptuous spirit. They had presumed that if one were to take the matter before the saints, there could be no proper judgment. Paul says that it is God’s people who will judge the world. Hebrews 11:7 says, “*By faith Noah . . . condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*” The life of a Christian has this effect on unbelievers. Noah judged the world and declared it to be condemned by his obedience to the will of God. Perhaps on Judgment Day Christians will shout “Amen!” and give a hearty consent to the Lord’s judgement. They will be associated with Jesus on that day and will pass judgment on even the wicked angels.

Paul wonders how the Corinthians could go before men who were “*of little account in the church*” when they had

business disputes with their Christian brethren. If the unbeliever was wise enough to handle judgments in the court system, then why were they not following Christ? These were men who were devoid of spirituality and any spiritual understanding. Paul says that by using the court system of the world Christians were implying that God could not supply the necessary wisdom and skill to His people to deal with their own business matters. Paul's extreme suggestion was made to move the church to shame so that they would look inside themselves.

Saints are to obey all the laws and ordinances of the government (cf. 1 Peter 2:13). Obeying the laws of the land does not cause disobedience to God if the Christian will obey God rather than man (cf. Acts 5:29) when there is any conflict between the two. All transactions that require legal action and sanction by the civil government should be respected. Disciples are not forbidden to defend themselves against unbelievers if necessary. Paul defended himself when he needed to (cf. Acts 16:37–40; 25:10–12). Paul's point is that God's children should not have to go to court against a brother to obtain justice. If civil law requires going to court, it needs to be carried out legally, but brethren should first act as Christians with fairness, honesty, and justice in their disputes. A brother might have to seek legal counsel to find out what the law teaches and its implications, but it is best to avoid bringing matters before the unbelievers.

Such Matters Are to be Settled by Christian Arbitration

Paul said that it was wrong for brothers to bring these matters before an unbeliever. It is possible that he was using irony when he asks if it could be that there is not a single wise man among them able to give a decision in such a case. They thought themselves to be very wise. Paul says:

*The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely **defeated** already.*

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers (1 Corinthians 6:7–8).

The word “*defeated*” refers to the affect the lawsuits were having on their Christian fellowship. They were defeating the very purpose of the church, and everyone lost. The body of Christ was supposed to offer safety and refuge. The church cannot offer refuge if the body cannot solve their own problems in love and peace because of the destruction caused by lawsuits.

Paul’s next point is that a disciple should allow himself to be wronged or defrauded or even suffer injury rather than be contentious in a pagan court. When looking at such practice, the world would immediately think that greed was in the heart of one or both parties. This would discredit the name of the Lord. It is not easy to suffer injury or be wronged, but it is much better to suffer rather than let the church be defeated in its effort to glorify God and reach the lost for Jesus.

It is Contrary to the Nature of Christianity

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

Paul then listed several of the sins that the brethren in Corinth had previously practiced. Paul urges them not to be deceived. They had been washed, sanctified, and justified from

these sins. They had been led to think that legal actions could be separated from their spiritual lives. They had once been unrighteous, but their current conduct of participating in fraud in the court system made them as much a sinner as any of the sins they used to participate in. They were going back to the lifestyle and sins that characterized their lives before they came to Christ. That kind of practice would cause them to be classified with all kinds of sinners. Their greedy conduct rejected the very essence of the kingdom of Christ and God's rule and reign in their hearts and lives. They were rejecting the principle of self-denial. They were not making an honest effort to put the old man to death and put on the new man (cf. Colossians 3:5–17; Ephesians 4:17–5:21).

Notice the sins that Paul provides in this list. They were once sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers. Every accountable person is amenable to God's universal moral law given from the very beginning. When one committed a sin under "the law of sin and death" (cf. Romans 8:1–17), he was lost. They were once people who had sexual intercourse with another's spouse. They were once "*effeminate*," which literally means soft to the touch and metaphorically (a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as if it were another, Ed.) — in the New Testament — it means a male who submits his body to unnatural lewdness. The King James Version has "*effeminate*" in place of "*male prostitute*."

The next word in Paul's list is "*homosexual offenders*," which is one kind of fornication. William Barclay mentions that historically this shameful sin invaded Greece and Rome like a cancer. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman emperors practiced homosexuality. This sin was so widespread that there can be little doubt it was one of the main causes of Rome's

degeneracy and the final collapse of its civilization.¹⁰ Homosexual behavior is not a sickness. It is a sin and needs to be repented of and shunned just like any other sin. Even this most perverse sin may be forgiven like all other sins.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the conversion process that took place when they responded to the gospel. They “*were washed, . . . sanctified, . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*” (1 Corinthians 6:11). This harmonizes perfectly with the book of Acts. The Corinthians were among the many conversions recorded in this book, “. . . and many of the Corinthians who heard him (Paul) believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). The word “washed” is plural aorist middle tense, *apolouo*, which can be literally translated, “You were washed clean.” It is a combination of two Greek words *apo*/from and *luo*/washed. The verb which is translated “washed” is used metaphorically for baptism.

Ananias told Paul, “*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name*” (Acts 22:16). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes the church as having been sanctified, as **washed** “. . . with water through the word, . . .” (Ephesians 5:26). Paul talked to Titus about the fact that God “. . . saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the **washing** of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior . . .” (Titus 3:5–6). At the same time that the Christian is washed, he is also renewed by the Holy Spirit. The writer of the Hebrew letter said:

*Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies **washed** with pure water (Hebrews 10:22).*

¹⁰ Barclay, 60.

The New Testament teaches salvation by grace through faith at the point of baptism. The Christian does not put his trust in baptism: he puts his faith in the cross of Jesus. The action of baptism, being buried with Christ, is an expression of his faith. The Christian unites with Christ by being buried and raised with Christ (cf. Romans 6:3–4). This act of trust in Christ and His death is the moment Christians experience the new birth (cf. John 3:3–5). This is the point at which God has chosen to declare a believer both sanctified and justified. It is at this point that the believer calls upon the person of Christ to save him (cf. Acts 22:16). Peter says that this act of faith is what saves the Christian (1 Peter 3:21).

The word “*sanctified*” is a Greek word in the aorist passive tense which means to make or set something apart unto God so that it becomes dedicated to God. “*Justified*” means to declare something totally innocent. God is able to declare sinners innocent of any guilt because Jesus died for their sins on the cross and became sin itself (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). God establishes this truth through Jesus’ resurrection. The Christian shows his trust in Jesus’ death at his baptism through a penitent faith that leads him to baptism (cf. Romans 6:3–4). The brethren in Corinth, as well as anyone today who has this kind of faith, were justified in God’s eyes, acquitted and made righteous whenever that faith led them to go to Christ and into the benefits of His death. The washing of sanctification and justification happens simultaneously when the person obeys the gospel of Christ.

Notice that this is all done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which means that it happens by the authority of Christ and the Holy Spirit. This conforms to what Paul tells Titus about the Spirit renewing the Christian at the point of washing (cf. Titus 3:5). There are absolutely no references in the Scripture that the Holy Spirit leads, convicts, converts, or sanctifies in any extra-biblical matter in the matter of salvation. Look carefully at the first century cases of conversion in the book of Acts. Read Acts 2:1–47. The Spirit justified 3,000

precious souls on the day of Pentecost, but the Spirit did it through the proclaiming of the gospel of Christ by the Apostles' message. A look at the rest of the examples of conversion in the book of Acts shows the same thing to be true. The spoken teaching of Jesus and the Apostles are the final and complete revelation of the Holy Spirit's will.

The written Apostolic letters in the New Testament have the same authority and power as the oral teaching that was done in the first century. Man must never take one word from these writings or add anything to them. The three verbs: **washed**, **sanctified**, and **justified**, all in the aorist tense, express definite and instantaneous action. It all happens because of the Holy Spirit of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Law of Expediency

Paul tells the Corinthians that everything is lawful or permissible, but it is important to understand the context in which he offers this statement. He says,

“Everything is permissible for me” — but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me” — but I will not be mastered by anything. “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food” — but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also (1 Corinthians 6:12–14).

Paul introduces the topic of food (meat) offered to an idol because he was dealing with the matter of idolatry and the pollution of idolatry. (Paul covers this topic more deeply in 1 Corinthians 8.) He tells the Corinthians that it was right and permissible for a disciple to take some meat that had been previously offered to an idol. It was permissible to buy and eat this meat because it was not contaminated. Once the meat was

separated from the practice of idolatry, it was sold in the shambles or the provision market — today it is called a grocery store. It was permissible to buy this meat and eat it because meat offered to an idol was morally neutral. Idolatry and fornication are never lawful! The eating of meat was acceptable, but it was not always beneficial or helpful. Just because things are lawful does not mean that they are expedient, suitable, and edifying. It is never right to act unlawfully, but sometimes it is wrong to act lawfully. Paul says that he would not be mastered by meat, but that he would control his eating of meat.

The Purpose for the Body

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:15–20).

The Body is Temporary

Paul discusses the meat-stomach arrangement as a good one until the end of time because this physical body that man must feed is temporary. Man himself is not temporary because his body will be transformed into a glorious body for eternity. Many thought that it was natural to commit sexual immorality since the sexual desire is a God-given desire just as is the desire

to eat meat to satisfy the body with food. God will destroy the food-stomach arrangement in time. Paul said that man cannot steal food or become gluttonous to satisfy his desire for food and still glorify God. God has arranged the husband-wife relationship to satisfy the sexual desires (cf. 1 Corinthians 7). Food was made for the stomach and the stomach was made for food, but God did not make the body for fornication. God made the body for Himself.

The Divine Purpose of the Body

Paul tells the Corinthians that the believer is yoked with Jesus as Lord in a matter of destiny and in the resurrection. When the Christian is baptized, he becomes yoked with Christ, and at that point he also becomes a member of Christ's body which is the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27–31). Since each Christian is a member of Christ, then his body represents the limbs and organs of Christ. Every Christian must use his body in accordance with that union with Christ. The physical body is made for the Lord, and it is a part of the Lord's body.

Paul asks:

. . . Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:15–17).

Literally, Paul was saying, “Let such a thought not be born!” It is important to understand that Paul was not discussing fornication as it is normally spoken of. He was talking about fornication in its relationship to idolatry — the pollution of idolatry which includes fornication.

Many of the concepts that Paul presented to the Christians in Corinth are difficult to understand today. It is hard to realize that idolatry was so much a part of their way of life in these

Greek cities. Paul was part of the council that went to Jerusalem to consider the problems occurring in the churches. After their discussions, Paul said:

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath (Acts 15:19–21).

The council discussed the all-sufficiency of the cross, the Apostles, elders, brethren from Antioch, and sent a letter to the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Many of the problems that occurred in the first century still occur today. That is why these letters written by Paul and other inspired men are so important to the church today.

Dealing with Sexual Desire

1 Corinthians 6:16–7:9

Introduction

It is difficult to understand how different the Gentile culture in the first century was in contrast to the Jewish culture and also to today's culture. Some of the pagan temples provided elaborate dinner facilities and club-like atmospheres for their patrons. One popular activity involved men engaging in sexual relations with temple harlots as part of their devotion and worship to the gods. The Corinthians worshiped the goddess of love, so the temple harlot's purpose was to promote the worship of demons through the sexual union. Whenever a man participated in shameful prostitution with a temple harlot, she viewed it as fellowship with her god. The harlots were called priestesses and claimed to be worshiping when they engaged in sex. Anyone who surrendered his body to a temple priestess was used as a tool in her act of worship.

The Church and Personal Purity

Paul's Concern About Idolatrous Fornication in Corinth

Paul urged the Corinthians not to participate in idolatry because whoever participated in idolatry was having fellowship with demons (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:18–22). Through sexual union with a man, the temple harlots believed they could unite with a demon. Paul says: *“Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her body? For it is said,*

'The two will become one flesh.'” (1 Corinthians 6:16). Marriage as it is discussed in the Bible involves a number of important things. **First**, marriage has a purpose. The LORD said, *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”* (Genesis 2:24). Man is to leave his parents and become united in one flesh to his wife. **Second**, marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman, witnessed and joined together as husband and wife by God. **Third**, the man and woman must fulfill the civil law requirements. This usually involves a marriage license. Depending on the culture and the circumstances it is important to do whatever the law requires to become legally married.

Paul is not saying that a person who is joined to a harlot is married to her. He is saying that the sexual union between a man and woman causes them to mutually turn over the power of their bodies to one another. The sexual act was designed by the Lord as a deep expression of oneness between a husband and wife. The man and woman become united by the Lord when they make a covenant with each other. Mary was pledged to marry Joseph and God joined them together in a covenant. The Scripture says, *“. . . but before they came together (referring to the sexual union), she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 1:18–25).

God intended the sexual union to be **a part** of marriage. The Lord instructed Adam and Eve to *“become one flesh.”* He intended for the act of intercourse to be a privilege of the marriage union. God said:

*“Let us make man in our image. . . .” So God created man in his own image, . . . male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; . . .” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and **they will become one flesh.** . . . When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He*

created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them “man”
(Genesis 1:26–28; 2:24; 5:1–2).

Notice that God made them male and female at the time they were created. He blessed them and called them “man.” In marriage the two “*cleave*” (Genesis 2:24, KJV) to one another and unite into a plural unity that becomes “*one flesh*.” It is only in the physical act of intercourse that a couple truly becomes one flesh. This union, the physical act of sex, portrays the unity of **two people becoming one**. When a man joins himself to a harlot, the sex act itself is shamefully prostituted (sold for evil purposes, Ed) since intercourse so vividly expresses the union God meant to be enjoyed by a husband and wife only. This is what Paul is talking about when he tells the Corinthians they have engaged in sexual immorality with a temple prostitute and become “*one with her in body*.” God planned for this kind of union to be practiced only by the husband and wife.

Paul’s Warning — “Flee Fornication”

Paul urges the Corinthians, “*Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body*” (1 Corinthians 6:18). The sexual union of husband and wife remains the visible and physical act which the Lord selected to express the action of two becoming one. This union involves the psychological element of love between a husband and a wife and the blending of their two personalities together. Paul says that most of the sins that a man commits are outside his body, but when a man sins sexually with a woman, he sins against his own body.

The sexual union is specifically chosen by God to express, as nothing else can, the union of two separate beings becoming one. It is not like eating together or enjoying a trip together, even though both of those are a part of being married. If a man joins himself to a harlot, he is participating in the most intimate act which is meant only for the relationship of marriage. Such

an act joins the two participants in an unspiritual and unholy relationship. The man who unites himself with the Lord becomes one with the Lord in Spirit. Paul urges the brethren in Corinth to flee fornication. Paul uses the present tense imperative which denotes the urgency as well as the habit of fleeing. He is saying to make it a habit to flee sexual immorality.

The Strong Motivation

Our Body Is the Temple of the Holy Spirit

Paul concludes with:

*Do you not know that your body is a **temple** of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).*

These two verses present a strong argument for the basis of righteous conduct by God's children.

Old Testament Use of the Temple

The word "**temple**" is used in the Old Testament to refer to the Holy of Holies, "... make a **sanctuary** for me, and I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). Paul uses the same word in 1 Corinthians 3:16 when he says, "Don't you know that you yourselves (Christians) are God's **temple (sanctuary)** and that God's Spirit lives in you?" At one time God's spirit dwelt in the Holy of Holies, but Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that God's spirit dwells within them. Every Christian receives God's Spirit as a gift from God at the time of his immersion into the Lord for the remission of their sins (cf. Acts 2:38). The Spirit of God does not dwell in each Christian separate and apart from the Word of God, but in conjunction with the Word. The Scripture says, "They then that received **his word** were

baptized: . . . ”(Acts 2:41, ASV). It is after baptism that the Spirit indwells and influences each Christian. The Spirit dwells with the spirit of everyone who is baptized into Christ. The Spirit of God lives within those who belong to Christ (cf. Romans 8:9–11). Paul is not talking about the empowering of the Spirit at this point in his discussion. He is simply talking about what the Spirit becomes to those who belong to God. He told the Ephesians:

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession — to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13b–14).

The Christian’s body is a shrine in which the Spirit of God lives. Knowing that the Spirit of God lives within him should cause every Christian to want to be holy and to never involve his body in impurities. Paul ended this discussion by saying, “*Therefore honor [glorify] God with your body*” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Questions in Regard to Marriage

The next problem areas that Paul discusses with the Corinthians concern marriage. **First**, he talks about the “*good*” state of not marrying, “*It is good for a man not to marry*” (1 Corinthians 7:1b). **Second**, Paul says, “*But since there is so much immorality each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband*” (1 Corinthians 7:2). Because there is so much temptation, however, Paul says there is an alternative — “the better state” of being married. **Third**, Paul talks about his own example in these matters. **Fourth**, he addresses the permanency of marriage. **Fifth**, he discusses the problem of being married to an unbeliever. **Sixth**, Paul talks about the problems of being unmarried.

1 Corinthians 7 is not an easy chapter to explain. Some of the passages are difficult to understand. This chapter is a good example of what Peter was talking about when he said:

He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do other the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).

This verse issues an excellent warning: people who are ignorant and unstable tend to twist the Scriptures and use them out of context. It is important to be cautious and careful when dealing with a scripture that is difficult to understand. Bible study needs to include time spent in defining the words and looking carefully at the context where they are used to be able to understand it all correctly. Some truths are easily understood, such as the deity of Christ and the New Testament conversions recorded in the book of Acts. Some scriptures are the “milk” of the Word of God, and some are a little harder to understand and fall into the category of “solid food” (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12–14), which is for the more mature to digest.

It would benefit those who study this chapter to come with great deference and respect to God’s Word. Every effort has been taken by the author to explain this chapter in the context in which it was written by Paul. This is a topic that needs to be approached with honesty and an open heart so that each student might be able to understand all that God wants His children to know.¹¹

¹¹As the instructor of this course in 1 Corinthians Abe Lincoln always said: “Sometimes teachers may leave the impression that all truth can be equally understood, but some passages take a little longer than others. I want you to know that my study of this chapter is open-ended. I have not arrived to a full understanding. I am still a student of God’s word and still willing to be taught. I have a present conviction, but I need

Marriage and Celibacy

Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that (1 Corinthians 7:1–7).

Apparently, the church in Corinth had written to Paul with questions concerning sexuality in marriage. Before he addressed their questions, he dealt with some things of primary concern in regard to the spiritual welfare of the church. He stresses the need to remain unmarried, then added “**But since there is so much immorality, . . .**” (1 Corinthians 7:2), and then later he refers to the “*present crisis.*” (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:26). Paul does not give enough information for the readers today to know what the present “*crisis*” was. The word used for “**crisis**” is the same word that is used in Luke 21:23 when Jesus was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. It is also used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 3:7 to describe tribulation and persecution that is imposed upon someone either by external

to continue my study, so forbear with me.” Abe lived and taught this message until he died in 1997.

circumstances or inward pressure. It is important to note that Paul's instructions to the Corinthians were based upon the "*present crisis*" they were experiencing.

Paul speaks in favor of celibacy when he says, ". . . *It is good for a man not to marry.*" (1 Corinthians 7:1). He also says: "*I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that*" (1 Corinthians 7:7). Paul even speaks of his own celibacy as his gift from God and wishes that all men might be able to remain unmarried as he did. He strongly acknowledges that marriage is honorable and even commanded in certain circumstances. Jesus also spoke in favor of celibacy when He said that not every man could receive these teachings when He was talking about marriage and divorce (cf. Matthew 19:1–12).

Some commentaries mention the fact that the Gentiles and Essenes (an ancient Jewish sect that practiced self-denial, Ed.) advocated celibacy. Many of the other versions translate 1 Corinthians 7:1 as ". . . *It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*" That translation would imply that man should avoid marriage in view of the sexual union involved in the marriage relationship. To a Jew celibacy was the opposite of righteousness, and the idea of being unmarried was the exception rather than the rule to follow. A godly Jew was married and had a family. There were all kinds of extremes in the first century culture. Some believe that celibacy is wrong, but Paul defends it and says that it is good, beautiful, and excellent in view of the distress. Later Paul mentions the fact that an unmarried man has less distractions and anxiety than a man who has a family (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:32–34). Other people and religions advocate the celibate state as being more spiritual than the married relationship because of this. Some even believe that a person should remain celibate even in marriage.

The Responsibilities of Marriage Partners

Paul speaks directly about the God-given sexual desire and

the fact that it is good so long as it is fulfilled within the bonds of an approved marriage. He begins, “*But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband*” (1 Corinthians 7:2). Paul clearly states that one purpose for marriage is to satisfy the sexual urge and to guard against the sin of fornication. He emphasizes this further when he says:

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Corinthians 7:8–9).

Paul talks about love within marriage in such a way to suggest that love is present from the beginning of marriage (cf. Ephesians 5:22–33; Colossians 3:18–25). Since many cultures have arranged marriages, a couple would marry, learn to love one another, and during the marriage make all the adjustments necessary to create this kind of love. Paul Butler¹², in his work, commented on the American view of “falling in love.” That expression is used frequently as if it is some sort of accident when a person “falls in love.” No one really “falls” into the true biblical kind of love. There is a deeper meaning to this word “love” than anything that happens accidentally. The biblical kind of love comes from a person’s will rather than his emotions. True love is caring and seeking the best for someone even when that other person is not loveable and when the person himself does not feel like showing care and concern. This kind of God-like love is the love that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13. Before marriage, love is something that is practiced and accomplished.

Paul reinforces his teaching that the pressure of sexual

¹² Butler, 120–121.

desire must be met by saying, “*The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband*” (1 Corinthians 7:3). The Greek word that Paul uses for “fulfill” is in the imperative verb form which means it is an obligation that must be repeated. Paul does not just say that it is simply permitted; he says that it is commanded in marriage. The sexual union is not restricted to procreative purposes. Sexual intercourse is a God-arranged right of each partner in a godly, joyful, and uninhibited marriage. The sexual union is an added language God has given a husband and wife to be able to express their love. The Bible is God’s manual for marriage. Paul says that neither the wife nor the husband has exclusive power over their own body (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:4). The wife’s body belongs to the husband and the husband’s body to the wife, and each must be considerate of the other. They belong to each other.

In marriage, each partner surrenders and submits to the other partner. Sexual love is a beautiful tool to build with and not a weapon to fight with. Paul said, “*For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer*” (1 Timothy 4:4–5). To refuse one another this sexual love is to commit robbery and invite Satan to tempt one or both partners to seek fulfillment elsewhere. Marriage counselors today report that the happiest and most successful marriages are those characterized by complete liberty, few inhibitions, and the absence of any guilt complex about sexuality within the will of God.

Paul gives one exception to withholding sexual responsibilities of husband and wife. He says:

Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Obviously, Paul is talking about marriage partners who are believers since the abstinence is for the purpose of prayer. The idea of self-control is not only stressed in this chapter but also in 1 Corinthians 9 as well. Prayer, church work, and good deeds cannot be used as an excuse for neglecting one's marriage.

In 1 Corinthians 7:6, Paul says, "*I say this as a concession, not as a command.*" Paul is talking about his instructions concerning remaining unmarried, marrying, and the temporary abstinence for a husband and wife. Jesus set forth the permanency and elevated purpose of marriage when the Pharisees came to him to test him with the question, "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?*" (Matthew 19:3). After Jesus answered the question:

The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given" (Matthew 19:10–11).

Jesus recognized the fact that most men would marry.

Paul's Personal Example

Paul says that being able to remain unmarried is a gift. The word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 7:7 is ***charisma***. He uses the same word again in 1 Corinthians 12 when he talks about miraculous gifts from the Holy Spirit. God gives everyone gifts, but the miraculous gifts were given by the Holy Spirit according to God's will (cf. Hebrews 2:4; 1 Corinthians 12:11). The "gift" Paul is talking about in this passage of scripture is a gift that comes from a person's own abilities or desires. Celibacy is good only if a person is able to exercise sexual self-control. Literally, "self-control" means containing the power within.

Paul says:

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:8–9).

There is no Greek word for “*passion*,” so the original text said, “*It is better to marry than to burn.*” It is the context that allows the translators to add the words “*with passion*” to show that this verse is talking about sexual passion. Paul is clearly conveying that marriage is the only human relationship in which sexual intercourse is approved by God. Paul urges a person to marry when it first becomes apparent that he is not able to control the sexual desire that he is given by God. Paul is not saying that a person should wait until after he has sexual encounters to realize that he has no self-control. Paul uses the Greek imperative and comparative mood when he says “*they should marry*” indicating that this is a command from God.

God's Plan for Marriage

1 Corinthians 7:10–35

Review and Introduction

Marriage predates all other institutions since it was sanctioned by Jehovah at the beginning of time. The origin of marriage and God's intent and purpose for it are recorded in Genesis. God's will that marriage should be permanent was conveyed from the very beginning: "*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24). There were times in the Old Testament when God accepted something less than ideal, but those were the exception with divorce as the last option. God's requirements for marriage involve a purpose (cf. Genesis 2:24), a covenant (cf. Malachi 2:14), and obeying the laws of the land (1 Peter 2:13). These three elements characterize marriage, but God alone joins the man and woman together.

Instructions Concerning Marriage and Divorce

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord); A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not

divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:10–16)

God's Instruction for Marriage Between Believers

Many scholars of this section of scripture believe that Paul is using Jesus' universal law of marriage to say, "*Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate*" (Matthew 19:6). Paul is affirming what Jesus had already said. Jesus gave only one exception to the permanency of marriage when He said, "*I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery*" (Matthew 19:9). It is better for a marriage to include confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Paul tells the Corinthians that a wife must not separate from her husband, and a husband must not divorce his wife. This command is from the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:10–11).

God's Instruction for a Believer Married to an Unbeliever

Some biblical scholars believe that Paul is making applications of the universal law of marriage to different situations because the Corinthians had asked questions to which the Lord did not give specific instructions. Paul says, "*To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord) . . .*" (1 Corinthians 7:12). Each situation dealt with a "believer" being married to an "unbeliever."

The **first** situation involved an “unbeliever” who was content to remain married to the “believer.” In this case, the “unbeliever” was sanctified by living with the “believer,” and they should remain married. The **second** situation involved an “unbeliever” who was not content to remain in the marriage and was probably in the process of leaving. Paul says that the “believer” must allow the “unbeliever” to depart. The Greek word Paul uses for “*leaves*” is quantitative present, a species of the progressive present tense, which means that the action is in progress. When Paul says, “. . . *A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.*” (1 Corinthians 7:15), he uses the imperative mood, which is authorative, meaning by God’s permission the “believer” is no longer “*bound*” to the marriage covenant. Paul does not say why the “unbeliever” was choosing to leave, but he does say the “believer” is no longer bound to the marriage vows. It is possible that the “unbeliever” was threatening to leave the marriage if the “believer” did not forsake Christ.

