

STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

**FIRST
CORINTHIANS**

STRIVING FOR UNITY

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To Paula
the one who
has taught me
what it means
to be
pure in heart

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

The study of the Bible has come upon hard times. Even though a host of modern translations can be found on the shelves of any local bookstore, there don't seem to be that many people who actually read the Bible. Why? In a country that prints more copies of the Bible than ever before, why aren't we reading it? The real reason is that we find it to be boring.

Let's face it. The Bible is a very old book written about people who lived long ago and far away. It talks about arks and floods and tribal rituals and animal sacrifices. It is full of stories of famines and floods, kingdoms and wars, prophets and disciples, all very interesting, but at first glance these seem to be of little relevance to me.

Wouldn't it be great if God were to write a book that spoke to the problems of the 21st century man? It could include such topics as the problem of sin and division and hypocrisy in the church. It could talk about the issues of sexuality and the unique problems that face married people. It might shed some light on the proper role of women in the church. It could discuss the difficulty of clean living in a dirty world and what to do with the "grey areas." It could give the bottom line on the modern charismatic movement and this issue of speaking in tongues. It would be nice if it added a final chapter to straighten out all of the confusion over future prophecy.

The good news is that God has written a book that covers all of those topics and more. No, I haven't received some special revelation from heaven or seen a mystical vision. I'm talking about Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. So pull up a chair and join me in this fascinating look into a book that I consider to be as relevant as yesterday's newspaper and a lot more accurate.

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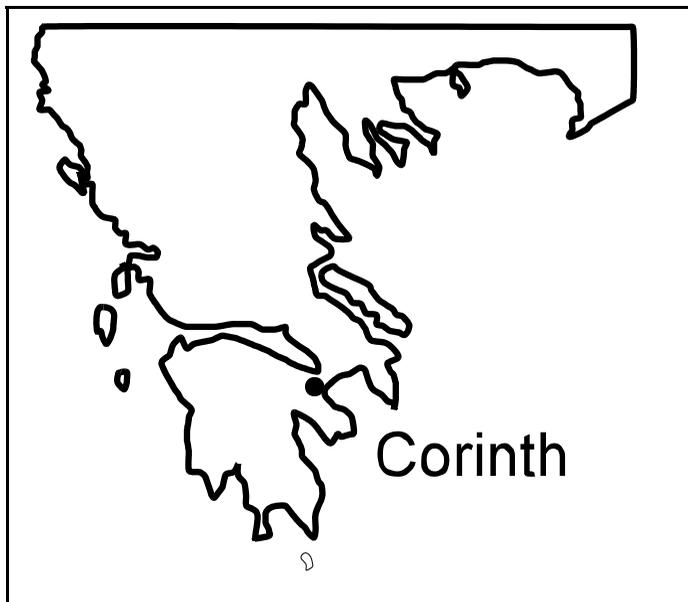
INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

The main thrust of the letter is for pure, godly living.
Dr. John MacArthur.

*Here, as in no other place, is the tension between the
practical and theological so consistently maintained.*
William Baird.

One of the most strategic areas in all of Greece was the isthmus of Corinth. This narrow land bridge is only four miles wide and is the only connecting link with the Peloponnesian Peninsula to the south. Today there is a canal that has been cut through this isthmus that allows cargo ships to avoid the longer journey around the Greek peninsula, but in that day, cargoes would have to be unloaded on one side of the isthmus and transported overland to the other side.

The city of Corinth grew up on a high plateau on the south end of this isthmus. The city itself lay at the foot of the Acrocorinth, a mighty acropolis rising straight up into the sky to a height of 1800 feet.



Due to this central location, the city of Corinth achieved a position of prominence very early in the history of Greece. It quickly became a trading center for all of Greece. A tram was built so that smaller ships could be dragged across the isthmus on rollers and so avoid the long, dangerous passage around Cape Malea at the southern end of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. Ports were built on either side of the isthmus and this served to further increase the prosperity of Corinth.

The city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. and lay abandoned for a hundred years until Julius Caesar ordered its rebuilding in 46 B.C. Under Roman Rule, Corinth became the capital of the entire province of Achaia. It now became the vanity fair of the ancient world. The Isthmus Games, held from times unremembered in the Colosseum of Corinth, were now re-instituted and brought athletes from all over the world.

The Temple of Aphrodite, located at the top of the acropolis, became renowned throughout the Roman Empire for its 1000 temple prostitutes.¹ Notorious for its immorality, the term *korinthianzomai* (to act like a Corinthian) came to refer to the act of fornication. Thus the city of Corinth could be described in four major points.

1. Commerce.

Because of its two major ports on either side of the isthmus, the city attracted a great deal of the shipping business. Added to this was its central location on the land bridge connecting northern and southern Greece.

2. Education.

¹ *And the temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, prostitutes, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess. And therefore it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich; for instance, the ship captains freely squandered their money, and hence the proverb, "Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth." Moreover, it is recorded that a certain courtesan said to the woman who reproached her with the charge that she did not like to work or touch wool: "Yet, such as I am, in this short time I have taken down three webs." -- Strabo, Geography 8:6:1.*

Corinth had become a smelting pot of many peoples and cultures. Greek philosophy still reigned in the city and the inhabitants took great pride in their reasonings.