Verbs Used in Connection With Marriage

There are eight different verbs used in the New Testament primarily to refer to the **marriage union**. Because there are so many different views concerning these passages, it is a good idea to take notice of the different verbs that are used:

The Greek word ***gameo*** means to unite in the marriage bond (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:9, 36, 39; Matthew 5:32; 19:9–10). This word is used 29 times in the New Testament, and every time it means a union formed in marriage.

The Greek word ***echo*** means to have or to possess. It denotes a bond of ownership in marriage (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:2, 12, 13, 29; Matthew 14:4; 22:28). This word for “have” or “has” is used over 700 times in the New Testament, but it is only used to refer to the marriage union 18 of those times. The best way to

determine the meaning for this word is to look at the context.

The Greek word *oikeo* means to be willing to dwell in the house. It is used twice in the New Testament to refer to the marriage union (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:12, 13).

The Greek word *deo* means to bind or tie together. Many times it is translated as “*bound*.” It is sometimes used when describing a prison bond. Paul uses this verb three times to refer to a marriage bond (1 Corinthians 7:27, 39; Romans 7:2). This verb is used 44 times in the New Testament, but Paul is the only writer who uses it to refer to the marriage bond.

The Greek word *haptomai* means to touch or to hold. Paul uses this verb when he says, “*... It is good for a man not to marry,*” but that is the only time this word is used to refer to marriage. The King James Version translates this as “*... not to touch a woman*” (1 Corinthians 7:1).

The Greek word *douloo* means to enslave or bind. Paul uses this word in 1 Corinthians 7:15 when he says, “*A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances.*” This verb is found eight times in the New Testament, but if this verb applies to a marriage bond in this verse, then that is the only time it is used in this manner.

The Greek word *kollao* means to become united. It is a very strong word that could be translated as “glued together.” This is the root word Jesus used when He said a man must leave his father and mother and “*... be united [“cleave” in the King James Version] to his wife*” (cf. Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7). Paul also uses this word in Ephesians 5:31. This word is used 14 times in the New Testament, but only three of those times referring to marriage.

The Greek word *suzeugnumi* means to join or

yoke together. It is only used twice in the New Testament, and both times it applies to the marriage union (cf. Matthew 19:6; Mark 10:9).

Consider These Contrasts

*To the married I give this command (**not I, but the Lord**): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest, I say this (**I, not the Lord**) . . . (1 Corinthians 7:10–12).*

Many scholars of the Scriptures believe that in this section of scripture Paul emphasizes that this command has already been made by the Lord during His personal ministry. Beginning in 1 Corinthians 7:12 Paul denies that the source of his instruction came from the Lord Himself. Remember the Holy Spirit was the source of Paul’s inspiration as promised by Jesus (cf. John 16:13–15). Paul, as an apostle, was led into all truth. On this occasion, the Holy Spirit was guiding Paul with additional truth as was necessary to answer the questions the Corinthians had asked. Paul confirmed that he was one who was trustworthy (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:25) and being led by the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:40).

There are three contrasts worth looking at in 1 Corinthians 7:10–15. **First**, Paul is addressing two different groups of people. He is talking about a marriage in which both partners were “believers” in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11. In 1 Corinthians 7:12–15 Paul is speaking about a marriage in which one partner is a “believer” and the other is an “unbeliever.” **Second**, the source of the instruction was different. The first source was Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:10–11), and the second source is Paul, being led by inspiration (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1–15).

Third, the content of the instructions is different. In the first command, Paul says Jesus taught that the partners should

not leave or separate. The reason for separation obviously was not sexual immorality in this circumstance or Paul would have instructed as Jesus did when He said divorce is permissible only if marital unfaithfulness is involved (cf. Matthew 19:9). Paul, through the Holy Spirit, forbade the “believer” to separate, but says that it is permissible for the “unbeliever” to leave. He urges the “believer” to allow the “unbeliever” to leave because “. . . God has called us to peace” (1 Corinthians 7:15). This instruction is also different in that Jesus said that if the “believing” wife is the one to leave, she is not allowed to remarry except in reconciliation to her husband. A “believing” husband is not allowed to “divorce” his wife (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:11). If the “unbelieving” partner chooses to leave the “believing” partner, the “. . . believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; . . . ” (1 Corinthians 7:15).

Lexical Argument on Divorce

Another interesting point of study is found in the two different Greek words that Paul uses when he is talking about a separation or divorce (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11, 12, 13, 15). The two words Paul uses are “*chorizo*” and “*aphiemi*.” A challenging study would be to use a lexicon to see how these words were used in the first century.

Most scholars agree that the word “*chorizo*” was used as a technical or legal term for divorce. Some word studies say that this was the word that became the technical word for divorce in the original koine Greek. This was the word that Jesus used in Matthew 19:6 when He said, “. . . what God has joined together, let man **not separate**.” This is the same word that Paul uses when he says, “A wife **must not separate** from her husband. But if she **does** [separate] . . . ” (1 Corinthians 7:10–11). Paul uses the same word when he says, “But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so” (1 Corinthians 7:15).

The reason some words are translated one way and the same word a different way is a mystery. Why did the translators of the King James Version and the American Standard Version

use the words “*put away*” instead of “*divorce*” when they translated Matthew 19:9? Of the 48 scholars who worked with the King James Version only seven actually worked on the translation of 1 Corinthians. How many of the 101 scholars who worked on translating the American Standard Version actually translated 1 Corinthians is not known. Some scholars conclude that Paul is referring to what Jesus taught during His ministry which **tolerated** divorce, but instructed the Christian wife to remain unmarried from the legal standpoint or else be reconciled to the husband in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11. In the legal sense, she is an unmarried woman, but since the Lord **does not permit** divorce, she is still married to her husband in God’s eyes.

Additional Thoughts on Marriage and Divorce From This Passage

Paul says that the “unbelieving” spouse is “*sanctified*” by the “believing” spouse if they remain in the marriage relationship (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:14). Paul is not saying that the “unbeliever” is **saved** by being married to a “believer.” The “unbeliever” is “*sanctified*” because his relationship with a “believer” sets him apart from the influence of the world through the Christian influence of his partner. If God does not approve of the marriage, the children would be unclean because they would have been born “out of wedlock.” Paul says, “. . . *as it is, they are holy*” (1 Corinthians 7:14).

The word “*bound*” in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is perfect tense which indicates a completed action with a resulted state of being. This word expresses an existing state that has happened because of a completed action. This same tense is used in 1 Corinthians 7:27 when Paul asks, “*Are you married?*” Then in 1 Corinthians 7:39 he also uses the perfect tense when he says, “*A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives.*” That means that the state of being “bound” to a marriage partner began in the past and continued until the point of time when the statement is made. The perfect tense does not give an indication

of when the “binding” is completed. The context of these verses conveys the fact that the “binding” occurred at the point of marriage.

In 1 Corinthians 7:15 Paul says: *“But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.”* The word “*bound*,” as it is used in this verse, is a very strong word that means to be subjected to the will of another. In this case Paul says that if the “unbelieving” partner has decided to leave, then the “believing” partner is **“not bound.”** Stephen used this same word when he spoke to the Sanhedrin about the descendants of Abraham, *“Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years”* (Acts 7:6). Abraham’s descendants served as **slaves** to the Egyptians for 400 years. The same word is also used figuratively by Paul to refer to being enslaved to God (cf. Romans 6:22) and being enslaved to serve all men as a Christian (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19). It is possible that Paul uses this word to say “When the ‘unbelieving’ partner leaves, the ‘believing’ partner is no longer **enslaved**.” In other words, once the “unbelieving” partner leaves, he no longer has any power over the “believing” partner’s body. If the “unbeliever” does have power after leaving that would be slavery indeed. Paul says this is not how it should be.

Paul urges the “believer” to attempt to keep the marriage intact even if the “unbeliever” is trying to end it. There might be hurt feelings and tremendous pressure, but there is always the chance that the “unbeliever” would be saved through the influence of the “believer.” The guiding principle needs to be a peaceful existence. Paul says, *“God has called us to live in peace”* (1 Corinthians 7:15).

Principles Governing Paul’s Instructions

*Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life
that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has*

called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you — although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to (1 Corinthians 7:17–24).

Hold Your Position

The most important word in this passage is obviously “**called.**” It is used in almost every verse. When the New Testament uses the word “call” it refers to the “call of God” through the gospel. It referred to that which brings the Christian into a relationship with Jesus. Paul uses this same word when he wrote to the Ephesians, “. . . *I urge to live a life worthy of the calling you have received*” (Ephesians 4:1). The “call” in 1 Corinthians 7 has nothing to do with a person’s job or social standing. God’s permissive will allows a person to be **called** into Christ no matter where he is in his life. He may be married, divorced, widowed, Gentile, Jew, master, or slave. “The call” actually has nothing to do with heritage, social standing, or married status. The emphasis in “the call” has to do with obeying God’s command. Paul says, “. . . *Keeping God's commands is what counts*” (1 Corinthians 7:19). It is not important that a person remain at the same job or retain the same social position he once held after he obeys the gospel of

Christ. What is important is that he does obey, and that as a disciple, he should walk worthy of his calling in Christ. It is not the external that matters, it is the internal.

Paul says that being bond or free is not what is important when you are in Christ, because He paid the price for every Christian's freedom. Bond and free become free in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever a person becomes a follower of Christ, regardless of the circumstances, he does not need to take any special means to change his circumstances. Each individual Christian is accepted just as he is when he obeys the Lord's commands. Many times in the first century, the people who responded to "the calling of God" were slaves. Their situation as a slave did not change because they became followers of Christ. Freedom in Christ does not affect any position the government might have placed the Christian.

Problems Encountered by Those Who Are Married or Unmarried

Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away (1 Corinthians 7:25–31).

Paul confirms his own inspiration by saying, “*... I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy*” (1 Corinthians 7:25). Paul had already said that he wishes all men could remain unmarried. Here he explains there are reasons besides his own example to remain unmarried. The person who is married faces more stress and pressure. Paul says, “If you are married. Do not seek a divorce. If you are unmarried, do not look for a wife.” Paul uses the Greek word *luo* in 1 Corinthians 7:27. The New International Version translates this word as “*unmarried*.” The King James Version translates the same word as “*loosed*.” Paul uses the perfect tense again to say, “Were you married to a wife in the past, and do you remain bound as a result of that marriage?” This word is used 43 times in the New Testament, and every time, unless this one passage is an exception, it refers to something that was once bound or tied up and has been released. Paul is saying that if you are married, do not try to change that situation. If you are divorced, do not look for someone to marry. He says that those who do marry have not sinned, but they must choose to face the problems that marriage will hold. Paul wanted to spare his fellow Christians that stress.

No matter what situation the Christian is in it is important to have the proper attitude and action even though there may be a “*present crisis*” (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:26). The proper attitude and action will happen only if the Christian has a proper sense of values. The priorities of this life are the same whether the Christian is married or not. God must be the One at the top of the list of things that matter in a Christian’s life.

A Christian must also realize the place and nature of material things in his life. Some grieve or even sin, because of the absence or the loss of **things** in their lives. Some of the disciples joyfully accepted the seizure of their possessions, knowing that they possessed something better and more lasting (cf. Hebrews 10:31–34). Earthly things that are bought do not belong to the Christian. He is but a steward of all that God has given him. Paul says: “*... From now on ... those who use the*

things of the world, [she should live] as if [they are] not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:29–31). The world is passing away, and the Christian should not be engrossed in the things of this world. The word “use” normally means to use something very cautiously, but Paul uses it here to mean overuse or using to the very utmost.

Paul says this world is doomed for destruction. Christians should not be attached to the material things of this world. Peter reminded all Christians that they were sojourners (cf. 1 Peter 2:11). A Christian is just a pilgrim (one who is on a journey, Ed.) on his way to heaven. Paul told the Philippians that a Christian is not a citizen of this world, but a citizen of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Philippians 3:20). A Christian must live in the world around him, but he needs to limit his contact and attachment to this world. Peter told the Christians in the first century that there would be suffering in the Christian life (cf. 1 Peter 4:12–16). It is important to remember that time in this present life is short.

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs — how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world — how he can please his wife — and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world — how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:32–35).

An unmarried person does not have to worry about family matters. He does not have to provide for his own (cf. 1 Timothy

5:6). A married man is required to provide support, protection, and security for his wife and support and education for his children. A married man must divide his interests between his family and the Lord. An unmarried man can concentrate completely on being able to please the Lord. Paul says the same thing is true for the woman who is married or unmarried. Notice that Paul distinguishes between the “*unmarried woman*” and a “*virgin*” (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:34). He most likely includes the widows and those who had been “scripturally divorced” in the words “*unmarried woman*.”

Paul is not saying that fulfilling the responsibilities of being married is wrong. Marriage just makes living a Christian life more difficult. It is wrong for a husband or wife to neglect their marital obligations. Paul says that he is only saying these things “...*for your own good*” (1 Corinthians 7:35). He is not trying to restrict men and women unnecessarily. The Greek word that is translated “*to restrict*” in the New International Version is the word that applied to a noose or a halter that is thrown on an animal to catch it and tie it up. A Christian does not have to follow Paul’s inspired judgment. Paul says that it is better to remain unmarried and not to become distracted from the Lord’s work, **but** it is not a sin to marry and have a family. Paul’s inspired judgment is something that needs to be considered, but in this context, doing what Paul made a decision **not to do** is not sin.

It is so important to understand and apply these teachings in the church today. Those things that are a matter of judgment need to be fully considered and followed. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that by remaining unmarried, a person could serve the Lord in a far greater capacity and without the extra anxiety that a married person must face. The unmarried person will have freedom from distress and emotional decisions, relief from anxiety, and the opportunity to serve the Lord more intently and fully.

Conscience and the Christian

1 Corinthians 7:36–8:13

Introduction

This chapter will continue to look at Paul's instructions concerning marriage. He presents these instructions to the Corinthians in keeping with the customs of the first century. These customs probably forbade a young woman to make any decisions concerning marriage because the father made all the arrangements and choices for his daughters. Arranged marriages did not originate with Paul. These passages concerning marriage are some of the most difficult passages written by Paul especially in view of the changes in culture that have occurred over the years.

There is a difference of opinion among biblical scholars concerning the relationship Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 7:36–38. Is he talking about the father-daughter relationship or an engaged couple relationship? The New International Version is translated differently than the King James Version, American Standard Version, and the New American Standard translations. Obviously there was some evidence for translating these verses to apply to the engaged couple, “*... but he who marries ... does right . . .*” (1 Corinthians 7:38, NIV), but all of the older translations translate these verses to apply to the father-daughter relationship.

Marriage Is Not a Sin

If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in

years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin-this man also does the right thing. So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better (1 Corinthians 7:36–38, NIV).

But if any man thinketh that he behaveth himself unseemingly toward his virgin (daughter), if she be past the flower of her age, and if need so requireth, let him do what he will; he sinneth not; let them marry. But he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power as touching in his own will, and hath determined this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin (daughter), shall do well. So then both he that giveth his own virgin (daughter) in marriage doeth well; and he that giveth her not in marriage shall do better (1 Corinthians 7:36–38, ASV).

The Greek word for “giveth” is *gamizo*. It denotes the action of a father giving his daughter in marriage. If the father has decided against marriage for his virgin daughter and feels that he is behaving properly toward her, then the father is within his authority to keep his daughter unmarried. Paul does not explain the phrase “past the flower of her age,” but “getting along in years” would surely apply to being old enough to marry. The phrase “*If the need so requireth*” refers to the fact that passions and instincts can become so strong that marriage would be required to avoid sinning. In the Greek translation of this phrase, the pronoun is understood from the context. This phrase is third person singular present tense and could apply to his and/or her desires.

Paul's Teachings Concerning Widows

The Privilege of Remarriage

Paul emphasizes again the rule concerning marriage of one man and one woman for life when he says, “*A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives*” (1 Corinthians 7:39a). The Greek word for “*bound*” is in the perfect tense which means that once the person is “*bound*” it is a continuing action. The only thing that could sever this binding relationship is death or a permitted divorce.

Defining the Phrase “*Only in the Lord*”

Paul says, “*... But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 7:39). The American Standard Version translates this verse to say, “*... she is free to marry to whom she will; only in the Lord.*” The Greek word for “*only*” is *monon* which is an adverb used to modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. The phrase “*only in the Lord*” modifies the verb action of the sentence — “*marry*. ” Paul is describing the kind of marriage the woman must have. The widow is no exception to God’s plan for marriage. She must marry so that she is in harmony with the Lord’s will. The phrase “*only in the Lord*” is talking about “*how*” the woman is to marry rather than “*who*” she could marry. Paul is saying that it is wise to marry a person who belongs to Christ and is devoted to the Lord. (Check the way the phrase “*in the Lord*” is used in other passages: Ephesians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Colossians 3:18.)

Paul's Instructions Concerning Liberties

Meat Sacrificed to Idols

The subject of the disciple’s association with meat that had previously been sacrificed to idols may be the most controversial subject in this letter. Many of the Greek cities

were full of idols (cf. Acts 17:16). A number of archeological findings have unearthed markings of meat markets in conjunction with the offerings made to idols. In the Gentile world at this time it was difficult to find meat which had not been offered to an idol. Cultic meals were held in honor of marriages, victory in some military operation, or perhaps honoring some public servant. Whenever one was invited to have a meal even at the home of a friend, the host might serve meat that had been offered to a patron god like Artemis. Many of these feasts were fabulous events with all types of meat served. The majority of the meat that was sold at the public meat markets had probably been a part of sacrifices to idols in various degrees. It is possible that the meat which had not been used in sacrifices cost more, and this complicated the problem even more because of the financial problems involved. The practice of idolatry and eating the meat that had been offered to an idol was an important part of the social and cultural events in Greek society.

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God. So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:1–6).

The Christian's Proper Attitude

The Christian in today's culture may not face this specific kind of problem, but he does have to deal with the matter of Christian freedom. Paul places emphasis on the fact that knowledge must be balanced with love. Obviously the Corinthians had asked, "**Can we eat the meat offered to idols?**" The saints in Corinth had been enriched in the knowledge of God's word (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:5). They had the correct intellectual knowledge about the nature of God and knew that an idol was nothing but a visible representation of a non-existent god which existed in the mind of an ignorant unbeliever. They knew that a non-existent god could not contaminate the meat that had been offered to an idol. Some of the brethren must have reasoned, "A piece of wood that only represents a mythical god could not possibly contaminate the meat offered to it. How can anything that doesn't exist contaminate meat?"

Although false gods did not exist, idol worship did. Satan and demons did exist. Idol worship was involved in demon worship. Idol worship was compounded by the fact that sometimes there was not a god figure represented by the idol. The Corinthians had knowledge, but they needed to follow a pattern of love toward their brethren in Christ. Paul says, "*Love does no harm to its neighbor*" (Romans 13:10a). There is no love without a basic and correct understanding of Christ and His gospel, but there can be correct knowledge without love. Paul talks about a person knowing all mysteries, being able to speak all languages, and having a great faith, but still being a person who does not have love (cf. 1 Corinthians 13). A man who has knowledge devoid of love can become puffed up. Knowledge is important, but it must be joined with love. The solution to the problem in Corinth was to add love to the knowledge they possessed. There are many references in Scripture concerning the need to grow in knowledge (cf. Colossians 1:9; Philippians 1:9; 2 Peter 1:5, 3:18).

The trouble with loveless knowledge is that it inflates the

ego of a person. It breeds conceit. Those who have a “know-it-all” attitude are always in danger of feeling superior to others. With a “know it all” attitude they do not consider the conscience of another brother. Love seeks to build others up whether the brother is weak or strong. A weaker brother in the first century, who was denying self because of his own conscience concerning eating the meat offered to idols, should not have been abused by the stronger, mature Christian. Judgment in the area of conscience should not be made on the basis of knowledge alone. A good illustration on this point would be a small child who is afraid of the dark. The child cannot be assured that there is nothing to be afraid of by using wise arguments to tell him it is foolish to be afraid of the darkness. A small child needs love, consolation, and a tender touch to overcome his immature fear. A mature Christian can use knowledge as a weapon or he can use love as a spiritual instrument to build.

Paul says, “*The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know*” (1 Corinthians 8:2). Anyone who knows the truth is very conscious of how much he does not know. There is a big difference between knowing about God and knowing God for who He is. Paul says, “*The man who loves God is known by God*” (1 Corinthians 8:3). Love builds up and puts another person first. The weaker brother, who was judging and criticizing the stronger Christian in Corinth, was stumbling over things the stronger Christian was able to do. Love from the stronger Christian will not try to force the truth into the weaker brother’s heart and mind. Genuine and pure love will help the weaker Christian to grow by being patient with his immaturity. There is a difference in spiritual growth and a prideful knowledge. The object of knowledge is to participate in the divine nature. Peter said:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness **through our knowledge of him** who called us by his own glory and goodness. **Through***

*these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that **through them** you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:3–4).*

Christians are partakers of the divine nature through knowledge. Each Christian becomes more and more like his Lord as he grows spiritually and becomes conformed to His image. Paul says, “*But the man who loves God is known by God*” (1 Corinthians 8:3). God acknowledges the man who loves Him. By loving God a man allows God to know him. A Christian makes a personal commitment of faith and love to God. John said:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 John 4:7–8).

The Christian who uses human reason and intellect to elevate himself in pride cannot become humble and allow God to rule over him. Being known and fully possessed by God enables a man to see things from God’s point of view. In another letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about judging people from a worldly point of view (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14–17). Paul says that he no longer judges people from a human standpoint. By looking at people and situations with love based on God’s view of the world, a Christian can decide how he should act toward others. One writer said love requires the proper concern for a brother’s lack of understanding.

A Brother’s Conscience With Regard to Knowledge

But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they

*think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since **their conscience is weak**, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the **weak*** (1 Corinthians 8:7–10).

The important concept in this passage deals with conscience. Paul says that a false god has no existence in the real world. Christians in the first century knew that false gods did not exist, but this fact was handled differently by the “weak.” Paul uses the same terms here that he used in Romans when he said, “Accept him whose faith is **weak**, without passing judgment on disputable matters” (Romans 14:1).

*For if anyone with a **weak** conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this **weak** brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their **weak conscience**, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall* (1 Corinthians 8:10–13).

Whether a brother is weak or strong, someone else may consider themselves spiritually superior if they do not have love. Every Christian needs to be careful how he exercises his freedom so that he does not become a stumbling block to those who are weak. When love was not present, the weaker brother would pass judgment on the one who ate meat and consider him to be a sinner. Without love the stronger brother would hold the man who did not eat in contempt. God makes it very clear that He accepted both brethren, and they needed to stop judging each other.

A disciple of Christ knows that there is only one God. He is the God of the universe, the God of all men, creator, and sustainer of everything that exists. There is one Lord, Jesus Christ, who is equal with the Father through whom all things and everyone came to be (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6). Paul introduces the fact that Jesus was an active agent in creation. This fact is also confirmed in other passages in the Bible (cf. John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-4). Before Jesus became flesh, He was an active agent in the Godhead who took part in creating all things. Not everyone who had heard these things was able to intellectually perceive them as the truth. This was particularly true of the weak Christian who may have been accustomed to idolatry prior to his conversion. Even after his conversion, he would still associate certain foods with the heathen practice of idolatry. Because of his weak conscience, the weaker brother felt polluted by eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

An idol might still represent something wrong to a weak disciple because his intellect would know that idolatry was wrong. He would know that there was only one God, and that God and Christ were the creators of all things, but it would take time for that truth to become integrated into his mind and emotions. The weak Christian would eat and feel condemned because he could not eat from faith (cf. Romans 14:23). Mentally he knew that there was only one God, but it would take time to trust in Jehovah and have full assurance of faith in this matter.

With Regard to Conscience

The word “*conscience*” literally means to know with or to have joint knowledge. The word is used thirty-two times in the New Testament. In this context, some brethren had weak consciences because they had spent a life time perceiving idols as gods. They had spent so much time participating in idolatry that their consciences had been trained to accept the idea that an idol really was a god. They had grown up believing this was

true. Paul is talking to Christians who had heard and believed the truth about God, but the concepts from idol worship were not easily removed. The Jewish Christian had a keen conscience concerning things that were kosher (clean or fit to eat according to Jewish dietary laws, Ed.). This involved the eating of meat and observing feast days (cf. Romans 14). Conversion for the one who had been an idol worshiper would be a drastic change. Becoming a fully assured Christian who believed in one God would not happen over night. The conscience is the internal courtroom where thoughts, words, and deeds are judged, and either approved or condemned, based upon whatever “law” is being followed. Paul says that the conscience either commends or condemns (cf. Romans 2:14–16; 9:1). The conscience is not the “law” or the rule that is followed. The conscience is the mind that passes judgment on the person’s thoughts, life, and actions according to the rules. Before many of the Corinthians became Christians, their “law” had been idolatry. For the Christian the “law” is Christ, His sacred will, and the New Testament. Paul says that not every disciple has this precise knowledge of God and Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:7). Not every disciple had fully drawn all the logical implications of the doctrine of Christ. Some in the church had been so accustomed as unbelievers to food being associated to the heathen practice of idolatry that they still ate with a sense of heathenism. This polluted their conscience. They felt that they were still involved in the worship of idols by eating any food that had been offered to idols. This was an inner feeling that would linger in the heart and mind of any new Christian who had once been involved in idolatry.

I can recall young Christians being very sensitive about their former beliefs and practices when we lived in southern Africa. It took time for them to feel comfortable in their heart about previous beliefs, and they needed a lot of loving care from other Christians to enable them to grow spiritually. Paul acknowledges that this is a sign of intellectual weakness. God has made some strong in order that they might bear with the

weak (cf. Romans 14:1–15:13). There is nothing in food itself that brings guilt upon the weak Christians. When a weak Christian does something that he feels is wrong, he condemns himself in his own heart. Paul says that the stronger Christians need to be gracious, forbearing, and kind toward the weaker brother. He says, “*Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak*” (1 Corinthians 8:9). When Paul was talking to the Romans, he urged the weak Christian to try to understand the stronger Christian’s freedom (cf. Romans 14:1–4). In love the weaker Christian must allow the mature Christian to exercise freedom in his faith. Each one has an obligation to love and act accordingly.

Food has nothing to do with the spiritual man since it is the sustainer of the physical body. The real issue in these verses is **love**. Love means not putting a stumbling block before any brother. This has to do with getting rid of any unloving attitudes. Sometimes it means having to give up the privilege to do something because that something might cause another brother to stumble. A brother must be willing to surrender his right out of love for another brother.

The word for “*stumbling block*” is ***proskomma***. This means a hindrance over which one trips and falls. Paul says: “*For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge*” (1 Corinthians 8:10–11). The example of one Christian upon another can destroy a weaker brother. When Paul wrote to the Romans he told them that it was wrong for anyone to make another one fall by what he was eating (cf. Romans 14:20–21). It is wrong to lead a weaker Christian to do something that he believes to be wrong because of freedom. It is wrong to cause a weaker brother to sin and destroy his union with Christ. It is wrong for the stronger Christian to exercise his freedom to do something if it is going to destroy the fundamental moral

resolve of a weaker brother in such a way that it would injure the weaker brother's conscience. Once the weaker brother's conscience has been injured, it is possible that the weaker Christian will be bold enough to engage in other practices which are clearly prohibited in the New Testament scriptures. During the first century it was possible that the weaker brother might be led back into idolatry. Paul urged them to flee idolatry (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:14).

Paul says: "*When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall*" (1 Corinthians 8:12–13). The word "wound" is a present participle that means a continuous violent beating. This is the same word that was used to describe the beating that the soldiers gave the Lord prior to His death on the cross (cf. Matthew 27:30).

This is a very serious matter. A Christian should never be a part of destroying the work of God in the heart and life of another Christian. The work of the gospel can be destroyed and ruined by such actions. The conscience of a weak Christian can be easily defiled, wounded, offended, and even destroyed. The stronger Christian must bear with the weaker brother in love so that he can mature in the Lord. This does not mean that the stronger Christian has to pamper and encourage the weakness of another brother. He seeks to edify and help this weaker Christian to grow. Paul says that he would give up any practice within his life that he had the freedom to engage in to avoid destroying a weaker brother's relationship with Christ. It did not matter that Paul had every right to enjoy this practice and could do so with a good conscience on his own part. He told the Romans, "*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 14:17).

FREEDOM BRINGS SLAVERY

1 Corinthians 9:1–22

Introduction

Paul covers the subject of Christian liberties by discussing the matter of eating meat that had been previously sacrificed to an idol (cf. 1 Corinthians 8–10). Beginning in 1 Corinthians 9:1–14, Paul defends his right to receive support from the church in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 9:15–27 he defends his right to refuse that support. How can a person give up his rights? Issues that are morally indifferent become a matter of judgment. If the issue is only a matter of judgment, Paul makes it clear that he had the right to deny some of the privileges and liberties that he had in Jesus for the gospel's sake. When someone knows and obey **the truth** according to the gospel there is freedom. Jesus said, “*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32). When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he also talked about **the truth** that is found in Jesus: “*Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus*” (Ephesians 4:21).

There is a state of freedom if someone is in Christ. Paul told the Galatians: “*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery*” (Galatians 5:1). In his last letter to the Corinthians, Paul talked to them about the freedom they had in the Spirit: “*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*” (2 Corinthians 3:17). The state of freedom that a Christian enjoys has a clear purpose. Each Christian enjoys the freedom of Christianity to become more

and more like Christ and to glorify God in all his deeds. The freedom a Christian has must be used to establish a Christ-like personality. That is what Paul was telling the Roman Christians when he said:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. . . . For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called, those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Romans 8:1–2, 29–30).

Paul is explaining that same purpose to the Corinthians for the freedom they possessed because of **the truth**. When Paul wrote to the Galatians he refused the human rules that were unknown to God. He gave up some of his liberties in Christ for the Gospel's sake (like eating meat), but no one could take away the freedom he celebrated in Christ.

Paul's Liberty as an Apostle

An Affirmation of His Apostleship and Liberty

Paul uses himself as a example telling the Corinthians he is free. He establishes his credentials as a servant of God in relationship to the church in Corinth: “*Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 9:1–2).

Various Liberties Available to Paul

This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:3–14).

Paul gives the Corinthians a number of arguments to prove his biblical right to receive financial support for his work while he was with them at Corinth. When he left Corinth, they were still partners with him in the gospel. Paul said, ". . . Am I not an apostle? . . ." (1 Corinthians 9:1). The word "apostle" means

one who has been sent under a commission. The apostles of Christ had certain credentials and a specific purpose. The credentials, purpose, and “*the things that mark an apostle — signs, wonders and miracles . . .*” (2 Corinthians 12:12) were known to the Corinthians because these things had been performed among them with great perseverance. Peter proclaimed as the other apostles were preparing to choose a replacement for Judas that an apostle had to be: “*. . . one of the men who have been among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these [an apostle] must become a witness with us of his resurrection*” (Acts 1:21–22). Paul was this kind of apostle because the Lord had appeared to him, then equipped, and qualified him to be an apostle (cf. Acts 9:1–22; 22:1–21; 1–23). Jesus not only equipped and qualified Paul to be an apostle, He convicted him of his unbelief and gave him a personal charge:

“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:16–18).

All of the Apostles possessed the empowering gifts of the Spirit that Paul speaks about later in this same letter (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). Paul demonstrated these miraculous signs and wonders in Corinth to confirm his message. The Corinthians had seen proof that Paul was an apostle sent by God. God was with each of these first century witnesses confirming salvation with them (cf. Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:2–4). The Hebrew writer said that the Lord was confirmed by those who heard Him. Christians today have a confirmed book — the New Testament

— as a document to prove what was taught in the first century as the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul had seen Jesus Christ, and the Corinthian Christians were the result of his time with the Lord. He was used by the Lord to bring the Gospel to the Gentile people (cf. Romans 11:13). The Corinthian Christians were proof of Paul's work. Those who had been taught the Word by people like Paul were instructed to share what they had with their instructor (cf. Galatians 6:6; Romans 15:26–27). These New Testament passages teach that the men who worked toward bringing the gospel deserved to be supported by those they had taught.

Paul told the Christians in Corinth they were “*. . . the seal of my apostleship in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 9:2). The word “seal” means to authenticate or validate. Their conversion to Jesus Christ confirmed Paul as being an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul uses this as his defense to the Christians who were judging him concerning his right to be supported as a preacher and teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul lists Barnabas in this defense proving the right of evangelists, teachers, and preachers to be financially supported by God’s people. Paul also refers to the apostle Peter (Cephas) when he mentions the right to be able to have a wife and a family and still be supported by the church. Mark 1:30 gives the details concerning Peter having a wife and a mother-in-law. Paul asks if he and Barnabas were the only ones who had to work for a living. Paul was known to work with his hands in order to support himself and others (cf. Acts 20:34)

Paul continues by using analogies from every day life to prove his point. He refers to the man “*who serves as a soldier. . .*” The government would pay the soldier wages and provide him with supplies, and that “soldier” could preach and teach during his basic training and on the battlefield. The man who plants a vineyard has the right to eat the fruit from that vineyard just as a man who raises milk cows has the right to drink the milk that comes from his cows. Paul is saying that if all of this is true in a secular arrangement, then it should also be true in a spiritual arrangement.

Next Paul uses a verse from the Old Testament to prove his point: “*Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain*” (Deuteronomy 25:4). The man who used an oxen to tread out the grain considered it cruel to muzzle the oxen as he worked; the oxen was allowed to eat as he worked. Paul did not mention this because God was concerned about the oxen — the oxen were not the ones who would be reading Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. This verse was written for man. Since Paul had labored night and day in plowing the soil that was the people of Corinth, he deserved the credit for sowing a spiritual crop among them. Having sown a spiritual crop, did he not deserve to reap a material crop as well? Paul accepted support from other churches: “*I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you*” (2 Corinthians 11:8). He had the right to expect support from Corinth.

Then Paul refers to an Old Testament practice about the men who worked in the temple getting their food from the temple and the men who served at the altar sharing in what had been offered upon the altar. In the Old Testament the Lord commanded that the priests who devoted their life to serving in the temple be sustained by have a share of the offerings that were given by the Jews. Paul believed he and others had this same right, but he said, “. . . we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:12).

Apparently Paul believed that accepting support from the church in Corinth would be a hindrance to the gospel there. In his discussion concerning the right to have support from a congregation, Paul is talking about genuine and sincere workers in the gospel. He is talking about someone who has given himself totally to the teaching and preaching of the gospel of Christ. Paul is not talking about supporting someone who was not devoted to the Lord.

It is easy to see this same lack of commitment to spiritual responsibilities today. Notice how much money is spent to educate the mind and to exercise the physical body in today’s society. Yet Christians still act miserly and selfishly when it

comes to supporting the things that are spiritual. Paul knew that it was for freedom that Christ had set him free (cf. Galatians 5:1), but he did not always exercise his right to freedom. An important part of freedom was the right to choose. Paul chose to exercise his right by refusing to accept support from the Corinthian church. Later some in the church at Corinth accused Paul of being a false apostle because he did not accept their support (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:13–16). It is obvious in Paul’s last letter to the Corinthians that Paul never expected his refusal to accept support from them to cause them to label him as a false apostle.

The next argument that Paul uses is the fact that the Lord said that it was right for one to receive support in the gospel: “*In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel*” (1 Corinthians 9:14; cf. Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7–8). Paul defended his rights — his freedom — to be supported by the churches for whom he preached the gospel.

Paul’s Example of Restricting His Liberty to Save Others and Himself

Why He Chose Not to Exercise His Liberty Concerning Support

After defending his right to be supported, Paul discusses his right to give up the freedom to receive support:

But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the

gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it (1 Corinthians 9:15–18).

Paul refused to accept support from the Corinthians for the sake of the gospel. Earlier he had talked about the stronger brother giving up his rights for the weaker brother. Paul proved his point in this matter by being an example of this principle. He makes the point that he did not bring up the subject of support as a subtle hint that they should take up a contribution for him. Paul was very genuine and sincere in sacrificing his rights so that he might build up the body of Christ in Corinth by his example.

Paul says:

I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:15b-16).

When Paul uses the word “*boast*,” he uses it in the good sense of holding himself up as an example of a Christ-like person. He could not “*boast*” about preaching the gospel because he was compelled to preach. It was something that he had been called by God to do. By giving up his right to receive support in preaching the gospel of Christ, Paul was able to mature in the area of being a servant of the Lord Jesus. The perfect example of self-control and servant-hood was the man whom Paul was striving to become more and more like — Jesus Christ his Lord. Jesus had every right when He was here upon the earth to expect His apostles to wash His feet. What did Jesus do? He girded himself, put on a towel, and washed His apostles’ feet (cf. John 13:1–17).

Paul did preach the gospel voluntarily, but he could not glory in the fact that he preached the gospel because God had commissioned him to be an apostle and a preacher. His reward

for preaching was being able to make this commitment “. . . *free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it*” (1 Corinthians 9:18). Paul did not initiate the charge to preach, but he willingly and lovingly accepted the charge. Paul was not allowed to choose his profession. His reward was not in the fact that he was preaching the gospel of Christ. His reward was preaching without pay. He gained the satisfaction of preaching the gospel without any expense to the Christians in Corinth. Christians can gain greater rewards by relinquishing their freedom for others.

His Example of Servitude Towards Others

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19–23).

Paul had a greater purpose than just his own reward in not accepting financial support. Paul chose not to accept payment for his preaching services so that he might become a servant to everyone. Paul says that he made himself a slave to everyone so that he might win as many as possible to the gospel of Christ. Paul knew that he had a moral commitment to others. The “Great Commission” in Mark 16:15–16 clearly commissions all Christians to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature. Paul chose to put himself under bondage to others to win their

souls to Christ. When Paul was among the Jews, he chose the Jewish culture and habits. Paul knew all the Jewish requirements because he had been raised as a dedicated Jewish Pharisee (cf. Philippians 3:1–9). He also knew that he was no longer subject to those requirements because the first covenant had been fulfilled in Christ and done away with (cf. Colossians 2:13–15; Ephesians 2:13–17; the book of Hebrews). Paul honored the Jewish customs that he might win the Jews to Christ. Paul had Timothy circumcised (cf. Acts 16:1–3), he kept a Jewish vow (cf. Acts 18:18), and he went into the temple at the elders' recommendation to be responsible for those who kept the customs concerning the cleansing of the flesh (cf. Acts 21:26). He lived as the Jews lived, ate what they ate, and abstained from what they considered to be unclean “*. . . so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings*” (1 Corinthians 9:22–23).

Paul said, “*... I have become all things to all men . . .*” (1 Corinthians 9:22). He became weak to those who were weak. The word “weak” is perfect tense denoting an action completed in the past that had continuing results. This attitude of becoming “*all things to all men*” was probably one that began at Paul’s conversion. Paul never compromised any doctrinal or moral truths but simply tried to put himself in the other person’s thinking and circumstances as much as possible so that he might save souls.

Paul did not do everything he did for his own salvation. Some of the brethren from Jerusalem went to Antioch and wanted to require all the Gentile Christians to be circumcised (cf. Acts 21), but Paul would not consider the idea of a person being bound by the law of Moses for his salvation’s sake. Paul denounced that apostasy in every way. (Many of the books Paul wrote confirm his opposition to this idea: Romans, Galatians, Hebrews.) The New Testament teaches that Christians are not under the system of law and works such as the Law of Moses. Christians are under the law of grace and faith which is found

in Christ Jesus. Paul became a Jew to the Jews, he lived as one not under the Law to win those who did not have the Law (the Gentile world), and he became weak to win the weak. Paul taught that even though the Gentiles were not under the Law of Moses, they were under a moral law (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:21; Romans 2:12–16). Paul became “*all things to all men.*” He adapted himself to their culture, languages, and traditions so that he might win souls for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If a Christian is going to reach the lost and weak disciples who need strength, he is going to have to learn to understand their thinking, feelings, and conscience to be able to gain them for the Lord. God’s children need to be sensitive to other feelings and beliefs. This failure to understand and practice becoming “*all things to all men*” has greatly hindered evangelistic efforts in the body of Christ today.

Spiritual Conditioning and a History Lesson

1 Corinthians 9:24–10:14

Introduction

Only the amazing grace of Jesus Christ could transform a former self-righteous Pharisee like Paul into a Christian who involved his life in the Greek culture to be able to save the Gentiles. The book of Acts illustrates how beautifully Paul went from one Gentile city to another to preach Christ. This book shows Paul as bold and truthful but never unkind, rude, or insulting toward the Gentiles and their practices. Paul was always courteous, considerate, and knowledgeable concerning unbelievers. After they were converted to Jesus, Paul treated them without any partiality.

One of the significant things about the law of Christ to which Paul was subject was its emphasis upon the law of love. Jesus told His disciples: “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*” (John 13:34–35). Paul knew about this kind of love. In the last letter he wrote to the Corinthians, he says:

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no

longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

There is power in giving up one’s rights for the benefit of others. Paul was willing to observe and respect any man’s convictions as long as that man did not attempt to bind those things on others as being something necessary for salvation.

Paul Adheres to the Law of Love

Paul’s Illustration from Athletics

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24–27).

Paul often uses athletic contests to illustrate his teachings. Since the time of the Greek emperors, athletic games were very popular throughout the Greek world. The Olympic Games were held in Olympia and first recorded historically in 776 B.C. The emperor Nero, who was the ruler during the first century when Paul was writing this epistle, drove a chariot pulled by four horses. In one of his races (about 66 A.D.), history states that he was thrown from the chariot and crushed. When he was restored to the chariot and tried to finish the race but could not, the referee, who was wise enough to know that this was not just a chariot drive but the emperor of Rome, awarded the crown of victory to Nero. Nero was so touched with happiness as the

crowd applauded him that all of Greece was exempt from any tribute to Rome.

The citizens of the first century were well acquainted with athletic games. The Isthmian games were held in Corinth. The Greek word the New International Version translates as “*competes*” in 1 Corinthians 9:25 is translated “*Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. . . .*” in the Revised Standard Version. ***Agonizomenos*** literally means to compete for a prize, but is also used to refer to struggling or agonizing over something. Paul was telling the first century Christians that faithfulness to Christ involves a struggle, and they must be contenders for a right relationship with Jesus. Everyone who competes must go into strict training and exercise self-control (inner strength). This is the same strength Paul talked to the Galatians about when he said, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . self-control. Against such things there is no law*” (Galatians 5:22–23). According to Horace, every athlete in the Greek games had to endure the regimen of obedience, sparse diet, and severe training for ten months before he was qualified to enter the actual game.¹³

Those who have been athletes understand what Paul was telling the Corinthians. Many months must be spent to discipline the body and the mind before there is any participation in athletic games. Paul is saying that some times the Christian must give up some things that are lawful. He is not talking about giving up things that are immoral or unrighteous in this context. The athlete in training gives up certain foods. He forces himself to get a certain amount of rest. There are many things involved in his training. Paul is still dealing with the concept of giving up one’s rights and freedoms **for the gospel of Christ**. There are some things that might hinder the athlete from receiving a perishable trophy, so the athlete is willing to give up those things. Should not the

¹³See Barclay, 175

Christian be even more willing to give up rights and freedoms to be able to receive the unfading crown of life? There may be some rights and freedoms that the stronger Christian must be willing to give up to help the weak brother or to win a lost soul for Christ. Every Christian must strive to reach the goal to gain his prize just as an athlete must work to reach his goal of winning the trophy (cf. Philippians 3:12–14). Each Christian's goal should also be to become more and more like Christ and to become mature in Him.

Another Reason for Restraint: the Possibility of Apostasy

There is no substitute for victory. Paul says, “*. . . I beat my body and make it my slave . . .*” (1 Corinthians 9:27). He was the master of his own body. The word Paul uses for “beat” means to bruise or strike in the face. Paul did not do this literally, but he made sure his mind was controlled by the Lord at all times. Paul’s purpose was to be able to run so that he might not be disqualified or rejected so that he might gain the prize. This is surely a rebuke to any half-hearted service that the Christian might offer to Christ. Paul made sure that he was qualified to receive the crown forever by setting a goal rather than running aimlessly in his Christian life.

A Lesson from the History of Israel

Just as an athlete must use self-control and inner strength in his life, so disciples of Christ need to show the same kind of virtue in spiritual things. Paul uses the Israelites to make this application for the Christians in Corinth.

*For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were **all** under the cloud and that they **all** passed through the sea. They were **all** baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They **all** ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual*

*rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with **most of them**; their bodies were scattered over the desert”*
(1 Corinthians 10:1–5).

Obviously some in the church at Corinth had a false sense of security. There is security in Christ only when the Christian properly and purposely holds onto his faith. Israel was overconfident because of all the blessings God had given them. Christians can become the same way.

Blessings Given to Israel

The Israelites pledged to follow Moses as a leader. They were all baptized into Moses as they followed him across the Red Sea. They were totally surrounded (immersed) by the water in the cloud above them and the water of the walls of the sea around them. That immersion protected them from the Egyptians who were following them (cf. Exodus 14). As they followed Moses, they renounced the bondage of Egypt and were born again into Moses and freedom. At that particular point the Israelites gained their freedom from Egyptian slavery. Hebrews 11:29 says, “*By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land.*” The Israelites were immersed at that point into Moses’ laws, his authority, and his leadership. Baptism is an expression of faith. For the Israelites it was faith in Moses — they followed him knowing that he was following God.

In the examples from New Testament scriptures, believers were baptized into a union with Christ (cf. Romans 6:3–5). They were baptized into the possession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew 28:18–19). Just as the Israelites were saved from the Egyptians the day they crossed the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 14:30), the lost sinner is saved by his obedience to Christ when he crosses into the water of baptism. His obedience to Christ’s will is an act of faith in the cross of Christ. There is a design and purpose for immersion into Jesus (cf. Mark 16:15–16; Romans 6:1–4; Colossians 2:9–12).

The Jewish forefathers **all** ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from a spiritual rock which was Christ. The manna which God supplied daily to the Israelites was spiritual in its origin. God also gave them miraculous guidance by the cloud that appeared as a pillar of fire. He sustained them with food and drink in a supernatural manner. God supplied them with bread from heaven in the form of manna, but that bread was symbolic of Jesus who would come from heaven to give life to the world (cf. John 6:32–33). The food and water that the Israelites received from God was real and physical, but its origin was supernatural. The presence of the Spirit and the pre-incarnate Christ accompanied them.

Paul uses the word “**all**” in 1 Corinthians 10:1–4 to show that **all** the Israelites received God’s divine blessings. This obligated **all** the Israelites to respond to God’s blessings with respect, holiness, and love. Notice that this is not what happened: “*Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert*” (1 Corinthians 10:5). They had been blessed by God’s grace, but they were unwilling to be obedient to God. The Corinthians were becoming as proud and presumptuous as their Old Testament brothers.

Paul Warns: Study These Events to Keep From Falling into the Same Trap

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did — and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did — and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angel.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Corinthians 10:6–13).

Paul was warning the first century Christians not to be like their forefathers. He lists a number of sins that the Israelites were guilty of. These are all things that displease God. The Israelites desired evil, they were idolaters, they committed sexual immorality, they tempted Christ, and they murmured against God.

First, Paul talks about the fact that the Israelites had their hearts set on evil things (cf. Numbers 11:4–7). Second, he quotes Exodus 32:6 to describe the ways in which Israel worshiped other gods. They were involved in pagan rituals. Idolatry is not limited to the worship of heathen images although it certainly includes that. In his letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians, Paul called covetousness a form of idolatry (cf. Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:5).

Third, Paul mentions sexual immorality. In the first century, sexual immorality accompanied the practice of idolatry, but this sinful action was masterminded in the Old Testament by Israel and Balaam (cf. Numbers 22:1–31:8; 2 Peter 2:15; Revelation 2:14). Sexual intercourse with any person other than one's singular spouse is immoral because, in His holiness and righteousness, God declared it to be so in His Word. No amount of reasoning can change this fact. Jimmy Allen makes this wise comment in his book on 1 Corinthians. This is a statement that Christians today need to seriously consider:

The person who says he cannot be tempted sexually is so young that his passions have not arisen, so ignorant that he does not know what is occurring, so old that they have already subsided, not normal or lying. For the vast majority, only death will totally deliver from this temptation. Not simply a fear of evil (which is extremely important) but a passionate love for purity characterizes those who do not go astray in this realm.¹⁴

Fourth, Paul discusses the sin of tempting Jesus Christ. The Israelites put the power of the Lord to test over and over again. The Greek word for “*test*” means to tempt to the utmost. The same word is used in the New Testament to describe the temptations of Christ (cf. Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). One of the ways Israel tested God was to complain about their food. He sent fiery serpents among them and many of them died (cf. Numbers 21:4–9). What would happen size-wise to a congregation if God dealt in that same way with those who complained about God’s care for them? It is important to rest assured in God and His faithfulness and trust Him with the day to day cares.

Fifth, Israel grumbled, complained, and murmured to God — “*All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron . . .*” (Numbers 14:2) — after the spies had returned from surveying the land of promise. And Korah, Dathan, and Abiram “. . . rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men . . .” (Numbers 16:2), so the Lord caused the earth to swallow these people. The Greek word for “*murmur*” means to give audible or verbal expression to unwarranted dissatisfaction. This is the idea of condemning God instead of thanking God and showing proper obedience to Him. This is the person who sets himself up as a judge over God by saying, “God, I do not like what you

¹⁴ See Jimmy Allen, Survey of First Corinthians, (Searcy, AR: Harding College, 1975), 120.

have done.” He murmurs with sullen discontent against God and His judgments. This was and still is a terrible sin.

Their History Was Recorded to Admonish Us

Paul says, “. . . these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did” (1 Corinthians 10:6). The book of Jude talks about —

. . . godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus. . . . These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter other for their own advantage (Jude 4, 16).

Paul refers to previous events in the patriarchal and Jewish ages. He warns the Corinthians to learn from the things that happened to their forefathers. When he was writing to Timothy, Paul said:

The goal of this command (not to teach false doctrine or be devoted to myths and genealogies that promote controversy) is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk (1 Timothy 1:5–6).

Beware of Overconfidence

The things that Paul wrote were written as examples and warnings to the Corinthians and to the church today. Paul urged them not to become proud of standing firm. Christians need to beware and be careful. The word “be careful” is present imperative which demands the necessity of continual watchfulness on the part of the Christian. Christians have been given a living hope and an inheritance that cannot perish through their faith. They are preserved by the power of God through faith (cf. 1 Peter 1:3–5). There must be a trusting obedience on the part of the Christian. He must maintain his

faith and add to that faith all the virtues necessary for growth in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-9). Paul does not want any Christian to forget that he has been cleansed of his past sins and has been saved. He can remain in that condition. That is the security of trusting and believing in God. Christians are kept by His power (cf. 1 Peter 1:5).

Paul closes out this portion of his letter to the Corinthians by saying:

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. **And God is faithful;** he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a **way out** so that you can stand up under it* (1 Corinthians 10:13-14).

God will not allow the Christian to be tempted beyond his power to resist. John talked about the different ways Christians are tempted through the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). God is not unaware of these temptations. He will provide a way out. God's providence is presently active in every Christian's life. The word "way out" refers to an actual escape from something — it is an exit. This is the word that would be used to describe the way an army would escape when they were surrounded by the enemy. It is a way to safety for the Christian. God gives His children a victory over temptation.

Paul urged the Corinthians as "*my dear friends.*" He says, "*Therefore (because of all that Paul had said before this), my dear friends, flee from idolatry*" (1 Corinthians 10:14). The verb tense in the verse is present imperative, which means that Paul is urging them to **keep on fleeing**. Later he urged them not to be joined with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). There cannot be a fellowship between God, the church, and idols. Christians need to forsake all that is involved in idolatry. They can learn from their forefathers and the past, but they cannot continue to be a part of what their forefathers practiced.

Eating Meat and Wearing Veils

1 Corinthians 10:15–11:7

Introduction

God will provide the way of escape when His children are tempted. He will provide the power and strength not to be overcome by idolatry. He will give the strength to flee idolatry. He will give Christians today the strength to overcome any temptation put before them. It is important to know that there is this kind of strength in Christ.

Eating Meat in Pagan Temples

The Example of the Lord’s Supper and the Sacrifices of Israel Applied to Things Sacrificed to Idols

Paul asks some very powerful questions after giving the Corinthian brethren the assurance that “*God is faithful*” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans

are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:15–22).

Paul explained that the best defense against idolatry was not to eat in a heathen temple regardless of the circumstances. This defense made sense, and Paul was appealing to their wisdom.

The word that Paul uses for “*sensible*” applies to someone who is prudent or practically wise. The Corinthian Christians should have had enough experience in or being surrounded by idolatry that they could easily recognize the truth of Paul’s statements and be able to make wise decisions.

Paul uses several illustrations or comparisons that apply to the Christian’s participation in the Lord’s Supper to help the Corinthians judge what he was saying. This participation in the Lord’s Supper was communion with the Lord’s body and His blood. The “*cup of thanksgiving*” is the Christian’s way of sharing in the blood of Christ. The Christian initially shares in the death of Christ when he is baptized into the death of Christ (cf. Romans 6:3). In baptism the Christian receives the benefits of forgiveness, promises from God, and the fellowship with God. The blood of Christ continually cleanses the Christian as he walks in the light of God’s word day by day (cf. 1 John 1:7).

The church today uses the word “communion” when referring to the Lord’s Supper to signify the bond of one body of believers all united to Christ and His body. The “*bread*” represents the body of Christ and the fact that there is one body (unity) of Christians (cf. Ephesians 4:4). The priests of Israel who ate the sacrifices were also sharing in the services they offered on the altar. The Israelites would participate in the sacrifices at the altar to be reminded of God’s blessings.

Christians today eat the Lord's Supper to be reminded of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The word "*sacrifice*" denotes a **communion with the deity** on whose altar the sacrifice is offered. As the priests ate the meat which was offered to God in the Old Testament, they were participating in a communion with God. Just as the Lord's Supper signifies the Christian's participation or communion with Christ, so one's participation in a sacrifice offered to demons would signify a communion with demons. Paul wanted the Corinthians to be able to make the comparison of offering a sacrifice to God and communing with God so that they could see that this was also true of the pagan sacrifices at Corinth. He said the sacrifices the heathens offered were offered to demons. A Christian cannot partake of the Lord's Supper **and** the table of the demons and be in fellowship with God. Paul was trying to emphasize to the Christians in Corinth that they should not participate in any of the **public idol feasts**. They were not strong enough to withstand God's wrath any more than the Jews of the Old Testament could defy the Lord and withstand His wrath.

Conclusion Regarding Things Sacrificed to Idols

Specific Instructions: Feel Free to Eat Anything Sold in the Marketplace

"Everything is permissible" — but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" — but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.' If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if

anyone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience’ sake — the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? (1 Corinthians 10:23–30).

Paul knew there were other questions involved in the issue of pagan sacrifices. What about eating the meat offered to idols at private meals in the home of an unbeliever? Paul says not everything is beneficial or expedient even though it may be permissible. The Christian must not be involved in anything that is unlawful, but just because it is lawful does not mean that it will be helpful. Paul says, “*Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others*” (1 Corinthians 10:24). This is a strong point to remember. The believer can eat anything that is sold in the meat market without raising a question of conscience, but he must consider the good of others. Everything that is done must be done considering the welfare of others. This is particularly applicable to the spiritual welfare. Salvation of the lost and the building up of the body of Christ should be the desired end result of everything the Christian is involved in. Paul gave these same instructions to the Romans when he said, “*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. . . .*” (Romans 14:19–20).

Specific Instructions: Regarding Eating in Unbeliever’s Home

Paul said that if an unbeliever invited the Christian to a meal he did not have to worry about eating the meat for his own conscience sake. Regardless of how the meat had been used, it was all right for Christians to buy and eat because everything on the earth is the Lord’s. If an unbeliever mentioned that the meat

had been offered in sacrifice, then the Christian needed to refrain from eating not for the sake of his own conscience, but for the sake of a weaker brother who might have a problem with eating.

General Principles for All Things

A Christian does not need to isolate himself from friends who are not Christians. How can the church be an influence and a light to the world if it isolates itself from those who need Jesus. It is important to spend time loving and serving the world so that they can be won to Christ. The important thing to remember is:

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jew, Greeks, or the church of God — even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 10: 31–11:1).

These are all things that need to be considered before a Christian does something that is not against the law. Does it edify? Does it build up the body? Will it cause a brother to stumble? Does it glorify God? Will it hurt the conscience of a weaker brother? Will it cause another brother to sin?

Women Praying and Prophesying with Heads Uncovered

Paul's Use of Traditions

The idea that all things should be done to glorify God leads into Paul's next topic. He continues addressing public worship and the matter of authority. First, Paul talked about the position

of women in the church and the wearing of veils. Then he talked about the events pertaining to the Lord's Supper.

I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings (the word “traditions” is used in the New American Standard Version), just as I passed them on to you. Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. 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. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice — nor do the churches of God (1 Corinthians 11:2–16).

Paul commended the church for remembering him and keeping the “*teachings/traditions*” that he had passed on to them. The word “*traditions*” means that which has been handed down to another. In this case, as well as in his letter to the Thessalonians (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:15), Paul was talking about the Apostolic doctrines that had been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The Issue of Authority

The problem Paul was addressing in this section deals with the matter of authority. In this context he was dealing with the subjection of woman to man. Spiritually, men and women are considered equal by God (cf. Galatians 3:28). The Bible does not teach that any woman is inferior to any man, but **in the matter of authority**, God has clearly made it known that His will is that a man should be the one who takes a leadership role. The women in the church at Corinth had cast off their cultural mode of ancient dress which was a symbol of their submission.

Paul states God’s divine will by saying, “. . . *the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God*” (1 Corinthians 11:3). Paul is referring to the proper order and rank (authority and submission) God established in the very beginning. He insisted that the women in the church at Corinth needed to accept and respect this as being a role established by God. Paul speaks of God the Father as “*the head of Christ*,” yet God and Christ are equal in essence, being, and nature. Christ willingly became the Son of man (cf. Philippians 2:5–11; Hebrews 1:1–4). In his last letter to the Corinthians Paul spoke about the poverty of the Lord, “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Paul is referring to the condescension of Jesus and His reincarnation as a human being. The Lord became subordinate to the Godhead by becoming a man to be able to save mankind. Since God could not die, Jesus

Himself became a man and was “. . . *obedient to death — even death on a cross!*” (Philippians 2:8). Woman is man’s equal in essence and nature, but she was created and must maintain an attitude of submission and respect toward the leadership role God has given men in the activities of the church.

Jesus subjected Himself to the Father, but that does not mean that He is, or ever was, inferior to the Father or the Holy Spirit. The “order of rank” within the activities of the church does not mean that women are inferior to men. The teaching in this area is broader than just the husband and wife relationship. It covers the attitude that all men and women need to have. The broader issue also involves the fact that men and women must not defy the divine order of femininity and masculinity. The divine order from God declares that the head of every male person is Christ and the head of the woman is the man. This fact does not deny that Christ is also the head of every female person.

Paul is reinforcing God’s plan as it has been from the beginning when God created woman as a suitable companion for man. She was to be his “*help meet,*” which means that she was specifically created to be a helper suitable for man. Man’s role and function was to be a protector, provider, and leader. Woman’s role and function was to be a wife, mother, helper, encourager, and supporter. The word “wife” means “surrounder.” This refers to the nature of her function in the home atmosphere. This “order of rank” does not mean that man is superior to woman. Man is given authority because he was created to function in a leadership role. The husband is to be the leader and the head of the wife in the home situation. Paul says:

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved (1 Corinthians 11:4–5).

In this context, the woman who prayed with her head uncovered was dishonoring man.

It is important to establish the role and function of the male and female in these passages. Paul uses the phrase “*who prays or prophesies.*” Prophecy was one of the miraculous gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit on certain people during the first century. The Spirit gave gifts as He determined and willed it to be (cf. 1 Corinthians 12–14). Prophecy had to do with inspired teaching that occurred as an utterance given by divine inspiration. Paul’s use of this phrase conveys the fact that women in the first century were also recipients of spiritual gifts.

The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were received through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. The Spirit bestowed gifts to certain ones during the first century. One of the gifts was the gift of speaking in foreign languages with dialects that they had not learned so that other people could understand the Word. There was also the gift of tongues which involved speaking in prayers and songs **to** God rather than just for the sake of man (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:1–5). Paul was dealing with women in the church at Corinth who possessed some of these spiritual gifts. This principle would apply to all women, but he was especially talking to the women who were praying and prophesying in the Spirit. Apparently, these women who had the gift of prophecy exercised their gifts without having a veil on their heads. Paul was telling these women that discarding the custom of wearing a veil was a shame for a woman and it brought dishonor on the men.

Paul said that if a man were to pray or prophesy with his head covered with a veil that would dishonor Christ who is head of the man. The word used for “*cover*” in this text refers to the veil that first century women wore. The word is ***katakalypto***, which is a combination of the word ***kata*** meaning down from and ***kalypto*** which means to cover, hide or to veil. ***Katakalypto*** referred to covering oneself with a veil that hung down from the head. The custom among Greek women was to

wear veils to honor and protect their femininity whenever they were in a mixed audience of males and females or in any public meeting. Charles Hodge makes the following comments concerning ancient Greek veils:

The veils worn by Grecian women were of different kinds. One, and perhaps the most common, was the *peplum*, or mantle, which in public was thrown over the head and enveloped the whole person. The other was more in the fashion of the common eastern veil which covered the face with the exception of the eyes.¹⁵

Paul was discussing this artificial covering of the veil worn by women. Obviously, it would be a shame for a man to wear such feminine attire. During this era, no respectable woman would go out in public without a veil. If she did, she would be judged the same as a woman who had had her head shaven. The veil was an important part of the woman's feminine dignity. It gave her a sense of security and a measure of protection when she associated with the public. In the oriental lands, the veil was a sign of power, honor and dignity for the woman. With a veil on her head she could go anywhere with security and respect. Without the veil a woman was subject to insults and ridicule and she was considered to be worth "nothing." A woman automatically lost her dignity and authority if she did not wear a veil in public.

Any man who prayed with his head covered/veiled would be acknowledging some other authority rather than Christ's. The custom of wearing a head covering or veil was a visible sign of submission. The male person is in submission to Christ so praying with a covering on his head would shame the Lord.

¹⁵ See Charles Hodge, D.D., Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: W.M.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 209.

The male who prays with his head uncovered shows that he is accountable only to Jesus Christ. The female in the first century wore a veil as a sign of her own dignity and submission.

Authority and the Love Feast

1 Corinthians 11:8–22

Introduction

Paul dealt with the matter of leadership and authority in 1 Corinthians 11. He emphasized the fact that if a man were to wear a veil while he prayed and prophesied, he would be disrespectful to Christ as his head. If a woman prayed and prophesied without her veil, she would be dishonoring men and herself as well. During World War II, some French women had their heads shaved in public when they were caught associating with the German soldiers. This was done to shame the women. A shaved head had this same kind of symbolism during the first century. Paul said if a woman was not going to wear a veil, then she might as well have her head shaved.

Paul Offers Scriptural Proof for the Order of Authority

The God-Given Order

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head (1 Corinthians 11:7–10).

Paul gives very clear scriptural evidence for what he is teaching. Man was first in the divine order and purpose because he was created first. Woman was made from man, not man from woman. Regardless of current philosophy, Christians need to respect the authority of the scriptures. The reference to the angels in this text gives emphasis to the fact that God's creation must be content with His order and arrangement. Jude wrote:

And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home — these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day (Jude 6).

The Place of Women in God's Order

The veil was recognized as a badge of seclusion which proclaimed that the woman who wore it was a private woman who went about doing her duties at home. During the first century, a woman's whole life was so separated from the public eye that both sexes looked upon the veil as the truest and most treasured emblem of a woman's position. In his book on 1 Corinthians, Paul Butler says:

The veil was the woman's badge of honor and respect. It showed that she had a definite place as a person in God's order. Woman was not created to be simply a "thing" or an "object" to be exploited by any and all men. She is to be honored, protected, cherished, loved, served, and led by her husband because she is a female.¹⁶

The woman is to be mentally, emotionally, and physically subordinate to the man. Being in subjection to a man does not degrade the woman any more than Christ was degraded when

¹⁶ See Butler, 203.

He subjected Himself to His Father while He lived as a man here upon the earth. By placing herself in subjection to the man, the woman is taking her God-ordained place. She is filling the role of honor that God has created for her. As strange as it may seem to many modern activists today, the woman's place and her dignity is still found in her femininity. It is the woman's right to have the honor, dignity, and protection that she alone can have in femininity. If she forfeits this, she forfeits her rights in many ways.

The Place of Submission in God's Order

The principle of this teaching is just as relevant today as it was in the first century. Paul affirms the great worth of women when he says, “*... man is born of woman. ...*” (1 Corinthians 11:12). A woman's worth needs to be understood and appreciated. God is the source of all things, and men and women are equally dependent upon one another. There should be a genuine cooperation between the sexes. During the first century, the only place of fellowship in the Roman Empire that welcomed all people regardless of their nationality, gender, or social and economic position was the church. Paul uses the illustration of “hair” to support his teaching in regard to veils. He is urging all Christians to use common sense when he says:

Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice — nor do the churches of God (1 Corinthians 11:13–16).

The veil that was worn during the first century was a visible sign of femininity and subordination. Paul appealed to the Corinthians to use their judgment. The word “*nature*”

denotes that which is recognized as the constitution of things. In this case, the natural distinction of a woman is that she has “long hair.”¹⁷ Paul used the same word in Ephesians 2:3 to refer to a certain kind of thinking which became natural after much practice. Paul said that when something is practiced for such a long period of time it often becomes a part of the person’s “nature.”

The word “hair” that is used in this verse refers to hair as an ornament rather than hair as the physical element. Many research sources state that in the more advanced civilizations men had short hair and women had long. Throughout history there were exceptions among nations whose men wore their hair long without being referred to as effeminate. One example is of Samson in the Old Testament (cf. Judges 13:1–16:31). The Old Testament teaches that the Nazarites were the ones who never cut their hair during the period of their vow of separation (cf. Numbers 6:1–21). These customs were a part of the fellowship and wave offerings associated with the vows an Israelite might make to God. The priests were instructed to keep their hair trimmed (cf. Ezekiel 44:20). The practice of wearing long hair was permitted during the Old Testament, which indicates that there is nothing immoral about long hair.

During the first century the Grecian culture was very different. Conventional pictures of Jesus show Him with long hair and a beard, but many archeological research findings show that Jesus never had a beard and his hair was closely cut. Some of the oldest representations of Him are found in the catacombs of Rome where he is pictured without a beard. For the first four centuries after His death, Jesus was portrayed without a beard and with short hair. During this time period, no males wore long hair except the Nazarites. Jesus was from Nazareth, but he was not a Nazarite. Paul would not have said

¹⁷ See M.R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, (Wilmington, DE: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1972), 787.

that it was a disgrace for a man to have long hair (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:14) if Jesus had had long hair. Christ did not dress or conduct Himself in such a way as to draw attention to Himself. In fact, the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus before His crucifixion had to ask Judas to show them which one He was (cf. Matthew 26:48; Mark 14:44; Luke 22:47; John 18:3).

When Paul uses the phrase “*long hair*,” it refers to **letting the hair grow**. A person either lets his hair grow naturally or gets it cut. God created a distinction between male and female, making it a disgrace for a man to appear like a woman and for a woman to appear as if she were a man. Deliberate effeminacy in a man and masculinity in a woman has always been wrong. When Paul refers to a woman’s “*long hair*” being “*her glory*,” he says, “*For long hair is given to her as a covering*” (1 Corinthians 11:15b). The Greek word *anti* is used for the phrase “*as a covering*” to show that the long hair is given to her “*instead of*” or “*in place of*” a covering. Paul is saying that although the “*long hair*” is the woman’s glory, it was not enough of a covering during this time because of the significance an artificial covering had.

Obviously, Paul expected a dispute on this matter because he said: “*If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice — nor do the churches of God*” (1 Corinthians 11:16). Paul was guided through the Spirit in what he was teaching and any other information is not important. It is enough for Paul to state: “*... we have no such practice ...*” (1 Corinthians 11:16).

Applications

In this passage (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:11–16), Paul was addressing the issue of women in the church who had spiritual gifts and had discarded the common practice of wearing a veil. The majority of nations in the twenty-first century have no such custom, and there are no longer women who possess spiritual gifts. If a Christian woman went to a part of the world where wearing a veil carried with it the same significance that it did in

Corinth, then she would want to show her submission and respect for that culture by wearing a veil.

Problems Concerning the Lord's Supper

Divisions and Heresies — Wrong Conditions

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval (1 Corinthians 11:17–19).

Paul continued his instructions to the Christians in Corinth by talking about some of the events that had led up to the improper observance of the Lord's Supper. Paul said there were divisions among them. Paul had praised them for remembering the teachings he had passed on to them. He realized that some of the abuse of leadership and authority was due to ignorance. That was not the case in observing the Lord's Supper, however, so Paul told them he had no praise to accompany his directives. Paul uses the Greek word for “*heresies*,” which means a religious sect that divides the people according to which side they are on, producing divisions among the group. Paul said that their meetings were doing more harm than good.

When Paul was writing to the Galatian brethren, he listed “*divisions*” in his list of “*the works of the flesh*” (see American Standard Version, 1901, Galatians 5:19–21) as something that is condemned and abhorred by the Lord. Paul is saying that anyone involved in one of these divisions is not pleasing to the Lord. Christians need to determine who is approved by the Lord and who is not. Those who are spiritually sound would be the ones who are not contributing to the heresies and divisions and

would not endorse actions that would cause division among brethren.

Paul said the differences among the Corinthians were necessary to show which of them had God's approval, but Christians should not compromise any truth that is essential to unity and fellowship with God. They need to keep the unity of the Spirit, be bound in peace, and adhere to seven absolutes of belief (cf. Ephesians 4:4–6). Christians do not practice anything that contributes to disunity. It is better to allow the truth to make the proper division than to be united in error. Paul is saying that one who is true to Jesus would not only refuse to join in these factions, but would lovingly admonish and resist any actions that would cause disunity. An interesting truth from this section shows that one can remain in a divided church and work toward its unity and still be in fellowship with Christ.

Love Feast Abused — Wrong Actions

William Barclay discusses the habit of sharing a meal together during the first century world as a Love Feast:

The ancient world was in many ways a much more social world than ours is. It was a regular custom for groups of people to meet together for common meals. There was, in particular, a certain kind of feast called an "*Eranos*" to which each participant brought his own share of the food, and in which all the contributions were pooled to make a common feast. The early Church had such a custom; they had a feast called the *Agape* or Love Feast. To it all the Christians came, bringing what they could, and when the resources of all were pooled, they sat down to a common meal. It was a lovely custom; and it is to our loss that the custom has vanished.¹⁸

¹⁸ See Barclay, 111-112.

The Consequences of Wrong Motivation — Wrong Conduct

A Love Feast is still done in some churches today and sometimes called a “pot luck.” In the first century, the church met before their public worship since the Lord had met with his disciples for the Passover Feast before He instituted the Lord’s Supper (cf. Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–23). This was something the Lord permitted (cf. Jude 12; 2 Peter 2:13), but they were abusing one another rather than building each other up and confirming their love for one another. Paul says:

When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!
(1 Corinthians 11:20–22).

The Fruit of Wrong Action — Mistreated Brethren

The manner in which the Corinthians behaved during a Love Feast led to their unworthy manner of observing the Lord’s Supper. They had abused the Love Feast and their relationship with each other, so they could not immediately enter into the worship service to the glory of the Lord and participate in the Lord’s Supper. They could not possibly have eaten the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner. Paul told them they needed to “eat at home” if they were not going to wait for each other when they ate together (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:33–34). If someone arrived early for the Love Feast and was hungry, he ate without waiting for the others to arrive and possibly ate to the extent that others did not have enough to eat when they arrived. They needed to exercise self-control.

The words “another gets drunk” usually means to be intoxicated with alcoholic beverage, but it could also be used to

refer to being a glutton with food the way it is used in this context (cf. Jeremiah 31:14, 25). Many Bible scholars believe this is the meaning as Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 11:21. It is likely that if Paul was referring to someone who had become intoxicated with alcohol, he would have demanded that one be taken from the assembly. He had said earlier not to keep company with a brother who was guilty of drunkenness (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:11). Perhaps many of the Christians in the church at Corinth were slaves and dock hands who had to work on the first day of the week. These latecomers would probably need a good meal more than many of the others, and yet they would receive the least amount if the other brethren had gorged themselves. This would have been shameful on the part of the gluttonous brethren and would have been humiliating for the others. It is clear that Paul was not talking about the Lord's Supper when he told them that they could "*eat at home.*"

The church in Corinth had a designated time to eat the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:23; 16:2). The example in Acts 20:7 teaches that the church in Troas broke bread "*on the first day of the week.*" The Old Testament command for the Jews to remember the Sabbath day meant that the Hebrews were to keep every Sabbath Day (cf. Exodus 20:8). Memorial feasts such as the Passover Feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, or Pentecost had a stated time of observance. There are also historical testimonies from some early church writers that say that the first century Christians met on the first day of every week to observe the Lord's Supper. One document called "The Didache" written between 65–80 CE and believed to have originated in Syria says that on every Lord's Day Christians "assembled together, break bread and give thanks."¹⁹ There are also quotes from Justin Martyr and other historians that show

¹⁹ Emily K.C. Strand, The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, translated by Charles H. Hoole, Athenaeum of Christian Antiquity, St. Pachomius Orthodox Library, November 1994.
<http://www.saint-mike.org/library/EarlyChurch/Didache/Didache.html>

that this practice of meeting “*on the first day of the week*” continued beyond the apostolic days.

Misconceptions

Many have misunderstood the verses concerning the Lord’s Supper and have wrongfully concluded that it is wrong to have a meal in the church building. During the first century, many of the congregation s met in a person’s private home (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:4–5). If it was acceptable to meet for worship in an “eating house” (homes), then eating in the “meeting house” (church building) following worship would also be acceptable. God authorizes Christians to **meet** for worship. It is simply a matter of judgment as to where the “meeting” is done. The need for a building for the church to meet in (whether rented, bought, or built) is authorized and permitted by the Lord, but not commanded. The word “*church*” (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:18, 22) refers to the people and not the building. Paul left the synagogue and continued his teaching in the house of Justus in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:7). The house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, was located next door to the synagogue. This was one specific place where the church met during the first century.

Paul says, “*Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God . . .*” (1 Corinthians 11:22). Paul asked if they had homes, but this surely does not limit homes as the only place of worship. This statement does not prohibit the church meeting elsewhere. Paul was condemning the manner in which the Christians in Corinth conducted themselves during their Love Feasts and the Lord’s Supper. He was not condemning where they met. The place of the common meal and where they worshiped had nothing to do with despising “*the church of God*.” The carnal nature of the brethren in Corinth showed their insensitive arrogance and gluttony. It also humiliated their own brothers and caused Paul to “*have no praise*” for the brethren in Corinth concerning their observance f the Lord’s Supper.

Proper Observance of the Lord's Supper and the Source of Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 11:23–12:11

Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 11:23, Paul begins to discuss the Lord's Supper and the proper way the Supper ought to be observed. Paul thought it wise to refresh the memories of the Corinthian brethren concerning the events surrounding Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper before His death. Paul had received the historical and spiritual details of the Lord's Supper by revelation from the Lord. The Lord's Supper was, and still is, a simple and solemn observance.

The Lord's Supper Properly Understood

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the

bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions (1 Corinthians 11:23–34).

The Lord's Supper Commemorates Our Covenant — Christ

One of the main points of the Lord's Supper is the covenant aspect. The Lord's Supper is not the covenant. The Lord's Supper commemorates the covenant. Isaiah wrote predicting the suffering that the Messiah would endure as the Suffering Servant. He said:

I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles . . . (Isaiah 42:6; cf. Isaiah 49:8).

When Jesus healed the sick and warned them not to tell who He was, He was fulfilling the prophecy that came from Isaiah 42. When Christians eat the bread and drink the cup, they are remembering that through faith they have appropriated (set aside for a specific use, Ed.) Jesus as their covenant. Jesus' atoning death and His resurrection from the dead are the

covenant. Christians partake of Jesus through the appropriation of His word.

Paul had already told the Corinthian Christians that Christ was their “*Passover lamb*” (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7). Christians keep the Passover feast. They appropriate Christ, His life, and His death into their lives on a daily basis by believing and obeying His word. Jesus taught His disciples that Christians eat His flesh and drink His blood by partaking of His will, His mind, and His heart (cf. John 6:53–65). He was referring to His atoning sacrifice on the cross and giving up Himself for all Christians as the Bread of Life. When Christians partake of the Lord’s actions, disposition, and nature, they assimilate the Lord’s life and His teaching. By partaking of the Lord’s Supper, Christians have fellowship with their Lord.

Paul calls the Lord’s Supper a communion or “*participation in the blood*” and “*the body of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10:16). Christians can participate in the benefits of His body and of His precious blood by properly observing the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is the weekly reminder to Christians that they share in a divine person and not a system of rituals. It involves the actions of eating and drinking, but it is also a participation in the benefits of Jesus, who is the covenant.

The Lord said, “. . . do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25). The word “*remembrance*” involves bringing back into one’s mind the crucifixion scene with renewed appreciation. However, it involves more than that. Paul told the Corinthians in his next letter:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

Christians participate in the life and death of Christ. His sacrifice controls and gives order to the Christian life. If the

Christians in Corinth had understood and practiced this concept, they would not have had a false sense of superiority and indifference toward their brethren. They would have possessed the mind and attitude of Christ just as Paul instructed the Philippians to have (cf. Philippians 2:5–11). Possessing the mind of Christ causes the Christian to consider his brothers in Christ better than himself. This enables the Christian to partake of the Lord's Supper in an appropriate and worthy manner. The Christians in Corinth had not taken their covenant with Jesus into their hearts.

The Elements Involved — Unleavened Bread and Fruit of the Vine

The only kind of bread that was used by the Jews during the Passover Feast was unleavened bread. This would have been the bread that Jesus used when He instituted the Lord's Supper. Unleavened bread brings to mind Jesus' body and His death on the cross. Jesus said, "*This is my body, which is for you . . .*" (1 Corinthians 11:24).

Paul continues by reminding all Christians about the Lord's Supper referring to "*the cup*." The expression "*the cup*" is a figure of speech called a metonymy which means to use one word for another. Jesus used the words "*the cup*" to refer to the **contents** of "*the cup*" rather than just the cup itself. Matthew 26:27–29 says:

*Then he took **the cup**, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my **blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this **fruit of the vine** from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."*

Christians drink "*the cup*" when they drink the fruit of the vine which represents Christ's blood. Peter said that Christians are redeemed by this precious blood (cf. 1 Peter 1:18–19).

Drinking “*the cup*” brings to mind Christ’s blood and a renewed appreciation for what giving His blood for the sins of the lost world cost Him. His sacrifice is held in great honor by the redeemed. What a privilege to partake! What a fellowship all Christians share with Christ each first day of the week!

The Threefold Purpose of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is not merely a remembrance of the past redemptive work of Christ. It is also a proclamation (a declaration or telling forth) of the future redemptive work of Christ and His second coming. The Lord's Supper is an acted-out drama in which each Christian declares to the world that he believes in the death of Christ as a propitiation (atonement — a repayment for a wrong or injury, Ed.) for the sins of the world. The Christian is declaring to the world that Jesus' sacrifice satisfied God's righteousness and justice (cf. 1 John 2:1–2). As Christians eat the bread and drink the cup, they are proclaiming to everyone that there is no other person under heaven who can bring salvation except Jesus (cf. Acts 4:12).

The Lord's Supper serves as a sermon that is acted out by every disciple who participates. It is a sermon that serves as a reminder and a declaration that will continue until Jesus returns. Christians proclaim each Lord's day that Jesus is alive, He has risen from the dead, and He has been elevated to God's right hand as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords (cf. Revelation 1:5). On the day Jesus returns to receive His own, He will deliver the church to God the Father (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:24). Every Christian will be a part of that celebration.

The Fruits of Partaking in an Unworthy Manner

Paul instructs the Corinthian brethren and all Christians to maintain a proper attitude during the observance of the Lord's Supper, “*Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an **unworthy manner** will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 11:27). One purpose of the Lord's Supper is to challenge Christians to

examine their attitudes, their lives, and their relationship to Christ and His body. A person can participate in an unworthy manner by being irreverent and thoughtless. These are things which characterized the church at Corinth when Paul was writing to them. The word “*worthy*” means value, proper, good, and right. Every Christian needs to come to this Supper meal with a serious purpose of remembering the sacrifice of their Lord. He should be consumed with gratitude for his salvation and examine his heart and life in view of the Lord’s return.

Paul is not saying the person is “*unworthy*. ” There is no one who is truly worthy of the Lord’s sacrifice or of participating in the Lord’s Supper. Christ called His followers to come to the table in a worthy, appropriate, and fitting manner of participation. This involves coming in a respectful, grateful, and prayerful manner. If the Christian does not come in a worthy manner, then he is bringing judgment upon himself. Paul said that some of the Corinthians had eaten in an unworthy manner which made them weak and sickly spiritually. Participating in the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner makes a person guilty and liable to judgment from the law of the body and the blood of the Lord. The unworthy partaker is judged guilty as if he had taken part in the crucifixion of the Lord himself.

A “*church*” may appear to be alive and healthy but actually be sick spiritually. Some of the churches that were part of the seven churches in the book of Revelation claimed to be alive, but they were dead (cf. Revelation 2:1–3:22). The church at Laodicea believed that they did not need anything. They were sick and weak spiritually. The Lord wants His church to be spiritually whole. This spiritual wholeness will not occur if a congregation is guilty of partaking of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner.

Spiritual Gifts in the Church

In 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 Paul deals with the source, the nature, the use, and the value of spiritual gifts and exercising these gifts when the whole church came together. Right in the middle of this instructional material on spiritual gifts is the chapter on love. Love was what the church at Corinth desperately needed to be able to glorify God in their lives and to learn how to build one another up spiritually.

The Source of Speaking and Gifts

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1–3).

The way Paul begins this section of scripture makes it appear that the Corinthian Christians had written to him concerning questions they had about the use of and the abuse of spiritual gifts. Paul did not want these Christians to remain ignorant about the use or the purpose of spiritual gifts. This passage gives the insight that most of the disciples at Corinth had been converted from Gentile or Jewish paganism which was prevalent in the unbelieving culture of the first century world. During this period of time, emperor worship was being forced on the people. They had pagan priests who claimed to have “spirits” directing them in their work. Paul says that no one who undermines the lordship of Christ is from God. Jesus said that as the Spirit came upon the Apostles He would guide them into all truth and that the Spirit’s teaching would glorify and magnify the Lord (cf. John 14:15–21; 16:12–15; Acts 2:1–4). No one can magnify the Lord without getting his

material from the Spirit's message. The expression "*by the Holy Spirit*" (found in 1 Corinthians 12:3, 9, 13) means to be under the guidance, teaching, or influence of the Spirit's will.

The Source and Variety of Spiritual Gifts

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines (1 Corinthians 12:4–11).

Paul says there were different gifts, but all the gifts had the same Spirit as their source. All the gifts magnified, honored, and served the same Lord. The different gifts allowed for different kinds of service, but the service was offered to the same Lord. The word "*service*" indicates the purpose for which the gifts had been given. Different gifts worked in different ways, but it was God the Father who worked through each gift in all men. God the Father used these first century gifts to accomplish His work and His will among the people. The gifts were all to be used for the common good of everyone rather than for just the person who possessed the gift. The gifts were not given for personal pleasure or pride. Since the gifts were used to serve Jesus, they did not need to be coveted or despised by others.

Luke recorded an account about a man named Simon (cf. Acts 8:18–24) who was a sorcerer before his conversion to Christ. After he became a follower of the Lord, he wanted to be able to bestow spiritual gifts on others for the purpose of making money. Peter told him that his heart was not right with God because he had an evil intent. Simon wanted the gift for his own personal benefit and glory.

The Source and Types of Gifts

These spiritual gifts were given during the first century through the laying on of the Apostles' hands. The different kinds of gifts were:

- ◆ **Wisdom** — the supernatural power to reveal Christian principles and the application of gospel truths.
- ◆ **Knowledge** — the supernatural guidance in knowing the facts of the gospel of Christ.
- ◆ **Faith** — the gift which enabled those who were empowered by the Spirit to move mountains (not literally). Paul referred to this kind of faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:2 and Romans 12:6) which was used with the gift of prophesy in proportion to the faith they possessed. This was more than the “*common faith*” (Titus 1:4) and more than “. . . *faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17). This gift of faith was used to accomplish the impossible that could not be done without the assistance of such faith.
- ◆ **Healing** — the gift of supernatural power which enabled certain individuals like the Apostles to cure illnesses and diseases (cf. Acts 5:15–16).
- ◆ **Miraculous powers** — a gift that was used more to bring about judgment than to show mercy which was involved in using the gift of healing. This may have been the gift Paul used to strike Elymus blind as an act of judgment from God (cf. Acts 13:8–12). Peter and the other Apostles may

have used this gift upon Ananias and Sapphira as an expression of God's judgment (cf. Acts 5:1–11).

- ◆ **Prophecy** — the gift to speak forth the mind and the will of God by inspiration. This gift had to do with utterance under divine guidance. Peter said:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

There were no uninspired prophets of God. Agabus is the first New Testament prophet written about after the church was established. He came to Antioch of Syria from Jerusalem to speak for the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 11:28; 21:10–11).

- ◆ **Distinguishing between spirits** — the gift to discern between the true and false spirits. Until all the message was committed to a written document (the New Testament), there was no objective test available to discern between the prophets who spoke for God and those who were pretenders. The apostle John said, “*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1). The people with this gift were people who could easily detect whether or not a man was speaking the mind and the will of God or was a false prophet.
- ◆ **Speaking in different kinds of tongues** — the gift that enabled people to speak in a human foreign language. The first time this gift was practiced, according to New Testament records, was on the day of Pentecost when the Apostles spoke in every language and dialect that was represented on that occasion (cf. Acts 2:1–13). Those from

foreign lands did not need an interpreter because they heard each of the Apostles speak in their own language. This ability came through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There was no effort or learning process involved as is required today to speak a foreign tongue. The Spirit immediately gave the Apostles the ability and the gift to speak in the dialects of other people in the first century.

- ◆ **Interpretation of tongues** — the gift of interpretation of tongues. The word interpretation is from the original language *hermeneia*. The word hermeneutics is the science of interpreting or explaining the scripture. When a person exercised the gift of speaking in tongues in an assembly, there had to be an interpreter who could explain the song or prayer that had been spoken. Paul talked about this later when he compared prophesying and speaking in tongues (cf. 1 Corinthians 14). The one who was speaking was required to edify the assembly, which meant the church needed to understand what was being said.

It is very important to understand the whole context of this passage. These miraculous gifts were distributed according to the sovereign will and choice of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:11). The writer of Hebrews affirmed this same truth when he said, “*God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will*” (Hebrews 2:4). The Spirit directly bestowed gifts on the day of Pentecost to the Apostles. The Spirit directly gave Cornelius and his household the gift of tongues (cf. Acts 10:45-46). All the other references in the study of this topic in the New Testament show that the Spirit gave gifts through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles (cf. Acts 6:8; 19; 2 Timothy 1:6). The Holy Spirit determined who should receive each gift.

This passage of Scripture is proof of the personality of the Holy Spirit since a mere force or influence could not **determine**

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to give such gifts. Modern religious groups who have not understood this context and the design and cessation of spiritual gifts teach that today there are God-given gifts based on the recipient's faith and desire. This passage clearly teaches that these gifts were given exclusively according to God's purpose and according to the will of the Holy Spirit.

Being of One Body Motivated by Love

1 Corinthians 12:12–13:3

Introduction

Scripture records Paul's presentation concerning the body of Christ, the church of Jesus Christ, as he presented it to the Corinthian brethren in 1 Corinthians 12:12–30. In these passages he compares the church to the physical body. Paul began by telling the Corinthians how to get into the body of Christ. He explains the necessary relationship that needs to be sustained toward one another. Paul continues to emphasize that anyone who contributes to tearing apart the oneness of the body of Christ is in danger of losing his fellowship with Jesus. There is one body, and everything fits together for the benefit of the body in God's plan. He says Christians are all a part of one body, so the brethren need to quit boasting about their gifts and bemoaning the fact that they do not have the same gift as someone else within the body. The church really is similar to the human body in that each part and everyone is vital and important as a member of the one body.

Jesus prayed for oneness of mind, love, and purpose for His disciples right before He went to the cross (cf. John 17). Jesus knew that the world would never believe the Father had sent Him to bring salvation if His disciples — the men and women who make up the spiritual body of Christ — did not serve Him in unity. Jesus prayed:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20–21).

The Need for Diversity in One Body

The Unity of the Body and Many Parts Though Only One Body

*The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ (this reference is to Christ's body). For we were all baptized **by one Spirit** into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).*

Just as the human body must have all its parts functioning together and properly in order for the body to be healthy and doing its work, so it is with Christ's body. The Corinthians were not initially immersed **in** the Spirit but **by** the revealed will and command of the Spirit. Their initial immersion was **in water** in obedience to the apostolic teaching. Paul preached “. . . Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2) in the city of Corinth. Luke recorded Paul’s preaching in Corinth by saying, “. . . Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. . . . and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:5b, 8b). Paul is saying that by one Spirit (through the Spirit’s message) those who are baptized are led to be immersed into Christ for the remission of sins.

Later some of the brethren in Corinth received the Spirit to empower them with gifts through the laying on of Paul’s hands.

The giving of miraculous gifts is not the event Paul was talking about in these verses when he talked about being baptized by one Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12–13). That is a totally different study. The fulfillment of Jesus sending forth the Spirit into the world or the baptizing **with** the Spirit occurred at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1–4). After the Spirit was sent, He empowered the Apostles, and they “*began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enable them*” Acts 2:4). When Paul said, “*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — . . .*” (1 Corinthians 12:13), he included himself saying all Jews, Greeks, slaves, and free who had been immersed into water in obedience to the revealed will of the one Spirit received the same Spirit. Each one who is immersed into water “*is born of water and the Spirit*” and becomes a member of Christ’s body (cf. John 3:3–5).

Each member of Christ’s body is equally important. Each member of Christ’s body has been made to drink of one Spirit and it is the same Spirit for every member. The phrase “. . . *we were all given the one Spirit to drink*” (1 Corinthians 12:13) is a metaphor in which the Spirit is compared to water. When Jesus predicted the coming of the Spirit (cf. John 7:37–39), He talked about people being thirsty and coming to Him for a drink of “*living water.*” He was talking about the Spirit that those who believed in Him would receive. At this time, the Spirit had not yet been given and the Lord had not yet been glorified. In that context, Jesus used a figurative expression referring to His disciples receiving an indwelling Spirit at baptism. This indwelling Spirit is received by every Christian at the point of the new birth that happens at baptism (cf. Acts 2:38).

Harmony of the Body

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say,

“Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it (1 Corinthians 12:14–26).

Paul refers to each disciple as a member of the body. He uses the physical human body to illustrate God’s wisdom of diversity. Every organism consists of more than one member. No one member can supply everything the entire body requires to function properly. Every organism requires the proper function of every member so that the whole body can function properly. The human body could not function as it does if every part of it was an eye or an ear. That would create a 220 pound eyeball. The body would malfunction and die. God does not require uniformity, but each member does contribute to the unity and the proper function of the body. Every member cannot have the same function. Some members function in a

more open or public way than others and may appear to be more important than others, but this is not so. If all of the Corinthians had received the gift of tongues, it would have been impossible to carry out all the functions the Lord had planned for the church in Corinth to accomplish. It would have been a very unstable body of Christians.

The Spirit had given each gift as He had willed and had arranged the members of the body as He had chosen. By complaining about their gifts and trying to rearrange the priorities of the members, the church was in rebellion to God. The various gifts had not been given to hinder the body, but to build it up. The body could not function without all of its members. Some members were thinking they might be hindering the body's functions in the use and abuse of spiritual gifts. Paul said there must not be discord in the body over diversity. Diversity had been arranged by God. Every member needed to show equal, genuine concern for one another (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:25). What one member lacked, the other supplied. Where one member could not function, another member could.

There are **three lessons** that need to be understood from this passage of scripture. **First**, every part of the physical body is important. The members of the church need each other. Members of the church cannot subsist and grow spiritually in the body of Christ without each other's prayers, encouragement, and help. **Second**, members of the church need to respect each other. **Third**, members of the church must sympathize with one another.

God has mingled together parts of the body in such a way that no organ can be considered inferior, useless, or not needed. Those parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable. Just as the physical body does not have any unnecessary parts, the same thing is true concerning the spiritual body of Christ. An arm, eyeball, or a finger are all necessary parts of the body. There can be no such thing as isolation in the church of the Lord.

There is a singleness in the diversity of the church. Each member is a part of the body of Christ. God designed and brought into existence the church to function to His glory. God appointed a variety of functions in the church to produce unity of purpose and practice. The church must not attempt to place all its members into one mold of functioning. The church functions in one accord as one mind and body when each member respects, honors, and obeys the Head. Even though there is diversity, the church is able to function in unity of action, mutual sympathy, and with respect for each other.

God's Appointments in the Church

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:27–31).

Notice that **first** God appointed the Apostles in rank and authority. When the Apostles spoke in the Spirit, they spoke the very words of God. **Second**, God appointed prophets. This included men such as Mark, Luke, James, and Jude, who were New Testament prophets. These men were used by God to make His will known by writing books in the New Testament. Paul told the Ephesians that the Word of God “... has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:5b). **Third**, Paul referred to teachers. Luke mentioned teachers in the church at Antioch in Syria, “In the church at Antioch there

were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon . . . and Saul" (Acts 13:1). These were men and women who used the messages that had been revealed by the Apostles and prophets to build up and teach by conveying the apostolic message to others for the building up of the church.

Fourth, Paul said, "*. . . then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing . . .*" (1 Corinthians 12:28). These gifts were the signs and wonders that were used by the disciples as they "*. . . went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it*" (Mark 16:20; cf. Hebrews 2:2–4). **Fifth**, Paul mentioned "*. . . those able to help others . . .*" (1 Corinthians 12:28). This phrase probably referred to the special servants of the church who were the ministers and servants that were sometimes called "*deacons*" (cf. 1 Timothy 3:12). Every member of the church should be classified as a servant of the Lord and one who helps, but there was also a special office for the men who became public servants of the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 6:1–4).

Sixth, when Paul referred to "*. . . those with the gifts of administration . . .*" (1 Corinthians 12:28), he was probably referring to the overseers or the elders of each church. Acts 20:28 shows that the elders or overseers had been appointed by the Holy Spirit. The words used for this position meant one who had been charged with the duty of seeing that the things which were done in the church were done correctly. These men had the gift of administration. Their function was to see that the church was able to function. This same word was used in the first century to describe a ship's pilot who was assigned to steer the ship in the appropriate way.

We went to Africa on an old freighter and came back on an ocean liner. Every time the ship would get to the next port, the ship's crew would weigh anchor and wait for a small vessel to come out. The port pilot would board the ship to guide it safely into port. What a beautiful picture of the gift of administration. The man who served as a port pilot knew where all the rocks,

shoals, and the hidden reefs were that might sink a ship. The port pilot had the skill and ability to bring the ship safely into port. The nature and the work of the spiritual overseers of the body of Christ are that kind of work. They must be men who know where all the spiritual rocks, shoals, and the hidden reefs are that might harm the church.

Paul asked a number of questions beginning in 1 Corinthians 12:29. The response he wanted to each question was “No!” God did not intend for every Christian to be an apostle or a prophet. He did not intend for every person to have the same gifts. This would be like a physical body that consisted of a 220 pound eye. The lesson from this context is that every member must accept his place in the church and perform his work according to the ability God has given him. This is the only way the body of Christ can function smoothly and effectively as one body.

Paul introduced the great chapter of love by telling the Corinthians they needed to desire the greater gifts. He said, *“But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way”* (1 Corinthians 12:31). What a helpful way to introduce this important concept. In the first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul discusses the important significance of love. Then he defines and explains love (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4–7), and finally he proves that love lasts forever (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8–13). Paul said that they might not have a special gift from the Spirit, but each of them could follow the most excellent way toward unity and building up the body of Christ. The spiritual gifts that Paul listed were only temporary in nature, but love, as the greatest of all things, will last forever.

The Value and Necessity of Love

The Value of Love in the Body

And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have

not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:3).

Paul was telling the Corinthians that he was going to show them the best way of all. By choosing this way, they could go beyond and surpass any other way even to an excess. He wanted them to see a way to unity and yet diversity among all these gifts. Paul was talking about the way of love. Love surpasses all other ways.

The way of love is the *agape* way. God is an *agape* kind of loving God. There are **four words** in the Greek language that have been translated “love:”

Storge — This Greek word means to have an affection for someone. It is a family type of love. This word does not appear anywhere in the New Testament.

Phileo — This Greek word means a friendship type of love (cf. John 21:15–17). It is the brotherly type of love that the English word “Philadelphia” comes from.

Eros — This Greek word is used to describe the passion in the sexual union of a husband and wife. This word is not used in the New Testament.

Agape — This Greek word means to have a self-sacrificing kind of love. This kind of love involves self-denial. It involves the kind of love God has for His creation. This is the Greek word Paul used when he told the Corinthians he would show them a more excellent way.

The *agape* kind of God-like love was motivated by the Lord Himself and by the Son of God, Christ Jesus. The Apostle John said:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. . . . since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. . . . And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:10–12; 16–19).

God demonstrated this kind of love in the gift of His Son. We demonstrate a God-like love by loving each other.

God created man with a will, emotions, and intellect so that man would have the ability to love the way God loves. The choice to love the way God loves is a deliberate choice of one's will. It involves every aspect of a man's being. Caring about another person is an obsession. It is a love that by action deliberately chooses the object to be loved. Through all circumstances or even in spite of all circumstances, an *agape* love goes on loving every day no matter what. C.S. Lewis commented on this kind of love in his book, The Furlough. He said it is the kind of love in man which enables man to love that which is not naturally loveable.

Jesus loved those people who were not naturally loveable: lepers, criminals, enemies, people who were lacking in mental capabilities, the sulking, the superiors, and the sneering. Since

the will is involved, it demands complete self denial. This *agape* love is the word Jesus used when he said, “*But I tell you: Love your enemies . . .*” (Matthew 5:44). This kind of love does not look at the worthiness or the unworthiness of the one who is being loved. This is the kind of love that Christ showed for His followers. Paul said, “*Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son . . .*” (Romans 5:9–10).

It seems the Corinthians were evaluating spirituality on the value of spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Corinthians 12) rather than looking at the spirituality that a Christ-like person possessed. Paul assured the Corinthians that even if someone in the first century had the supernatural power to speak in the language of angels, predict the future, understand all things, or possessed the faith that could move mountains (this phrase is a proverbial expression that meant they could do what seemed to be impossible), and if he gave away all his earthly goods, or even became a martyr, but did not have love and did not do all of these things because of his love, then it would all be worth nothing. Paul said it would be as if he was just a noisy instrument. Someone who could speak in tongues might attract attention, but without love that person was a hollow voice. The people who used their spiritual gifts without love were worth nothing, because only love truly speaks to a person’s heart.

There are many sources that confirm the fact that having knowledge alone does not excuse or justify the absence of love. Paul was saying that even if he himself possessed all of these gifts and had full knowledge and perfect revelation, but he did not have love, he would be nothing. Paul used the Greek word *kumbalon*, which referred to something that was hollow. A person without a God-like love — *agape* — is of no use in this world. This kind of person is actually useless in glorifying God. Love is one thing that all men can understand. It is in love that Christians glorify God.

God-like Love

1 Corinthians 13:4–10

Introduction

Paul talked to the Corinthians about the use and abuse of spiritual gifts before he told them love was the one thing that all men could understand. Paul himself had both knowledge and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, but he assured the church at Corinth that those things meant nothing unless he had the God-like love that was “*. . . the most excellent way*” (1 Corinthians 12:31b).

Love Defined and Explained

Love’s Properties

Paul wanted the church in Corinth to know everything about God-like love, *agape*, so he gave them a list of the properties of the kind of love that was like God’s love. This is the kind of love all Christians need to glorify God. Paul says:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4–8a).

This kind of love has the power to restrain an individual from doing evil. In this short passage, Paul lists fourteen different properties of a God-like love. Notice the characteristics of *agape*:

- 1. Love is patient.** Love waits and suffers with others without giving in to anger and resentment. Love does not give up. Love shows concern day by day. Love causes the person to hold back any actions of intolerance or temper. This kind of love does not ignore another person. This kind of love is a mental action involving the mind.
- 2. Love is kind.** Love is serviceable and good. It is useful. A person with this kind of love gives gracious service to others. This characteristic of love involves action and giving. This is the kind of love God showed; "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son . . .*" (John 3:16a).
- 3. Love does not envy.** Love is not jealous. It rejoices when others have success. Envy not only involves desiring what others have, it becomes upset and jealous of the good that comes to others. Love does not do that.
- 4. Love does not boast; it is not proud.** Love does not call attention to itself. In classical Greek one who boasts is an arrogant person or one who talks too much. It refers to one who talks a lot and acts overbearingly confident. It reflects one who shows off or makes a parade for himself. Love that is not proud shows humility instead of pride. The King James Version says, ". . . is not puffed up" (1 Corinthians 13:4). This means that love is not puffed up like a bellows that is used to blow air onto a fire.
- 5. Love is not rude.** Love is never impolite. Love is tactful, sensitive, and discreet. Love does not behave itself in any manner that is shameful or insulting. Love

is courteous, polite, and respectful without compromising truth. Some Christians think being loyal and truthful means one must ask blunt questions and answer candidly without any charming ways. Paul said that love makes it possible to be right with the Lord without being rude.

6. Love is not self-seeking. Love does not demand its own way. Love is willing to sacrifice its own interests for the interests of others. This kind of love is unselfish.

7. Love is not easily angered. Love is not continually irritated with others. Love is not easily upset. The Greek word that is used in this instance means a convulsion of emotion that is caused by an intense sharpening. Love never flies into a fit of temper. Love is angry with the sin, but it does not become angered with the sinner.

8. Love keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not register the evil. This Greek phrase (present middle tense) means to give credit or to keep a record on someone's account. Love does not keep an account ledger of the wrong that is done. Love enables the Christian to keep a record of the kindness that is done and forget the wrongs. Love does not record the wrong.

9. Love does not delight in evil. Love does not expose the weaknesses and sins of others. Love does not boast about another man's sin. The Christian is to reprove and rebuke, but he must also encourage, use patience, and careful instruction (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2). Love will do everything possible to help the soul in sin to escape sin rather than delight in it. Peter said, "*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins*" (1 Peter 4:8).

10. Love rejoices in the truth. Love not only demands and is brave enough to face the truth, it delights in the truth. Love does nothing to conceal the

truth, but takes pleasure in hearing the truth. Love uses the truth to build up, but never to tear down.

11. Love always protects. Love will preserve by keeping away anything that threatens. Love prefers to be the protector rather than the attacker.

12. Love always trusts. Love is a discerner of the truth, but it is not suspicious. It attempts to see the best motives and to see the best in others. Love takes people at their word and believes in their reliability as long as possible, and then it grieves over those in sin.

13. Love always hopes. Love enables the Christian not to despair. There is always hope when love is involved. Hope involves the expectation of better things.

14. Love always perseveres. Love never fails. Love has the spirit that conquers whatever it must face — trials, pressures, and setbacks in life. The original Greek word means to bear up under or to never give up. There is an endurance factor. Love makes a continuous effort. The King James Version says, “...endureth all things. . . . never faileth . . .” (1 Corinthians 13:7–8). This kind of love never fails, is never ineffective, and never powerless. It is a love that will never come to an end.

The Permanence of God-Like Love

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to

face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:8–13).

Paul said the God-like kind of love is supreme above all else. It is a love that is going to last throughout eternity. *Agape* love is a forever kind of love. Paul says prophecies and tongues (which are some of the miraculous gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12) were only temporary. They were partial and imperfect elements that would one day pass away. A miracle was an event that occurred in the natural world, observed by the natural senses as something that was produced by divine power without any human or natural cause. The purpose of miracles was to reveal the perfect will of God for the benefit of man. The signs and wonders that the Apostles and disciples were able to perform were to confirm the Word of God (cf. Mark 16:15–20; Hebrew 2:2–4).

In the first century, a miracle was something performed by the Lord, His Apostles, or someone who had been empowered by the Holy Spirit with the laying on of the Apostles' hands. It was something that happened that transcended all the laws of nature. During the apostolic period, miracles were never intended to be universal. They were limited to those who had received miraculous gifts from the Holy Spirit. They were never used to simply relieve pain and suffering or to prolong life. They were used for a specific purpose. It is important to understand the design, purpose, nature, and duration of miraculous gifts.

Jesus said, “*Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist . . .*” (Matthew 11:11), but John did not perform miracles (cf. John 10:41), and he was not miraculously delivered from prison. The Lord had the power to heal everyone and raise the dead, but He did not always do that. Paul had the empowering gift of the Spirit, but he left Trophimus in Miletus because he was sick (cf. 2

Timothy 4:20). Even though Paul knew that Timothy had stomach problems and was frequently ill, he did not heal Timothy (cf. 1 Timothy 5:23). Those who were healed still had to die physically later on. Everyone who had been raised from the dead once still had to face death a second time.

Paul said,

... where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears” (1 Corinthians 13:8–10).

The words Paul used declared that the miraculous gifts of the first century would be temporary. Paul used words that plainly meant to abolish, to reduce to inactivity, to stop, and to come to an end. These were strong, definite words that foretold the cessation of miraculous gifts.

God gave miraculous gifts to the disciples during the first century —

to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12–13).

In that context, Paul was telling the Ephesians that miraculous gifts were for the ministry of edification and to unify both the Jews and Gentiles into one body, the church. It is obvious that Paul saw the need in Corinth for the brethren to mature and grow (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:20). One of the major problems for the church in the first century was the fact that many of the Jews who had become believers had a hard time accepting that Jews and Gentiles were acceptable before God on the same terms. Everyone who came to Christ came in faith

without the Law of Moses. God used miracles to announce and confirm His message (cf. Hebrew 2:2–4).

After God's judgment upon Judaism when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, miracles were not as necessary to confirm the gospel. Once the apostolic teachings had been verified, recorded, and developed into the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, there was no longer any need for miracles. It is important to read the accounts of all the miracles recorded in the New Testament: "*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:31). John said that Jesus did many things that were not recorded, but the reason the Bible contains what it does is so that everyone might believe. A person must understand the nature and purpose of miraculous gifts if he is to understand why and when they ceased to exist near the end of the first century. People in the first century received the Spirit to empower them through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles. In conjunction with their purpose, miracles ceased after the generation of believers who had received their gifts through the Apostles hands had died. There is no divine direction to perpetuate miracles beyond the days of the Apostles.

Paul said that miraculous gifts were imperfect and temporary. The time period in which miraculous gifts were partial (cf. "*in part,*" [1 Corinthians 13:9]) was during the first century, when miraculous gifts were functioning. Paul wrote by inspiration so there is no reason to question the quality of this truth. Jesus said that it was necessary for a person to know the truth before he could be made free from sin (cf. John 8:32). Three thousand souls were set free from sin on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:38–41), but the complete truth was not revealed in Christ's personal ministry.

Jesus promised:

*But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you
(the Apostles) into all truth. He will not speak on his*

own; . . . He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you (John 16:13–14).

The written Word of God is the truth in all its parts. It contains the full truth concerning the Gentiles, the Law, and the Gospel, which was not revealed before the conversion of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10). The Old Testament and Jesus Christ prophesied about bringing in other “sheep” (cf. John 10:16), referring to the Gentiles, but the truth, in all of its parts, was not written and recorded until the end of the first century.

Many scholars believe that in these passages in 1 Corinthians, Paul was discussing the complete written revelation which came toward the end of the first century. They believe that Paul was referring to the nature, the purpose, and the duration of the “gift stage” of the church when partial revelations were being made. Miraculous gifts were never an end within themselves. When the purpose of miraculous gifts had been completed by revealing and confirming all the truth, the gifts ceased to exist. If miraculous gifts still existed today, the church would be able to trace these gifts from today all the way back to the first century. This cannot be done.

The Perfection of Love

*But when **perfection** comes (The King James Version translates it: “**But when that which is perfect is come**”), the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Corinthians 13:10–12).*

The word “**perfection**” refers to something having reached completion or totality. Something that is “perfect” is full grown

and mature because it has reached its full development. The original Greek word for “***that which is perfect***” is neutral in gender, which means that it would not be referring to the second coming of Christ. “*That which is perfect*” does not grammatically or contextually refer to a person. It refers to “something” and not “someone.” Christ and His second coming are not referred to at all in this text. The phrase “*that which is perfect*” refers to the end of a process or development of something. This phrase is never used in the New Testament to depict the second coming of the Lord. The second coming of the Lord is not going to be a process. It will be an instantaneous event.

When perfection comes, the imperfect will disappear. When that which **was** “partial” has been completed, then the “partial” will cease because it is no longer “partial” — it has become perfect, whole, and total. There was a process occurring, and once totality had been reached, then the process was no longer needed. Love had something to do with the process that was going on, but love was not the “imperfect.” Paul said, “*Love never fails. . . . And now these three remain: faith hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love . . .*” (1 Corinthians 13:8, 13; 14:1).

Look closely at the context of 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. Paul discussed the different gifts and the varieties of gifts that were given by the Spirit. These gifts were not given to isolate the people in the church from each other. The gifts had been given to make the members of the church dependent upon one another and to be used to build up and edify the church. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about these matters because some of the members were impatient and irritable about the fact that they did not have what they considered to be the most important gifts. Other members believed themselves to be superior simply because they did have what they thought were the most important gifts. The church at Corinth needed to “grow up.” They were jealous, covetous, arrogant, and selfish. They were not using their gifts to help the body of Christ grow. They

were not using their gifts for edification and strength. There was even a problem with members who felt superior during the worship assembly. The speakers had to be regulated when the whole church came together so that others would have the chance to speak (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:29–33).

Paul wanted the church in Corinth to put the gifts in their proper perspective. Gifts were being lovelessly pursued, lovelessly possessed, and lovelessly exercised. He wanted the gifts to be used for the purpose for which they had been given. Paul wanted the whole church to be edified, so he wrote to them and said, “. . . *And now I will show you the most excellent way*” (1 Corinthians 12:31). The “*most excellent way*” is the way of love. He stresses the unparalleled character of love by showing what the absence of love would mean to someone. The Christian who possessed a full measure of revelation and a full quota of knowledge was still nothing unless he also possessed God-like love.

Paul stressed the supremacy of love, what love is, and what love is not. Love in its endlessly abiding nature has the power to make all things complete. Love **is** everlasting. Miracles and gifts were meant to last for only a certain period of time. Love is supreme and has an eternal place in God’s scheme of things.

Spiritual Maturity Through Love Is Better than Speaking in Tongues

1 Corinthians 13:9–14:19

Introduction

There is an extended discussion in 1 Corinthians 14 about the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy. Paul contrasted the use of prophecy and tongues in relation to how these two gifts could bring about congregational edification when the whole church came together. He specifically mentioned the edification of others eight times in the first twenty-five verses of this chapter and implied an edification factor five times. The first twenty-five verses were written to confirm the building up of the church through edification by making the point that tongues are inferior to prophecy in an assembly situation. After he had contrasted prophecy and tongues, Paul discussed the fact that every member should be permitted to make his own contribution to congregational edification. Loving consideration of others would solve any problem that revolved around gifts and the exercising of those gifts. The problems at Corinth were not because of a lack of knowledge or the lack of gifts (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:4–9). It seems that the Corinthians knew from these gifts some things about the Lord but didn't really know God.

Love Creates Perfection in Believers

The Transitory Nature of Miraculous Gifts

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:8–13).

What did Paul mean when he said, “*For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears*”? Was Paul talking about the gifts being “*in part*” or the knowledge the Corinthians were gaining from having the gifts as being “*in part*”? The Corinthians had a personal appropriation of knowledge and information which came to them through miraculous gifts (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:8). The context of the passage in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 clearly explains that miraculous gifts were to cease. It also conveys the concept that an imperfect knowledge would pass away.

Spiritual Immaturity Limits Understanding

Imperfect knowledge is portrayed in this text as the knowledge that a child might have. A child thinks, talks, and reasons differently than a man does. When a child becomes a man, he no longer thinks, talks and reasons like a child. A man

is fully developed and his knowledge, thinking, talking, and reasoning also become complete or perfect.

Immaturity Causes Spiritual Blindness

The change from child to man is illustrated by contrasting an example of being able to look in a mirror that only gives a partial or poor reflection (the first century mirrors would not have given a clear reflection like present day mirrors) with looking at something or someone face to face. The “*child*” and the “*poor reflection*” are all “*in part*” and “*imperfect*. ” The “*man*” and the “*face to face*” encounter are portrayed as “*fully known*” and “*perfection*. ” The things which are partial are contrasted to the things which are whole.

Total knowledge and revelation still count as nothing without love. Suppose that a Christian in today’s world memorizes and thoroughly understands everything that is written in the Word of God. If he does not have full maturity in terms of a God-like love, he still only has a partial knowledge of God. He may know all the facts about God, but he can not know the heart of God unless he possesses a God-like love. Paul says that knowledge puffs up while love builds up (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:1–2). God-like love joined with knowledge and spiritual gifts would enable the members of the church at Corinth to edify one another.

The gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge were essential for the growth of the church in Corinth, but without a God-like love for each other they would remain imperfect. They would remain as children at that particular time if they did not learn to love one another. Paul said that perfection, maturity, and wholeness would arrive and the childish, immature speaking and knowledge would be gone when they possessed God-like love. Paul did not exclude himself from this need for growth. Paul graciously included himself with the brethren he was writing to in Corinth. He said: “*When I was a child . . . when I became . . . Now I know . . . even as I am fully known*” (1 Corinthians 13:11–12).

Paul described two different ways of knowing and seeing. At that time, the church in Corinth had very poor sight. It was like a puzzling reflection in a mirror. Looking in a brass-type mirror did not give a clearly reflected image. If a person had appeared behind a Christian looking in a mirror, the Christian would have seen a very poor image of the person behind him compared to what he would have seen when he turned around to face the other person face to face. This illustration works best when we keep in mind that the mirrors that Paul was talking about in the first century in no way compare to the mirrors available today. Once the Christian was able to have a face to face impression of the other person, there was no longer any need to look at the image in the mirror. During the first century, knowledge and communication regarding the nature of the law, the disposition and attitude of the Lord, and knowledge of the Lord's will toward them was very shallow and partial. When love was added to their knowledge, they would be able to become whole.

The apostle John wrote to brethren who exalted knowledge in his epistles. He said:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 John 4:7–8).

The Corinthian brethren knew some things about the Lord, but they did not really know God. By the time Jude wrote his short epistle, the substance of Christian doctrine had been delivered, and he was able to write: “. . . I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). During the time of the Apostles, Christians could turn to the Apostles for the truth. As long as the Apostles were alive, Christians could talk to an inspired apostle and have access to all truth. The early church

was equipped with Apostles and prophets who had been given the message of truth by revelation (cf. Ephesians 3:2–6). After the New Testament was written, men could turn to the text of the written Word and have access to all truth. This is the same truth that is available today in the written Word — the Bible.

The Power and Permanence of Faith, Hope, and Love

There is nothing temporary about love because it never loses its strength. Faith possesses the past by giving a conviction of things that have not been seen. Hope claims the future and looks beyond to the glory that is not yet realized. Love is the final goal — **the end** — that God has for everyone. Faith and hope are elements that help God’s children reach **the end**. Paul was not saying that faith and hope will some day cease. Love is the “**the most excellent way**,” because it is the very essence and nature of God the Father (cf. 1 John 4:16). For this reason it is important to continue to study and re-study this chapter on love. Study and more study produces more and more appreciation of love and its significance in the Christian walk.

The Superiority of Prophecy in the Assembly

The Character and Purpose of Prophecy

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is

greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified (1 Corinthians 14:1–5).

At this point, Paul discussed the greater gift of prophecy when the whole church was assembled. He wanted the church in Corinth to understand the design and purpose of all the spiritual gifts and how to exercise their gifts in the early church, but he was especially concerned that they understand the gift of prophecy. The Christian who spoke in tongues could not be understood unless he could also interpret what he had said or there was an interpreter with him. He only edified himself. The Christian who prophesied spoke directly to men rather than speaking to God and was able to strengthen, encourage, and comfort others. He edified the whole church. Paul told them that he would choose for them to have the gift of prophecy.

Prophecy was the greater gift because with it the Christian could edify the whole church. Paul said:

So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? (1 Corinthians 14:23).

This is a key verse in understanding 1 Corinthians 14. As Paul discussed the spiritual gifts, he was speaking of these gifts in relation to the worship assembly at a time when the whole church was gathered. The church had assembled as a group of men and women gathered for the purpose of worshiping God in acts of reverence and praise.

The Goal of Christian Endeavor

Paul told the church in Corinth to eagerly follow the way of love. This would enable them to know God face to face and to build up their fellow disciples. Love did not prevent someone

from wanting spiritual gifts; it only purified the motive behind the desire and the use of the gifts in a proper way. Love enabled the use of spiritual gifts to have the complete result in the early church. Love and gifts in the apostolic church were not competitors when used to glorify God.

The Nature and Purpose of Tongues

The Christian who had received the gift of tongues spoke toward God rather than toward men. Luke recorded the first use of the gift of tongues which occurred on the day of Pentecost. The people were utterly amazed and said, “*We hear them (each of the Apostles) declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!*” (Acts 2:11b). Luke also wrote about the Gentile household of Cornelius receiving the gift of tongues: “*For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God*” (Acts 10:46). Peter and some of the Jewish brethren from Joppa heard Cornelius and his family praising and magnifying God in their own language. Cornelius and his family would have normally spoken in the Greek language. Peter and the other men would have been speaking Hebrew since they were Jews, yet they understood that these Gentiles were praising God.

The gift of tongues was the ability that the Spirit had given each one of these people to speak in a language that was not their own. It was a gift that miraculously provided the person with the ability to speak different but exact languages or dialects. The English word “dialect” comes from the Greek word from “*language*” (cf. Acts 2:6). The gift of tongues was an exact language that was unknown to the speaker. On the day of Pentecost there was no need for an interpreter because the text says that the Apostles spoke so that each one heard his own native language (cf. Acts 2:8). The audience was made up of many nationalities “...from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). In Corinth only one language was spoken — Greek was the language of the people. Paul said that when someone with the gift of tongues spoke in the church at Corinth an interpreter

was needed. This indicates that the one who was speaking in tongues as well as those listening did not understand what he was saying. The gift of interpretation was also listed by Paul as one of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:10).

Source and Benefits of Prophecy

Prophets spoke to men under the divine guidance of the Spirit to strengthen, encourage, and comfort (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:3). Prophecy was a gift more suitable for use in the worship assembly than tongues, even though in the minds of the Corinthians, tongues received a special place. Prophecy is defined as speaking forth the will of God by inspiration. It was a divine utterance under divine guidance. The apostle Peter said:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

Prophecy had a three-fold function. **First**, it was for “strengthening.” Paul talked about building up the church or the edification of the church. The word “edification” denotes the action of building a home upon a foundation. It is used figuratively in the New Testament to show the promotion of spiritual growth and support. **Second**, prophecy was for “encouragement.” This is also translated as “exhortation.” The Greek word is a combination of two words that mean calling someone to stand beside for the purpose of persuading, encouraging, and supporting. Everyone needs to be encouraged at some point. Elijah fled to the desert, but the LORD himself came and spoke with him (cf. 1 Kings 19:1–18). In the New Testament, Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, was called

“*Barnabas*” by the Apostles. His name meant “son of Encouragement” (cf. Acts 4:36). Encouragement was obviously his gift and something that was needed in the work of the church in Jerusalem. **Third**, prophesy was given for “comfort.” The word “comfort” means to console with a great degree of tenderness by speaking closely to someone.

The Limitation of Speaking in Tongues

There were two purposes for the gift of speaking in tongues in the first century. Paul said that he wished every one of the Christians in Corinth spoke in tongues, but they obviously did not all have this gift (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:5). **First**, speaking in tongues brought edification to the one who was speaking, but Paul urged the brethren “. . . to excel in gifts that build up the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). **Second**, by participating with the Holy Spirit, the one who spoke in tongues could become a “sign” to the unbeliever and believers of God’s power as in the case of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10:45–47). Without an interpreter for the whole assembly, there would be no one who would understand the language being spoken. The speaker did not edify if no one was able to understand what he was saying.

The fact that not all Christians had the gift of tongues indicates that Christians in the first century could receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit without having the miraculous gift from the Spirit. A Christian receives the Spirit as a seal of ownership from God and can be spiritual in his nature without having to exhibit the gift of speaking in tongues (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; Ephesians 1:13). Paul desired that they have the gift of prophecy because more people could benefit from this gift.

The Inferiority of Tongues in the Assembly

*Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues,
what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some*

revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church (Paul’s context is the worship assembly) I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue (1 Corinthians 14:6–19).

Tongues Cause Confusion in the Assembly

Paul said it was of more benefit to the church if what was being revealed was understood by the congregation. The

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difference between revelation, knowledge, prophesying, and teaching may not be clear, but each element is designed to affect the person's understanding and intellect. Paul used the illustration of instruments that play in a recognizable pattern to make music. Each instrument spoke with the language of music. Not everyone would have the knowledge of what was being played. Certain notes on a trumpet give the command to "Charge!" in a battle. Other instruments call for the battle to continue, and other notes might command a retreat. If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, then no one will be ready for the battle. This was the same situation when a foreign language was being spoken in the assembly. The one who heard gained absolutely nothing because he did not understand. Paul said the one speaking in tongues was just speaking into the air if there was no one there to understand what he was saying.

There are many languages in the world, and every language has its own meaning. There was no benefit for someone to be able to speak all the languages of the world unless the people who heard the words were able to understand the message. The Corinthians wanted to be able to speak in tongues, but if the church consisted of many members who spoke in tongues there would be nothing but confusion unless there was also an interpreter. If no one could understand the speaker, then it would be as if he was a foreigner in their midst. The King James Version uses the word "*barbarian*" (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:11), which was a favorite insult used by the Greeks concerning non-Greek speaking people during the first century. For this reason Paul urged the church in Corinth to try to excel in the gifts that could build up the church. Paul even urged the one who was speaking in tongues to pray that he himself might be able to interpret. Interpretation was essential so that others could understand, be edified, and participate in the prayer to say "Amen!"

The Superiority of Edifying Gifts

It is clear that the gifts that brought edification to others were superior to the gifts that only benefitted one person. Paul said that a prayer offered in an unknown tongue created a prayerful spirit for the one who was praying, but it was not fruitful to those who were listening. In these verses Paul was talking about praying and singing that was happening when more than one person was involved. He was not against the gift of tongues. He gave thanks to God for his own gift in that area (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:18), but in an assembled group, it would be more beneficial for him to speak five intelligible words than to try to instruct with ten thousand words that could not be understood. Edification of the body of Christ is a very important part of church growth. This was true in the first century church and it is still true in every congregation of the Lord's church today.

Keys to an Orderly Assembly

1 Corinthians 14:20–40

Introduction

Imagine the church at Corinth arguing over which Christian possessed the greatest spiritual gift. Paul warned them to stop acting like children. He contrasted the spiritual gifts of speaking in different kinds of tongues with having the gift of prophecy because he wanted the Christians in Corinth to see that the gift of prophecy was a more beneficial gift for the church as a whole than the gift of speaking in tongues.

The Purpose for Tongues and Prophecy

Exhortation to Be Spiritually Mature

First Corinthians 14:20–25 continues Paul’s discussion of tongues versus prophecy and addresses the purpose of tongues:

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law (this referred to the Old Testament scriptures) it is written: “Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,” says the Lord. Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers

come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”

Paul did not want the Corinthian brethren to be upset by his teaching and run off and pout like children. He advised them to be like “*infants*” in regard to evil and malice (since a child’s heart does not harbor resentment or bitterness). In their thinking, however, Paul wanted them to understand and reason like mature adults. This is the kind of maturity Paul had talked about earlier when he had talked about becoming perfect (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:10–11).

Paul illustrated the purpose of the gift of tongues by quoting Isaiah 28:11–12. During the time period covered in this passage in Isaiah, the people of Israel had not been listening to the words of the Prophet who had been speaking to them in their own language. Later, after they had been taken into captivity as a result of their own wickedness, God spoke to them in the language of the Babylonians or Assyrians. The Israelites remembered their unbelief when they heard the foreign languages that surrounded them since it was their sin of not believing that had caused them to be under foreign rule.

The Biblical Purpose of Tongues — A Sign to the Unbeliever

Paul used an Old Testament example so the Corinthians would realize that the gift of tongues was not designed for believers but intended to impress and convince the unbeliever of God’s presence and power (just as the Israelites had become convinced of God’s power and their transgressions against Him when they had heard the foreign tongues of their captors). The gift of tongues could be used in the assembly of the church

only if there was an interpreter. The gift of tongues was meant to signify God's power upon the speaker as he spoke in a language that the unbelievers could understand. The biblical purpose of the gift of tongues is demonstrated by how this gift was used on the day of Pentecost and with the household of Cornelius (cf. Acts 2; 10). It is helpful to repeatedly return to these two chapters and see the purpose of the gift of tongues.

Anyone with the gift of prophecy was able to make God's will known in the language of those in the assembly. The gift of prophecy was the more important gift because it could be used to edify the church as a whole without the need for an interpreter. Without an interpreter, if the whole church had been assembled and everyone had been speaking in a foreign language, a Greek-speaking unbeliever would have wondered if the whole church was out of their minds. If a prophet presented the message and a Greek unbeliever heard the Word in the language that he understood, the message would convict him of his unbelief and of his sins, expose a sinful heart, and cause him to exclaim, "*'God is really among you!'*" (1 Corinthians 14:25b). That is the purpose of the Word of God. The writer of the book of Hebrews said:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:12–13).

The Word of God as a "*. . . discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Hebrews 4:12, KJV) would lead the unbeliever to see his true spiritual condition before the Lord and to become convinced of God's presence in His Word.

Proper Participation in the Assembly

Notice the guidelines governing participation in the assembly that are presented in the last section of 1 Corinthians 14:

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two — or at the most three — should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:26–40).

Proper Conduct in the Assembly

Paul says that proper structure is necessary if everyone is going to learn and be edified. Everything that is done during the assembly needs to be for the strengthening of the church. He continues, “*But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way*” (1 Corinthians 14:40). These words denote a certain concept and meaning. The American Standard Version says, “*But let all things be done decently and in order.*” The word “*decently*” is an adverb used to mean something that is well ordered and planned out. The words “*in order*” are translated from the Greek words *kata* and *taxin*, which are used to signify the arrangement of something in a proper order, especially in a military order, or with official dignity. When the whole church is assembled, there is to be a type of regimented control of all the participants. Their gifts were not to be exercised spontaneously. God did not create disorder and confusion but wholeness. First Corinthians 14:33 says, “*For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*” The Greek word for “*disorder*” means confusion, instability, or anarchy. The English word “catastrophe” comes from this same word. The worship assembly of God’s church should not be considered a catastrophe. God is not the originator of that kind of activity.

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Paul Butler said:

The church today, though not possessing miraculous gifts, will do well to learn a lesson from the fundamental principle Paul teaches here. The principle is decorum, orderliness. Worship does not, in fact should not, have to be *spontaneous*, to be worship! Of course, worship must come from the heart. And, simply following a regimen of worship ceremonies does not insure that worship is being done. But neither does spontaneity! Paul is saying to these Corinthians (and to all Christians) that God is not pleased with any worship service that is disorderly and confusing. The worship of God must be intelligent, instructive,

maturing, and orderly (according to a design, with regularity). If spontaneity must suffer, then let it suffer. This is true of “youth sessions” as much, or more, than “adult sessions.” How can Christians learn to “order” their lives if they are taught that the worship of God is some exercise in spontaneity, impulsiveness, and confusion?²⁰

So an unstructured meeting offers little good, if any, for building up the whole church. However, a cold, heart-killing ritualism or formalism was not recommended either.

The Criteria for the Exercising of Gifts

Paul had specific instructions for the members of the church in Corinth concerning how they should exercise their spiritual gifts for the edification of the assembly. Paul said each one “. . . has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation” (1 Corinthians 14:26). It seems that though a number of brethren were to contribute to the edification of the assembly, some may have desired to speak to the point of preventing others from having their part in strengthening of the church.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26, the “*hymn*” mentioned was probably a song or hymn offered by a gifted brother. The singing with spirit and understanding that is mentioned earlier in the chapter (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:15) seems to refer to the same kind of action. It is possible that this was either a psalm from the Old Testament or one of the Spirit-taught psalms (cf. Ephesians 5:19). In either case, there were those who desired to sing a hymn before the whole church. This, as well as all of the other things mentioned in verse 26, was to “. . . be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:26b).

²⁰Butler, 316.

According to 1 Corinthians 14:27, no more than “*at the most three*” were to speak in tongues during the worship and they were to take turns. This suggests there may have been many who spoke in tongues and they may have been trying to speak at the same time. Someone also needed to interpret the tongues. Paul said, “*But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God*” (1 Corinthians 14:28). Without an interpreter, those who had the gift of tongues would not be permitted to exercise this gift. Those who could would need to pray in a foreign language privately (whether this meant at home or before or after the assembly is not made clear) if there was no interpreter.

Those who could prophesy were also limited to three and they were not to dominate the service. If a prophet was addressing the assembly and another prophet indicated that he had received a revelation, the first speaker “*should stop*” (1 Corinthians 14:30b). Then he (along with the others) should weigh what was said by the other prophet. The additional speakers would, by their lives and personality, contribute to the edification of the whole church. First Corinthians 14:31 says, “*For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.*”

Neither the prophets nor those who spoke in tongues had been taken over by the Spirit or moved beyond control through their inspiration. That kind of experience would have caused disorder and hindered the worship. First Corinthians 14:33 says, “. . . *God is not a God of disorder but of peace.*” Additionally, these first century Christians were to observe carefully the understanding and application of what Paul was saying about these matters when they came together in the entire assembly. First Corinthians 14:37–38 says, “*If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.*”

The Limitations for Women in the Assembly

Guided by the Spirit, Paul said:

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church (1 Corinthians 14:33b–35).

Paul is talking about the limitations for women during a mixed assembly of worship in which the whole church has come together. If there were women in the assembly who had the gift of prophecy (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:5), they were to remain silent. The word “*speak*” in this passage of scripture means to lead the assembly. Each time this word is used by Paul in this context, he is referring to the kind of speaking that involved leading an assembly of worshipers. He is not talking about the kind of speaking that is involved in singing, confessing one’s faith in Christ, or confessing one’s sins before the congregation (cf. Romans 10:9–10; James 5:16). Women are to be in submission according to the Law.

Remember, also, that women are very precious in the sight of God. Spiritually, men and women are one. Paul told the Galatians, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28). Paul had already written to the Corinthians concerning the male and female relationship (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3–16). Genesis 5:1–2 says: “*... When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘man.’*” God created humans in two phases: the male first and the female second. However, they are both created in the image of God, and their nature is described as “*man*. ” Paul is not speaking of woman as inferior to man or less than man spiritually when he instructs

women to be submissive and remain silent in the worship assembly. A woman not only reflects God's glory, but she also reflects the glory of man since she was taken from man (cf. Genesis 2:21–22; 1 Corinthians 11:7–8, 12). Women are not inferior to men, but according to God's word, women are in some areas under the authority of men or in submission to men. Submission and inferiority are not equivalent.

As a human being Jesus was totally in submission to His Father and as deity He was equal to the Father (cf. Philippians 2:5–11). Submission is a part of life as God planned it. There are purposes to be fulfilled and benefits to be reaped when Christians practice submission to God. The Scriptures teach a mutual submission between believers; they are to submit to one another. That means Christians are to place themselves at each other's disposal for Jesus' sake so what is needed by one can be supplied by another. This concept is seen in the family relationship. A father submits to his children to meet their needs, but the family is in submission to the husband/father as the head of the home.

Old Testament women were given prophetic powers and even official positions by the LORD. Miriam was a prophetess (cf. Exodus 15:20) and Deborah was a judge (cf. Judges 4:4). Esther was used by God to save the Jewish nation from King Xerxes and Haman's rage (cf. Esther 4:12–14). Prophecy involved leading and speaking to the people to be able to exercise that gift. Those at Corinth who had the gift of prophecy took an authoritative lead in the worship assembly as they held the attention of the hearers. Women are to teach and live as good examples so they may train younger women (cf. Titus 2:3–5). In the context discussed in 1 Corinthians 14, however, women have certain restrictions in regard to speaking in the church: "*As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says*" (1 Corinthians 14:33b–34). To participate in the worship assembly outside these restrictions is to act without biblical authority.

Some Issues Raised in Churches Today

These passages establish principles and concepts — in regard to what God requires for true worship and the edification of the church — that must be followed today as well. Being in subjection is the opposite of refusing to keep silent. Hence, a woman speaking in the assembly is not being in subjection “*. . . as the Law says*” (1 Corinthians 14:34b). This is also God’s command in the New Testament era, as it says in 1 Corinthians 14:37b: “*. . . what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.*” Notice that the reference to “*speaking*” in this context refers to speaking so as to lead the assembly. Throughout 1 Corinthians 14, those who were speaking were addressing an assembly of people (a public gathering — in contrast to the home setting referenced in 1 Corinthians 14:35 when Paul said that women should ask their husbands at home if they wanted to inquire about something). Keeping silent, then, means to not take the lead in a mixed assembly, a public gathering for corporate worship.

First Corinthians 14 is obviously dealing with a mixed male/female assembly, and the silence of a woman in such an assembly is bound on her as an expression of subjection (though this subjection does not apply when she is leading other females). Paul’s words in the book of 1 Timothy also address this matter. In 1 Timothy 2:8, Paul said, “*I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*” The Greek word Paul used for “*men*” in this verse distinguishes male from female. Paul’s instructions were that men pray in every place where the church is assembled. Paul must have had a gathering for corporate worship in mind or he would have forbidden women to pray at all. Additionally, Paul was probably referring to **leading** a prayer, because in this same context, when Paul was writing to Timothy, he talked about the proper clothing for a woman. He said, “*I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety . . .*” (1 Timothy 2:9), but this would not have applied to a private husband-wife relationship. So it seems Paul was saying that in

the case of a mixed assembly it should be the “*men*” who should “*lift up holy hands in prayer.*”

It is not unusual to have some honest doubts in these areas. These verses have created a number of questions among Christians. One such question is, “Can a woman sing in the assembly and teach and admonish others by such singing?” Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians 14 instruct women not to take a lead in the worship assembly. The Old Testament records women being involved in the assembly as singers (cf. Nehemiah 7, 10, and 12), but women who participate in the song service should not take the lead, but follow the song leader.

Another question that is often asked is, “What is wrong with a woman teaching a man in the assembly if she does it in an humble way?” The issue really is, “Is it biblical for a woman to teach a male/female assembly of the saints gathered together for corporate worship?” Look at the biblical account of Aquila and Priscilla (cf. Acts 18:24–26). A man named Apollos was speaking boldly in the synagogue, but “*when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately*” (Acts 18:26b). They heard Apollos in the synagogue, but they took him to their home to teach him the way of God more accurately. The principle Paul was trying to establish really refers back to 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul instructed all Christians concerning the headship of man. Woman is to serve under man and not assume a leadership role during worship.

Another question is, “What if the men give the woman permission to teach in mixed assemblies?” The answer to this question can be answered by another important question: “Does any man have the right to authorize the woman to do what the Lord has forbidden her to do?” It is commendable when godly women have the desire to be more useful in the building up of the body of Christ. Their work is essential for growth in the church, however, women should desire to do such work in a way that honors our Lord.

Another question is, “What about home devotionals?” Paul was not talking about a home setting when he instructed the women to be silent in 1 Corinthians or in 1 Timothy. It is important to remember the context from which Paul was addressing this problem.

Another question that is often asked is, “What about a woman commenting in a Bible class?” It seems that such an example would be permitted since the woman would not be taking the lead or addressing the assembly. One can tell the difference between the teacher and the student — the leader and one who is being led. It is possible for a woman to offer helpful remarks during a study time. Once again it is important to remember the context of what Paul is talking about.

The Source of Paul’s Teaching

Paul said:

Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored (1 Corinthians 14:36–38).

Paul asked them if they felt so elite that they thought they should be treated as some exceptional or special group in the Lord’s church who made their own rules and were not subject to the teaching given to them by an ambassador of Christ. He asked them if he had brought this message to them or if the Word of God had originated with them. Someone may have suggested that Paul was not the only prophet or that he had no authority to settle these matters. Paul told them he was writing the Lord’s commands — this was not just his opinion. Those Christians with spiritual maturity would accept what he had to say as God’s word. If someone chose to question these

commands from God, he was to be ignored. Paul was speaking with inspired apostolic authority.

The Assembly to Be Done in an Orderly Manner

Paul concluded this topic by saying: “*Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way*” (1 Corinthians 14:39–40). Paul had already instructed the Christians in Corinth to limit the number of speakers that were used in every service. They were to take turns in their speaking so that every person would have the chance to exercise his gift. Each one was to weigh carefully what the other prophets might say. Everyone was to be instructed and encouraged, and everything was to be done in an orderly manner.

Evidence Supporting the Gospel Message

1 Corinthians 15:1–28

Introduction

This is the beginning of the study of 1 Corinthians 15, the chapter that is known for its emphasis and profound teaching concerning the resurrection of Christ and the consequential resurrection of all men one day.

The Resurrection: Proclaimed in the Gospel

Now, brothers, I want to remind you (I want to bring back to your mind with renewed appreciation) of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the

least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed (1 Corinthians 15:1–11).

The Gospel in Relation to the Corinthians

Paul delivered the good news of Jesus Christ the Lord to the Corinthians. For a year and a half, he preached the “*gospel*” in the city of Corinth (cf. Acts 18:11). He wanted to remind them of the fact that he had preached the Word to them, they had taken a firm stand, and by the “*gospel*” they had been saved.

Things of First Importance — The Gospel

Paul had received the things that were “*of first importance*” and passed them on to the Corinthians. He preached good news that was logical, empirical, and historical. Paul preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is where the good news had its beginning. Whether men like it or not, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ happened. It is the gospel of Christ — it is the good news. Men may despise this truth or ignore it, but they cannot deny the fact that it happened. It is a fact that cannot be disputed.

The Gospels Are Historical

Paul Butler in his presentation of this passage makes the following observations (quoting from Simon Greenleaf).²¹

²¹Butler, 323–324.

Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853), one of the greatest legal minds in U.S. history, former head of the Harvard Law School, set forth the following rules of evidence in his book, The Testimony of The Evangelists, pub. Baker Book House, pp. 1-54:

1. The foundation of Christianity is based on facts. These facts are testified to as having occurred within the personal knowledge of the Gospel writers (such as the Apostle Paul). Christianity, then, rests upon the credibility of these (first century) witnesses.
2. A proposition of fact is proved, when its truth is established by competent and satisfactory evidence beyond reasonable doubt.
3. In the absence of circumstances which generate suspicion, every witness is to be presumed to be credible, until the contrary is shown . . . The burden of impeaching his credibility lies upon the objector.
4. All witnesses are entitled to the benefit of the axiom that men ordinarily speak the truth (are honest) when they have no prevailing motive or inducement to the contrary.
5. The ability of a witness to speak the truth depends on the opportunities he has had for observing the facts, the accuracy of his powers of observing and the trustworthiness of his memory. The authors of the Gospels can be granted at least the abilities of most human witnesses until the contrary is shown.
6. There must be enough disparity in the number and consistency of the witnesses to show there is no room for collusion, yet enough agreement to show they were independent recorders of the same events.
7. The testimony of the witnesses must conform in general with the experiences of others concerning similar circumstances or subject matter.

The four Gospels are accurate records. Any honest researcher should declare their compliance with the accepted “rules of evidence” unimpeachable. As authentic, competent, credible works of history, the four Gospels are impeccable.

Paul’s reference to Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, “in accordance with the scriptures” is significant. He means that the fundamental facts of the gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, were predicted in the Old Testament scriptures. That is a presentation of evidence which can be tested scientifically, or legally, at any time, by anyone who is honest enough to forego personal presuppositions. Prophecies made centuries before their fulfillment, the fulfillment of which is documented in minute detail, and in which factors of their fulfillment is beyond the power of human planning or manipulation, are sufficient evidence to prove the proposition that Jesus is the Christ, or no proposition can ever be proved!

The fact of Jesus’ resurrection is proven historically in the book of Acts. The foundational truth of Christianity is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the day of Pentecost, when Christianity had its beginning, Peter had preached a sermon which had emphasized the resurrection. Peter had set forth the evidence for a risen Christ. He had talked about the fulfillment of the Old Testament passages in Joel and had quoted David from the Old Testament (cf. Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11; Psalm 110:1). Peter himself was a trustworthy witness of the resurrection. Paul talked about how Jesus had appeared to the Twelve and about many others who served as witnesses to the fact of the resurrection. Jesus had appeared to more than five hundred people at the same time. There was a sufficient number of witnesses to prove His resurrection without any doubts.

The testimony of the Twelve had convinced over three thousand people that Jesus was a risen Savior the first time they had heard the gospel. Beyond any doubt, the people contemporary with the time of the Lord could testify to His resurrection firsthand. Every witness should be presumed to be credible until there is other evidence that says differently. There was more than enough evidence — more than enough witnesses to testify — to prove the resurrection, which left the burden of proof with those who did not believe. The people in Jerusalem who did not believe could not refute what the Apostles had been teaching. The Apostles were threatened for teaching the resurrection of the Lord. They were beaten and put in prison, but they continued to teach what they had seen and heard. Read the accounts in Acts of the persecutions that took place after Pentecost. The Apostles continued to preach that Jesus was the risen Lord day by day in the temple and from house to house.

The Testimony of Scripture

Paul referred to the “*Scriptures*” as proof of the resurrection. A person could believe in the bodily resurrection of the Lord simply because of what the Old Testament said. The Prophets had told of the coming Messiah in minute detail throughout the Old Testament before Jesus ever walked on this earth. Isaiah 53 is a beautiful example of the fundamental facts of the gospel — the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The prophecies concerning Jesus were made centuries before they were fulfilled. That is a presentation of evidence which can be tested scientifically and legally at any time, because the factors of fulfillment are beyond the power of human planning or manipulation.

The Testimony of Eyewitnesses

Paul gave a list of eyewitnesses to the fact that Jesus rose on the third day. These men and women could give unimpeachable testimony. Paul counted himself the least of the

Apostles. By God's grace, however he too was a witness to the resurrection of Christ. The word "*apostle*" means one who is sent forth with credentials and commissions. Paul saw the Lord and was commissioned by Him as he traveled on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1–19). Paul said that God's grace was not without effect. Because of God's grace to him, Paul worked harder than any of the other Apostles. The book of Acts contains a record of the labors of Paul. Saul of Tarsus had been a disciplined man who would not have been easily swayed to believe in the resurrection. Saul had been one of the greatest enemies and persecutors of Christ, yet he became one of the greatest missionaries of the first century as an apostle for Christ. Paul presented eye-witness testimony to establish the facts of the resurrection, to satisfy a disciplined person who was teachable, honest, and a serious searcher of the truth. The facts were convincing in the first century and remain so today.

Were these first century witnesses competent? Were they capable of having seen Jesus crucified, buried, and risen from the dead? Were they in a position to have known the facts? Were the eyewitnesses honest or dishonest? Did they have anything to gain by lying? The gospel in the very form they preached brought them no earthly power, no riches, and no praises from the high and mighty. It brought them only persecution, slander, poverty, and to some, death. Yet they went to their graves insisting on its historicity.

Were the eyewitnesses so few as to give reasonable doubt to the truthfulness of their testimony? There were the women who had come to the tomb of the Lord and had found it was empty, the Apostles, and over five hundred people who had seen Jesus at one time. Was there any historical evidence in the first century to the contrary? Has there been any historical evidence since the first century to contradict the gospel? Did anyone present the dead body of Jesus to prove that he had not risen from the tomb? The enemies of the cross offered not one bit of historical evidence to refute the gospel.

The Consequences of Denying the Resurrection

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men (1 Corinthians 15:12–19).

The Problem Examined

Paul said that if Christ had been raised from the dead (that was what he had been preaching), then how could others say that there was no resurrection from the dead? The facts contradicted each other. If there was no resurrection from the dead, then Christ could not have been raised. Paul was preaching the death, burial, and **resurrection** of Christ. If Christ had not risen, then there was no reason for the Christian to place his hope in Him. Believing that there was no resurrection from the dead made the religion of Christ useless. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, then hoping in Him for any reason was in vain.

The Result of Their Argument

If Christ had not been raised from the dead, then the Apostles were false witnesses. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, then the resurrection of Christ could not be an historical event. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, then all the people who

had said they had seen Jesus after his resurrection had given false testimonies. And if Christ had not been raised from the dead, then everyone was still living in sin. The cross as the substitutionary atonement of Christ's death is invalid without the resurrection of Christ. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, then the final words of Christ were also invalid. The bodily resurrection of Christ is what affirms Him to be a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world. If Christ was not raised from the dead, then He is not the Son of God — God would not have raised an imposter from the dead. All Christians obtain forgiveness of sins through the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Christ was not raised from the dead, then all who have died have perished. If this life is all there is, then Christians are “. . . *to be pitied more than all men*” (1 Corinthians 15:19). We are pitiful fools for hoping and believing in Christ.

The Resurrection — Christ's and Ours

Paul answered the hypothetical questions he had posed by giving the Corinthians assurances about Christ:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the

Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:20–28).

Christ — The Firstfruits

Paul affirmed that Christ is the “*...firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Corinthians 15:20). The firstfruits of the harvest had to be presented before the harvest could be established. The firstfruits had to be offered before the Jews could begin to harvest because the first sheaf of grain was presented to God as a thank offering. It was a pledge and assurance of the harvest that was still in the field. In the same way, the resurrection of Christ as a “*firstfruits*” from the dead is a pledge and proof of the resurrection that will come to all men who are God’s children. The firstfruits were whatever the harvest was. If the harvest was grain, then the firstfruits offered to God were grain (cf. Leviticus 23:9–14). Jesus is **the “*firstfruits*”** of the resurrection from the dead or “*of those who have fallen asleep.*”

Illustration of Adam

Just as Christ was **the “*firstfruits*”** of the resurrection of the dead, Adam was the firstfruits of the death of humanity because of his sin. Christ was **the “*firstfruits*”** of the resurrection of the dead because of His sinlessness. All of dead humanity will be resurrected when the end comes, but only those who are in Christ will be given eternal life. Those who have not trusted Christ will be imprisoned forever in torment (cf. John 5:25–29; Luke 16:19–31; Revelation 14:9–13; 20:11–22:5).

“Christ’s Coming” Has Reference to Christ’s Second Coming

In his writings to the Corinthian brethren, Paul wrote, “*when he comes,*” referring to the second coming of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23). He was talking about the resurrection of those who are “*in Christ*” and “*those who belong to him*” (1

Corinthians 15:22–23) that will come about simultaneously with the end of time. In other passages, Paul discussed the fact that this second coming would also involve those who do not know and obey God (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8–10).

Orderliness of the Resurrection

Paul says “*each in his own turn*” will be made alive (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23). This does not mean that there are going to be two or more groups raised at separate times. Paul made this clear through the Spirit as he instructed God’s people in Thessalonica:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:3).

When Paul used the phrase “*those who have fallen asleep*” in 1 Corinthians and in 1 Thessalonians, he was talking about the people who had died and whose bodies appeared to be sleeping. Paul told the Thessalonians earlier: “*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones*” (1 Thessalonians 3:13). These verses help explain the fact that when Jesus comes again those who have died in Christ will accompany Him, and those who are in Christ will rise first. Those who are left until the second coming of the Lord will not precede those who are dead but will be caught up with them (“*all his holy ones*” and “*the dead in Christ*”) to meet Jesus in the air.

When Jesus comes again to resurrect humanity, it will be one complete and final resurrection. The phrase “*each in his own turn*” is taken from the Greek military term, *tagmsti*, which means a rank, a company, or a group. It is used to define rank or order in reference to descending ranks. Paul explained that Christ’s resurrection ranks first and is **the “firstfruits.”** His second coming will bring about the harvest of His believers when they are resurrected. There are two ranks mentioned: Christ’s resurrection is the first and the resurrection of His followers is the second. The second coming will bring about the resurrection of all humanity and the harvest of the saints that must follow the firstfruits.

The Timing of the Resurrection

Christ’s second coming and “**the end**” are simultaneous. God’s redemptive program will be completed when Jesus comes to raise all the dead. This world will come to an end and God alone will exercise sovereignty and power.

Christ Reigns As Both Priest and King

Paul said that Christ will continue His reign until He has put all His enemies at His feet (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:25). He must destroy all dominion, authority, and power. The Old

Testament proclaims that Christ rules in the midst of His enemies.

The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth. The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head (Psalm 110:1–7).

Christ Is Reigning Today

First Corinthians 15:26 says, “*The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*” The Son of God reigns today. He will reign until the last dead person has been made alive. Paul told the Ephesians that God “. . . purposed in Christ . . . to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:9–10). Christ reigns today even as He sits at the right hand of the Father (cf. Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

When the End Comes, Christ Will Deliver Up the Kingdom (The Church)to God

The reign of Christ in the kingdom of God has one great end — the glorification of the Father by the Son. When every enemy has been overcome and everything has become subject to Him, then the Son will no longer reign. He will deliver up the kingdom to God the Father.

There are many important lessons to be learned from this text. **First**, when Christ has accomplished all His work, He will no longer act as Mediator, High Priest, and Redeemer. At that point, God will be “*all in all*” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:28). Nothing that Paul was teaching affects the co-equality and co-eternity of the Godhead. Humanity has always been and forever will be subordinate to God the Father. This does not set aside the humanity of Christ. The very fact that Christ was **the firstfruit** of the bodily resurrection from the dead proves that His glorified body will endure forever (cf. 1 John 3:2–3; Philippians 3:20–21; Colossians 2:9). The sum total of all the attributes of deity exist in Christ and the fullness of the Godhead lives within Him. The Lord will continue His reign until all His enemies are destroyed.

Second, the Lord as a priestly king rules over His servants with a scepter of righteousness through His Word, but He rules His enemies with a rod of iron (cf. Psalm 110; Hebrews 1:8). The Lord does not want anyone to perish but wants all to become His willing servants. As willing servants, Christians serve and submit to the King. Christ became King when He was raised from the dead and placed at the right hand of the Father. Paul gave the Ephesians a glorious picture of Jesus as He reigns in this present age and in all that will come (cf. Ephesians 1:20–23).

Third, the time will come when “the end” will occur. Upon the completion of all the roles Christ now serves in, He will submit Himself to God the Father. The Godhead will serve and function as it once did in the beginning. The final enemy will be destroyed. Death will no longer have any power and “*every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Philippians 2:10–11; cf. Romans 14:11).

The End Comes and the Resurrection

Introduction

The church in Corinth, like modern-day people, had many questions about the end of time and the resurrection. This chapter will cover the rest of 1 Corinthians 15 as Paul continued to look at these two topics. Paul explains that at the end of time, Jesus will not establish a kingdom on earth. He will present the redeemed citizens of His kingdom to the Father at the final judgment.

Instructions Concerning the End

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24–28).

The Nature and Extent of Jesus' Reign

Paul says "*the end will come*" when Jesus destroys His enemies and hands the church over to His Father. Jesus Himself talked about this when He said, "*Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned*" (John 5:28–29). Jesus also told his disciples that on the last day, He would raise up those who were part of Him (cf. John 6:54). Jesus is not just the **Sovereign** of the church, He is also the Prince over all the rulers of the earth (cf. Revelation 1:5). He is the ". . . **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**" (Revelation 19:16). He does not share His kingdom with any man. He is the Sovereign ruler over all. He has given them power to rule, but He is over all the powers of this earth. It is important to remember the extent and the nature of His reign.

The Kingdom Given Back to God

In this present age, the Lord rules over all those who rule, but the time is coming when that kind of rule will cease upon this earth because mankind will cease to exist. When that occurs, Jesus will hand over His redemptive kingdom, the church, which was established on the day of Pentecost. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the fact that one must be born again to be able to see the kingdom of God (cf. John 3:3). In that kingdom, God rules over the hearts of men in a kingdom that cannot be destroyed (cf. Hebrews 12:28). Paul told the Colossians, "*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*" (Colossians 1:13-14). Jesus is not going to establish a **new** kingdom; He is going to deliver those who have been part of His spiritual kingdom, the church, to God the Father. The citizens of this spiritual kingdom are those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus.

The Victorious Christ

Jesus will continue His reign over this present world until the last enemy is destroyed. That enemy is death. Physical death is an enemy that has already been conquered by the Lord, and one day, when the end comes, He will reign over death completely because there will be no more death (cf. Revelation 21:4).

The Son Will Be Subjected to God the Father

God has put everything under Jesus' feet. When the end comes, Jesus Himself will be subjected to the Father. Christ will no longer have a work to do on this earth. His work as Redeemer and Mediator will be over. Christians will no longer need a mediator. They will have face-to-face fellowship with God the Father. Christ's work on earth will be finished and the Godhead will be all in all.

Additional Arguments for the Resurrection with a Warning

*Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are **baptized for the dead**? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day — I mean that, brothers — just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame (1 Corinthians 15:29–34).*

In the previous verses in 1 Corinthians 15, the purifying power of the hope of the resurrection was discussed by Paul. In this passage, the discussion takes the form of certain questions. With regard to the first two questions Paul asked the Corinthians (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:29), there is no evidence that there was a sect in the first century which immersed living people as proxies on behalf of someone that had already died (such a ritual is practiced by a sect today, but there is no documented practice of such a religious group in the first century). The word “**for**” used in 1 Corinthians 15:29 is the Greek preposition **hupar** and may be translated either “*on the part of*” or “*with reference to*.” In essence, the church was being asked, “If the dead are not being raised at all, then why are people still becoming Christians and being immersed, with reference to the dead (or the dead being raised)?”

Baptism was and still is the action taken by a penitent believer to confirm his belief in the atoning death of Jesus on the cross (cf. Mark 16: 15–16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4–10; Colossians 2:11–12) and his belief that, as Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, “*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*” (Romans 6:4). Therefore, if Christ was not raised and there is no resurrection for those who believe in Christ, baptism — as to its form and purpose — is meaningless. Hence Paul was asking them why anyone would possibly be immersed with the expectation of the resurrection to come if there **was** no resurrection. One of the factors that motivates believers to be immersed is the fact that the Lord was raised and the saved are raised together with Him and the belief that when the end comes, the Lord will have enough power to raise all Christians. No one would be immersed into Christ (buried with Him) if he did not have the assurance that he would be raised together with our Lord. That is the reason Paul asked the questions in 1 Corinthians 15:29.

We Are in Danger and I Die Daily

Paul asked the Corinthians why Christians were willing to put themselves in dangerous situations if there was no resurrection. If there was no resurrection, why would they choose to suffer such abuse? They could surely choose a different way to live. Paul said, quoting Isaiah, the Prophet, “*If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’*” (1 Corinthians 15:32b; Isaiah 22:13).

“Do Not Be Deceived: ‘Bad Company Corrupts Good Morals’”

(1 Corinthians 15:33 [NASV])

In this passage, however, Paul is not just talking about an easier way to live a Christian life. He was alluding to the influence of the unbelievers and false teachers who question the power of God to be able to raise a dead body. Teaching that there was no bodily resurrection was evil and was part of the false doctrine proclaimed during the first century. The word that Paul uses for “good” is not the most commonly used word for “good.” He uses the word that meant that which is right because it produces good. Evil preaching and false teaching produce only evil. This kind of preaching corrupts everyone who hears it. The Corinthian church needed to sober up and come back to their senses. They were being influenced by false teachers and it was not producing good. Paul was admonishing them because some in the church were pretending that the Christian faith was valuable, while they preached against the resurrection. They were ignorant sinners.

The Resurrection Body

*But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised?
With what kind of body will they come?” How foolish!
What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.
When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be,
but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.*

But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being;” the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:35–49).

The Disturbing Question: “How Are the Dead Raised?”

Paul continues to cover the problems caused by false teachers by addressing some disturbing questions. Paul discusses the resurrection body in detail. He says God gives the body He has chosen whether it is given to plant or animal. There are obvious questions about the mechanics of the resurrection, but Paul says it is foolish to ask whether or not God has enough power to accomplish what He had said He

would do. Paul gives examples from nature to say that death is necessary and not a hindrance to the resurrection.

A farmer knows the seed must die and rot and dissolve before it becomes a new plant. A different form of life is raised than the form that was planted. Jesus talked about the same thing in the parable of the seed:

He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:26–29).

Jesus alluded to the power of God in the agricultural realm and said even the farmer does not understand how it works. That is the power of nature. God is the source of all life and He is the one that gives and sustains life. God is the source of all laws of nature with regard to life and the progression of life. All of these things work and proceed automatically without anyone fully understanding how it happens. It is foolish to deny that God could resurrect a dead body. Jesus also referred to this principle when He talked about His own death. He said: “*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds*” (John 12:24). Life and death are part of the laws of nature. Resurrection is a part of the Christian’s hope for eternal life.

Paul believed in the resurrection to come. When he was talking about the hope of what God has promised, he asked King Agrippa, the high ranking officers, and the leading men of the city of Caesarea, “*Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?*” (Acts 26:8). God has enough power to take a seed after it decays and rots and dies in the soil and bring forth a new plant. Only God has that power.

Different Kinds of Flesh

God is not limited to working with only one kind of body. He has the power to reflect His glory in heavenly bodies and terrestrial bodies. There is a distinction made between the flesh of man, and the animal, bird, and fish kingdom. All fleshly bodies are not the same. The wisdom and power of God can be seen in creation and in the fact that He is the sustainer of all life upon the earth.

The Body Is Sown Perishable and Raised Imperishable

Paul explains the difference between the dead and the resurrected body by contrasting their characteristics: dead-resurrected, perishable-imperishable, dishonor-glory, weakness-power, and natural body-spiritual body. Then he contrasts Adam and Christ. Adam became a living spirit, but “*. . . the last Adam, a life-giving spirit*” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Paul told the Philippians:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20–21; cf. 1 John 3:2).

One day all Christians will have a glorious body that will be imperishable, powerful, and spiritual.

“Adam Became a Living Soul” First Comes the Physical Body — Then Comes the Spiritual

The physical body we possess now resembles the same kind of body that Adam had. Some are skinnier or fatter, shorter or taller, and some have hair while others do not. The word of God says that Adam was the first man (cf. Genesis 1:27; 2:4–7,

19–25). He was created full grown. He did not evolve from a primate as present-day evolutionary philosophy asserts. The physical body is similar to Adam and gives all human life a connection to him. One day Christians will have a body that will be completely suited to the heavenly environment. It will bear the image of Jesus' heavenly and glorious body.

The Resurrection Day

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:50–58).

Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God

Paul said that the resurrection day will be a mystery. It is coming, but no one knows the day or the time. When Jesus was spending His final days with His disciples, He predicted that Judas would betray Him and that Peter would deny Him three

times. He told them that they could not go where He was going and that He was going to prepare a place for them. He comforted His disciples by telling them that He would return. He comforted their troubled hearts with the assurance and faith that God is. He said:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going” (John 14:1–4)

Paul told the Thessalonians that when the Lord comes, there will be no warning. He wrote about the resurrection day in great detail:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know

very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11).

There are other passages that talk about the day of judgment as the day the Lord will pronounce His sentence upon all men (cf. Matthew 25:31–46). Paul said that this day will be “*in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed*” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

“Where, O Death, Is Your Victory?”

When the trumpet sounds, the final victory over death will be complete. Paul said: “*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 15:56–57). All mankind (all accountable human beings) are transgressors of the law of God and stand convicted as sinners. Jesus gives Christians the victory because He lived a sinless

life, He practiced the demands of the Law, and in perfect obedience He became the perfect sacrifice for mankind's sins. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, He took away the Law that once convicted God's children of sin and alienated them from God (cf. Colossians 2:14–15).

The Christian has VICTORY in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Victory and Giving

1 Corinthians 15:56–16:14

Introduction

Paul said, “*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law*” (1 Corinthians 15:56). All accountable beings are sinners and have violated the universal moral Law of God. Sin is lawlessness, but the Lord came and fulfilled the righteous and holy demands of the Law by keeping the Law perfectly. He took the iniquities of the sinful man, who had violated the Law of God, and bore those iniquities upon the cross to fulfill the righteous demands of God. Through Christ’s perfect sacrifice, sinful man has access to the free gift of life by obedient faith. Only through obedient faith can the sinful man have eternal life in Jesus Christ the Lord.

Victory and Encouragement

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the

mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:50–58).

Victory in Christ

Every man sins, but Satan could not tempt the Lord to sin; so, therefore, Christ lived without sin. The “*sting of death is sin,*” but Christ overcame the power of sin. In Christ, the Christian has a victory over Satan, over the power of sin, and over death. Christ took away the power of death with His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, giving all Christians a great victory.

Paul’s Exhortation

Paul’s final exhortation in this chapter was for the Corinthian brethren to stand firm and be immovable in their belief and acceptance of the truth concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were to remain steadfast in the truth and never depart from it, particularly with regard to their certainty in the resurrection and consequent blessing that will be received though that resurrection. Paul urged them to “*always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain*” (1 Corinthians 15:58b). In the world, people can labor in vain for no real purpose; they can work for years on a project without any success or blessing to their lives. That is not the way it is in the work that is done in faith for the Lord. When a Christians serves the Lord by faith, he can be assured that his work is never in vain.

This exhortation is addressed to every Christian, not to just a few in the congregation. Every Christian needs to give himself fully to the work of the Lord. This abounding work in the Lord is based upon Christians being firmly established in the belief of the resurrection of Christ. Paul had said earlier that if Christians did not believe in the resurrection, then their faith was futile, and they were among all men the most pitiable (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12–19). He said, “*If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat drink, for tomorrow we die’*” (1 Corinthians 15:32). It is because of the Christian’s belief in the resurrection that he will give himself fully to the work of the Lord, allowing Christ to work through him for His own glory and honor. Believing that the Lord was raised from the dead enables the Christian to remain steadfast to Christ and to know that his labor is not in vain.

The Collection for the Saints

Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me (1 Corinthians 16:1–4).

Giving Is Not Optional — It Is at the Heart of Christianity

The directions that Paul gave the Corinthians were the same directions that he had already given to the churches in Galatia. He also discussed these instructions more fully in his later letter (cf. 2 Corinthians 8, 9). There is evidence that the same instructions were given to all the churches. Giving is an important part of the total Christian attitude. Paul told the Galatians, “*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the*

proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:9–10). Paul traveled through Macedonia and Greece giving instructions and encouragement all along the way (cf. Acts 20:1–6).

On the First Day of Every Week

“*On the first day of every week*” is the correct translation for 1 Corinthians 16:2 based upon the construction of the sentence in Greek. The “*first day of the week*” was the day the Lord was brought forth from the grave (cf. Luke 24:1; Matthew 28:1). This was the day the Lord built His church (cf. Acts 2:1 — the day of Pentecost was always fifty days after the Passover Sabbath). This was the day of the week brethren came together in Troas to break bread (cf. Acts 20:7). This was the day of the week John referred to as “*the Lord’s Day*” (cf. Revelation 1:10). The “*first day of the week*” is a very significant day for Christians. It is also a very personal day. Paul instructed “*each one of you*” to follow the instructions he had already given the Galatian Christians.

Paul wanted them to be ready to contribute to a collection that was being made for the saints in Judea. Paul knew that they had become neglectful in fulfilling what they had purposed to do. Paul told the brethren in Corinth about the sacrificial giving from the Macedonian churches, but he also commended the giving in Achaia when he wrote to the Romans (cf. Romans 15:25). It is not wrong to commend one another by using the example of fellow Christians. Paul was trying to motivate the Corinthians to be a part of this gift. A lack of spirituality can affect the congregation in many areas including giving.

Giving Is to Be Done Purposefully, Regularly, in Keeping With One’s Income, and Without Pressure

Giving is an index to spirituality. It is also a spiritual work of faith. It is not something that is just done externally. It is

something that must be purposed in the heart. It must be done purposefully, generously, lovingly, and willingly. The Lord is pleased when He finds that kind of ecstatic joy in the heart of a Christian. In a later letter Paul told the Corinthians, “*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Giving should be a planned response that is given “*On the first day of every week . . .*” (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Some Christians may respond, “I get paid once a month, so I can only give once a month.” Planning or setting aside needs to involve prorating a certain amount to be given upon the first day of each week from the once a month sum. Christians need to be reminded of the daily grace of God toward them. Giving allows them to reflect upon God’s goodness. Paul also said that the giving should be done “*. . . in keeping with his income . . .*” (1 Corinthians 16:2).

The New Testament does not spell out specifically the percentage that each Christian should give. Consider what the Old Testament says concerning giving, what Jesus taught during His personal ministry and the examples of the early disciples in the church at Jerusalem. Old Testament records of giving show that the Jewish people were commanded to give one tenth (cf. Leviticus 27:30–31). The New Testament Christians sold their land and houses and gave the money so that it was distributed to those in need (cf. Acts 4:32–36). The Macedonians gave out of their own poverty with much joy and beyond what they were able to give (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1–5). Surely Christians today should start with these examples and then excel in the grace of giving above and beyond the biblical examples.

Paul said, “*. . . set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income . . .*” (1 Corinthians 16:2). There are some textual variations in this verse of scripture. The accurate translation is “*Upon the first day of the week, let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper . . .*” (1 Corinthians 16:2, ASV).

The first century practice was that many people labored for one day, and at the end of that day's work, they were paid a sum of money. Perhaps Paul was saying that they needed to set aside a sum of money in storage for the work of the Lord. Then, when the Lord's Day came and each one gathered with God's people, a collection was to be taken to be put into the treasury until the time when Paul arrived. In Acts 4:36 and 5:2 the money that was given was "*put . . . at the apostles' feet.*" That is just another way of saying they put it into the treasury. Out of the collections that were made, distributions were made to those who were in need.

During His personal ministry, the Lord had a treasury box and Judas was the person in charge of it (cf. John 13:29). When Jesus told Judas, "*'What you are about to do, do quickly . . .*" (John 13:27), they thought Jesus was telling Judas to give something to the poor. Apparently, this was a common practice among the Apostles — to take something from the treasury for their own support or the support of others. As Paul was traveling, he mentioned the collections that had been made by different churches and gifts that had been given for the saints in Jerusalem (cf. Romans 15:25–27; 2 Corinthians 8:1–5; 9:1–5). He referred to a contribution that was to be given without any pressure. It was to have been set aside ahead of time so that there was no need for a special contribution to be taken when he arrived. Christianity does not pressure people to give. Giving is something that Christians lovingly and willingly do.

Paul's Future Plans

After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you — for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost,

because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me (1 Corinthians 16:5–9).

Paul Intended to Come to Corinth

Paul discussed his missions: going through Macedonia, coming to Corinth in Achaia and perhaps even staying the winter there, spending time with the Christians in Corinth, and staying in Ephesus until Pentecost. Paul did not want to visit Corinth immediately because he felt they needed to be sharply rebuked. With time, he hoped that they would have made the changes he had written to them about. He wanted to stay in Ephesus because he thought there was an open door for effective work even though many opposed him. Paul's plans changed after he had written the letter that is the book of 1 Corinthians, but he wrote another letter and explained the changes (2 Corinthians 1:12–2:13; 8:1–9:15). Paul was serving the Lord at Ephesus as he wrote this letter to Corinth; he did not make it to Corinth as he planned, but traveled instead to Macedonia and Troas.

Statements Concerning Paul's Stay in Ephesus

There were many opportunities for Paul in Ephesus. He faced many adversaries to the gospel in this city (cf. Acts 19:1–20:1)

News of Timothy and Apollos

If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was

quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity (1 Corinthians 16:10–12).

An Apostolic Request

Paul gave the Christians in Corinth instructions on how they needed to treat Timothy. He did not want Timothy to be afraid of an unchristian response toward him when he arrived. Paul assured them that Timothy was doing the work of the Lord just as he was. They were to receive him and then send him on his way “*in peace*” so that he could return to Paul. This meant that there was to be a right, loving, and united relationship between the church and Timothy when he left to join Paul.

Paul Suggested That Apollos Go Back to Corinth

Apollos was a tremendously skilled servant of the Lord. He had been a great help to the brethren in Achaia (cf. Acts 18:27). Paul urged him to return to Corinth, but he was unwilling. Paul told the brethren that Apollos would return when he had an opportunity. Apollos was the kind of man who would have been involved in the work of the Lord no matter where he was.

Paul’s Concluding Exhortations and Remarks Concerning Stephanas

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition (1 Corinthians 16:13–18).

Be Watchful, Stand Fast in the Faith, Act Like Men, Be Strong

Exhortations can be sermons within themselves. Paul concluded this letter with his final instructions to the church in Corinth. He said, “*Be on your guard . . .*” (1 Corinthians 16:13). Unfortunately, some brethren take certain dangerous, controversial issues or practices and create a movement (faction) that divides the body of Christ. Christians need to be watchful and aware of the fact that there are things that can take them away from Jesus. Satan is always trying to pull God’s children away from the position and privileges they have in the Lord. Peter urged the children of God to “*. . . be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position*” (2 Peter 3:17).

Paul then told the Corinthians to “*. . . stand firm in the faith . . .*” (1 Corinthians 16:13). A Christian who stands firm in his faith is one who is settled in his convictions and has confidence in the Lord. He is fully aware of the will of God and assured of the blessing in following that will. He is not a man who participates in foolish ideas, because he understands the will of the Lord. That is where faith comes in—he is confident in the Word of the Lord and willing to trust the Lord with his life. Earlier Paul had reminded the brethren that they had been saved by the gospel of Christ which they had received after he had preached the gospel to them (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1–2). He told them to “*. . . hold firmly to the word. . . Otherwise, you have believed in vain*” (1 Corinthians 15:2). If a person, after becoming a believer, continues to allow faith to govern his life, and he lives and walks by faith, he will receive the salvation of his soul in the final days. However, a person can fall from faith. He can choose to no longer walk by faith. So Paul urged the Corinthians to stand firm in their faith.

Paul urged the Corinthians to “*. . . be men of courage; be strong*” (1 Corinthians 16:13). Christianity requires men and women to live for Christ with courage and strength. There are marvelous examples in the Old Testament of men of courage.

Men like Joshua, who led the children of Israel into the Promised Land after God spoke to him saying:

"No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them" (Joshua 1:5–6).

The Christians in Corinth personally had the example of Paul. All Christians have the perfect example in Jesus who was a man who had to make courageous decisions in His life. When Paul told them to *"be strong,"* he was not talking about the outward, external strength that is elevated in today's generation. A Christian's strength must come from the Lord. Paul told the Ephesians: *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes"* (Ephesians 6:10–11). He told the Philippians, *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength"* (Philippians 4:13). A Christian has this same strength available today if he will trust in the Lord and allow His will to be accomplished in his life.

Finally Paul said, *"Do everything in love"* (1 Corinthians 16:14). This should immediately bring 1 Corinthians 13 to mind. Paul stressed the way love affects the Christian's life. Love changes the Christian's life so that he is faithful, devoted, kind, patient, truthful, protective, trusting, hopeful, and persevering. Love helps the Christian not to become envious, rude, self-seeking, boastful, proud, and easily angered. This kind of love can motivate Christians to act responsibly toward one another and have genuine care and concern for one another. Love can be tough. It can cause the Christian to be strong enough to say "no" to the things that are evil and to courageously carry out the work of the Lord. Love is what motivates every Christian in what he says and does.

Closing Remarks

1 Corinthians 16:15–24

Introduction

In the last two paragraphs of 1 Corinthians Paul wrote about some of the beloved brethren in the congregation. He commended the house of Stephanas in their willingness to serve those around them. It is through service that one exhibits the Christ-like quality that separates Christians from the rest of the world.

Stephanas Was the First Convert

Paul believed in giving faithful Christians the recognition they deserved. He commended the household of Stephanas for being the first converts in Achaia (Corinth is the capital of this province) and for being devoted to the service of the saints. He said that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus refreshed his spirit and the spirit of those in Corinth. These men had supplied what was lacking for the church in Corinth. God blesses His church through men and women who devote themselves to serving the saints.

Final Greetings and Confirmation of Paul's Love

Stephanas — The Addicted Servant

You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you,

brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition (1 Corinthians 16:15–18).

Paul commended the household of Stephanas as one of the first converts in the province of Achaia (Corinth is its capital). The King James Version translates this verse as “*...they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints . . .*” (1 Corinthians 16:15). Obviously, this brother understood what not everyone had understood concerning the nature of the redemptive kingdom of God — Christians are to be servants.

Servitude is something that can easily be seen from reading about Jesus’ ministry on this earth. He came not to be served, but to serve. Jesus Himself said, “*...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:28). When the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to talk to Jesus about her sons’ position in the Kingdom, Jesus told his disciples:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — (Matthew 20:25–27).

The Lord went about serving and doing good. This is the kind of attitude all Christians need to have — to be devoted to the Lord in service. A bond-servant is one who is bound by his service to another. It is probable that these Christian servants were “self-starters.” They saw what needed to be done as something the Lord would want them to do and they did it. They were following the example of Jesus.

Paul urged the brethren in Corinth “*to submit to such as these* (Stephanas and his household) *and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it*” (1 Corinthians 16:16). Paul was saying the Christians in Corinth needed to submit to those who were devoted to the service of others. In other words, a Christian who sees someone else serving the Lord needs to have the attitude of assisting in the project. He needs to be willing to join forces and work together. Christianity teaches the attitude of submission which can be shown by the willingness to work alongside others. This needs to be true of “... *everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.*” Paul was glad to have brethren like these who refreshed his spirit. Christians today need to strive to be the kind of Christians who refresh others with their presence and their work.

**Brotherly Greetings from Loving Churches
Brotherly Greetings from Loving Brethren
Brotherly Greetings to One Another**

The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand (1 Corinthians 16:19–21).

“*The churches in the province of Asia*” would consist of the same churches that are mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 as “*the seven churches in the province of Asia*” (Revelation 1:4). There were brethren in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Colosse, Iconium, Hyeropolos, Laodicea, and in the Lycas Valley. Paul was acquainted with these churches in and around Ephesus because he traveled throughout that area. He carried greetings back and forth among the brethren.

Paul also sent greetings from Aquila and Priscilla and the church that met in their house. Paul first met this couple when he left Athens and traveled to Corinth. He met Aquila and Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. They were tent-makers just as Paul was, so he stayed and worked with them. Once Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to Ephesus with his support, “. . . *Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ*” (Acts 18:5). Paul obviously was able to teach this Jewish couple the good news of the Lord. He stayed in their home and worked with them, but when Paul left Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila traveled with him to Ephesus. In Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos “. . . *the way of God more adequately*” (Acts 18:26).

Not only did Priscilla and Aquila send warm greetings to the church in Corinth, but the church which met in their home also sent greetings. Many of the churches in the first century had their meeting places in the homes of God’s children. The Apostles “*preached publicly and from house to house*” (Acts 20:20b). Paul said, “*Greet one another with a holy kiss*” (1 Corinthians 16:20b). During the first century, the standard greeting was not a handshake as it is today, but a kiss. Paul said this was to be a “*holy kiss*,” distinguishing it from a fleshly, sensual kiss.

Warning to the Unloving Paul’s Closing Salutations

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. If anyone does not love the Lord — a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen (1 Corinthians 16:21–24).

Notice that the ***anathema (curse)*** of God will be upon the person who does not respond to the love of Christ. John said,

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Christians are people who have learned what this Christ-like kind of love really means. Jesus showed the full extent of His love by going to the Father (cf. John 13:1). He said:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34–35).

Jesus loved Judas to the very end. He loved Peter even after Peter had sinned. The Lord was forbearing in His relationship to Peter so that he might repent and be brought back to a right relationship with the Lord.

Paul lived in daily expectation of the Lord’s coming. When the Lord comes, He will bring blessings and judgment, and Paul was eager for this event. The certainty of the Lord’s coming should motivate every Christian day by day. Paul asked that God’s undeserved favor be upon each one in Corinth. He sent his personal love as well. He had a forbearing, abiding love for his brothers and sisters in Christ in Corinth. Paul did not give up on this church. He continued to love and encourage them with his instructions. His love was not the type of love that would give up. He had an “*agape*” kind of love that never failed. The Holy Spirit used Paul to write this letter of exhortation and instruction to the brethren in Corinth and to the brethren in every age.

Review

This study of 1 Corinthians will end with a quick review of some of the problems that existed in the church at Corinth. Notice how, by the grace of God and by the belief and application of the gospel, they worked through the problems.

1 Corinthians 1–4

In the first four chapters of the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul dealt with the basic cause of disunity in the church at Corinth: they were boasting and glorying in men instead of in Jesus. In the first few verses of 1 Corinthians 1, Paul reminded them of the blessings they had in Jesus. They were mature and complete in Him. The Lord would bring them to the state of completion and present them blameless before Him in the final day. Paul reminded the brethren of the faithful nature of God — they could trust Him to help them overcome their difficulties and problems. Then in 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul specifically addressed the problem of the divisions that existed among them. He pled with them not to have contentions that would lead to divisions. Then he explained:

What I mean is this: one of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:12–13).

Some were saying things that should not have even been verbalized. They needed to have the same attitude, judgment, and mind.

Paul then presented an in-depth discussion of the nature of the gospel of Christ, telling them that it does not cause people to glory and boast in men but causes them to always glory in Jesus. Paul said he had been selected by the grace of God to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. He said that in response the Gentile world was still glorying in human wisdom and the unbelieving Jews were still looking for some sort of significant sign (the Lord had given that sign). Those who were believers in Jesus, however, saw both the power and the wisdom of God in the message of the cross on which Christ had been crucified. Paul wanted them to continue to see the power

of God in the death of Christ and His resurrection. He wanted to continue to preach only Christ and Him crucified (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:2).

Paul said the Lord selected those who were unremarkable by human standards to preach that message so that no one would glory in the flesh. He concluded 1 Corinthians 1 by saying:

It is because of him (God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:30–31).

Paul addressed this subject again in 1 Corinthians 3 when he told them to stop glorying in men because that had divided the church and caused the temple of God to be destroyed (see more information regarding 1 Corinthians 3 below). Paul wanted them to realize the position and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wanted them to realize that Christians are complete and perfect in Him. Christians can never boast too much about the Lord, but it is a sin (that divides the body of Christ) to boast and glory in men.

In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul said that the message had been given to them by the Holy Spirit of God. He discussed what is referred to as the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures: the Scriptures are inspired in word and complete and intact in every way. The Holy Spirit had taught them not in man's wisdom but in God's wisdom, combining spiritual things with spiritual words. Paul said that if the message had originated with the Holy Spirit of God (as it had), then the people should be glorying in the Holy Spirit of God, who was the source of that message, and not in man. An understanding of the things in 1 Corinthians 2 would have eliminated their boasting in men.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul said that they were still behaving in a worldly way because of their divisive quarreling (some

saying that they followed Paul and others Apollos). He said, “*What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe . . .*” (1 Corinthians 3:5). He said that he and Apollos were just mere servants of God that had enabled them to believe, deacons that had executed the commission of another, and people who had served the interest of others.

Paul then discussed the foundation he had laid:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10–11).

He said that “*as an expert builder*,” he had been able to lay the foundation (which was Christ and Him crucified) in their hearts and lives. He warned them, though, to be careful about how they built upon that foundation. He warned of the possibility of some not building upon Christ and turning out to be destroyed — of some not glorying and boasting in Christ and losing their relationship with the Lord. Then he told them to stop destroying the body of Christ. He said that God would destroy anyone who destroyed the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16–17). They were destroying the temple of God (the church of God) by glorying and boasting in men.

Finally in 1 Corinthians 3, he told them to notice all of the blessings that had been given to them. He told them that everything was theirs: all the teachers, life, death — everything that was valuable in a spiritual sense had been given to them in the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

Then Paul concluded the first section of the book of 1 Corinthians by asking the Corinthians to regard them as humble ministers of God. He used the word that described the under-rowers in a ship — the men who worked in the lower bank of the ship with an oar in his hand to pull the ship through the

waters by using oars. Paul and Apollos were the “*stewards*” of the mysteries of God and were trying to be faithful. Paul makes a final plea in that section for them to be faithful to Jesus, devoted to the Lord, and to stop glorying in men.

1 Corinthians 5

In this section of scripture, Paul was grieved because the church in Corinth was puffed up about the sin that was in their midst. They had a man shamefully living with his stepmother, and rather than take the necessary actions to bring him to repentance, they were boasting about this fellowship. They should have been in mourning, but they were proud. One of the only things that would cause the church to react with pride to such a sin in their midst would be the acceptance of human wisdom over God’s wisdom. The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians had explained why it was possible for this kind of shameful sinful condition to exist in the Corinthian church. Paul pled with them to take action against this man so that he would repent, turn away from his sin, and be accepted into fellowship with God again. They needed to turn this man over to Satan so that his spirit might be saved. There is evidence that this kind of public corrective discipline works because in a later letter, Paul talked about the fact that this man had repented. The church in Corinth was urged to forgive and encourage him (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:5–11).

Paul said, “*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*” (1 Corinthians 5:7b). The Christian’s relationship to Christ should motivate him to live a faithful, devoted life. Paul urged these brethren by saying:

But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat (1 Corinthians 5:11).

If these sins are being practiced by a Christian, then he is not striving to walk in the light (cf. 1 John 1:5–7), and the church needs to deal with his sinfulness by not eating with such a brother. The church takes action against such a one to bring him to his senses.

1 Corinthians 6

Paul was grieved that the members of the church in Corinth were so covetous and unspiritual that they would take one another to courts of law over the smallest matters. Paul exhorted the brethren to suffer the loss because they were defrauding one another and bringing shame upon the name of Jesus. He said it was a spiritual defect to even think about allowing an unbeliever to decide the things that were only small matters among themselves. This told outsiders that there was no one wise enough among them to make these judgments.

Paul introduced the subject of the Christian and their relationship to idolatry (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:12–17). He talked about the lawfulness of eating things that had been previously sacrificed to an idol as long as the Christian was not having fellowship with idolatry or causing a weaker brother to sin. Paul discussed these problems further in 1 Corinthians 8. Paul reminded them that their bodies were not their own. Perhaps he introduced immorality at this point because in the first century, idolatry also involved sexual immorality. He said:

Flee sexual immorality. . . . Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:18–20).

1 Corinthians 7

Since Paul had introduced the topic of immorality, he continued to talk to the Corinthians about the sanctity, purity, and the purpose of the marriage relationship. He told them that

in marriage the husband's and the wife's bodies belonged to their mate. He said they should not deprive one another of this relationship for in it they were honoring and glorifying God. Paul admitted that he had the gift of self-control and wished that all men were blessed in the same way. Paul began by talking to believers who were married to one another and then addressed the issues of a Christian married to a non-Christian. There are some difficult passages in 1 Corinthians 7 which need to be studied carefully to understand the will of God in the matters of marriage, divorce, and re-marriage (including widows and their right to marry as long as it is in the Lord).

1 Corinthians 8–10

In this section of scripture, Paul talked about a Christian's relationship to idolatry. He said that the Christian has the right to give up some of his rights in regard to meats offered to idols so that he can become all things to all men for the purpose of saving men. He warned the Corinthians about the example of Israel, urging them to take heed and not to think that they were immune to the temptation of idolatry. Paul said that it was permitted to go into an unbeliever's home and eat a common meal as long as it did not involve the practice of having fellowship in idolatry.

1 Corinthians 11

Paul discussed the headdress of a woman and the problems they had at Corinth concerning that custom in relationship to worship. The rest of 1 Corinthians 11 consists of an in-depth teaching on the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is taken each Lord's Day to bring the Christian's mind to the death and suffering of the Lord. Christians proclaim Christ's death every first day of the week until He returns, making sure to partake in a worthy manner. Paul urged the Corinthians to do this in an honorable, reverent, and loving way.

1 Corinthians 12–14

Paul addressed the problems that were occurring in the first century concerning the design, purpose, and origin of spiritual gifts. These gifts were to be used in a way that brought honor and glory to God. Many of the gifts were specifically to be used when the whole church was assembled. Paul challenged the Corinthians to grow and mature in the God-like love that would help them work through many of the problems they faced. This same kind of love is needed today.

1 Corinthians 15

Paul did a lengthy section on the truth concerning the resurrection of Christ, the firstfruits. Because Christ was raised, we know the rest of the harvest will be raised one day. Paul discussed the resurrection body and the resurrection day. He closed this section with:

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

1 Corinthians 16

Paul concluded this letter to the Corinthians by making some practical admonitions and exhortations. He closed with an admonition that those who do not love the Lord will be cursed. He also sent his personal love to each of the saints in Corinth: “*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen*” (1 Corinthians 16:23–24).

May God add His blessings to the study of this book from now on!

Gerald Paden

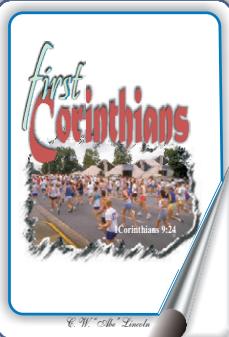


Abe was born and reared on a farm near Sweetwater, Texas. He graduated from Sweetwater High School and won for himself a scholarship to TCU and later transferred to ACC, now ACU, from which he received his B.S. Degree in 1950.

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Abe's over forty years on the firing line for the Lord took him to works in Iowa, Odessa, Midland, and Fort Worth, Texas and over twenty-five years teaching in the **Sunset International Bible Institute** in Lubbock. In the late fifties, the Lincoln family labored with the Tex Williams family in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, for three years. The Lincolns were working locally as both evangelist and elder with the church in Seminole, Texas along with his teaching duties in the **Sunset International Bible Institute** when he went to be with his Lord in the Spring of 1997.

While at ACU, Abe met and married Dot Dollar. They have a son, Steve, and a daughter, Becky.



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