3. Sports.

The Isthmus Games were the most famous throughout the ancient world, even overshadowing the Olympics. These were held every second year and included chariot races and boxing as well as the more conventional track games.

4. Religion.

The worship of Aphrodite and her fertility cult had heavily influenced the thinking and morality of the Corinthians. Many had been brought up to believe that sex was a normal part of worship and that sexual deviations were “an acceptable alternative.”

This was the setting for this epistle and it was into this setting that Paul came in the year A.D. 50.

PAUL’S MINISTRY AT CORINTH

During his second missionary journey, Paul came from Athens down to Corinth. He would remain here for a year and a half and a church would be organized here during that time.

1. Paul’s Ministry to Aquila and Priscilla.

After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, ³ and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers. (Acts 18:1-3).

Coming to Corinth, Paul fell in with a Jewish couple who had just recently arrived from Rome. We are not told that this Jewish couple

were initially Christians. The reason that Paul teamed up with them was that they shared the same secular occupation -- they were tent-makers. Apparently Paul used this opportunity to get to know them and to lead them to Jesus.

This is Christianity in action. It isn't only to be taken out and dusted off on Sunday mornings and then placed back in a drawer after the morning service. Paul had short-sleeve Christianity. He was a witness for Christ on the job and he led his co-workers to Christ.

2. Paul's Ministry to the Jews.

And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. (1 Corinthians 18:4-5).

The ministry at Corinth got off to a rather slow start because Paul was working as a tentmaker and could not completely devote himself to studying and teaching. This changed when Silas and Timothy arrived in town. With the financial backing that they brought with them, Paul was able to move into high gear. In no time at all, he was holding Bible studies in the synagogue in an effort to win Jews over to Christ. It wasn't long before he ran into some serious opposition. It was in the face of this Jewish opposition that he turned to the Greeks as the primary object of his preaching ministry.

3. Paul's Ministry to the Greeks.

And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles." ⁷ And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. ⁸ And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. (Acts 18:6-

8).

The open door at Corinth slammed in Paul's face as the Jewish resistance to the gospel grew and solidified. But no sooner had one door been closed than another was quite literally opened. Paul moved out of the synagogue and right next door into the home of Titus Justus, a new convert. Paul didn't even have to take down the sign that announced his Bible studies. He merely drew an arrow pointing next door.

It reminds me of the story of a man who owned a small country store in a growing community. One day he learned that a big corporation was going to build a giant department store on the land immediately adjacent to his store. No sooner had the department store gone up than another corporation moved in and erected a large supermarket on the other side of his little country store. The man was wondering how he could possibly stay in business with this kind of competition when he came up with an idea. He went out and bought the biggest sign he could find and placed it over his store with the words, "Main entrance."

This is more or less what Paul did. He moved out of the synagogue and into the house that was next door to the synagogue. The results were so effective that even the leader of the synagogue was converted along with his entire family.

4. God's Promise of Protection.

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." 11 And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:9-11).

As the hostility against Paul's ministry began to intensify, I think that Paul might have begun to feel just a bit intimidated. After all, he well knew what severe persecution could be like. He had been stoned and beaten and imprisoned for his preaching.

It is at such a time of need that the Lord appears to him in a vision and promises to protect him from harm while he is at Corinth. The fulfillment of this promise of protection is seen in the next paragraph.

5. The Hearing before Gallio.

But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, 13 saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; 15 but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters."

And he drove them away from the judgment seat. 17 And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. And Gallio was not concerned about any of these things. (Acts 18:12-17).

The Jewish opposition against Paul came to a head one day and the Jews took Paul before the Roman Proconsul, Lucius Junius Gallio. This was a serious matter. Gallio was the Proconsul of all of the Greek peninsula. A guilty verdict from him could not be overturned short of the Roman emperor himself. A guilty verdict from him would mean that the gospel would be outlawed all throughout Greece. That hadn't been the case up to this point. Christianity had not yet come under the attack of Rome. Christians were not being persecuted by the state. That decision now rested in the hands of Gallio.

Gallio refused to even hear the case. He declined to become embroiled in a Jewish controversy. He dismissed the case and set Paul free.

Imagine the scene. The Jews are gathered together against Paul. They are led by Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue -- the old

synagogue ruler had retired by converting to Christianity. They are furious with Paul. They are crying out for his blood. But suddenly the tables are turned. Paul is released and some of the Gentile bystanders give vent to their anti-Semitism by taking Sosthenes and beating him in the court before the judgment seat. The synagogue leader who tried to have Paul beaten is himself condemned.

The narrative is given to us for a reason. There is a lesson here. It is that God always keeps His promises. Remember that God had promised Paul back in verse 10 that He would keep him from harm. That promise was fulfilled in Gallio's judgment hall when the mob gave Sosthenes the beating that was meant for Paul.

You need to hear this because God has made some promises to you. He has not promised that you will never be beaten for your faith. But He has promised that He will always be there to pick you back up. And He has promised that He will give you the strength to take whatever comes your way.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13).

You are going to go through some hard times. They may not come all at once and they may not come soon, but one day they will come. You can be assured that, even when troubles do come, God is still in control He is in charge of the universe and nothing can come your way that has not first passed across a nail-scarred hand.

OCCASION FOR THE EPISTLE

In 1 Corinthians 16:8 Paul mentions his plans to *remain in Ephesus until Pentecost*. While waiting at Ephesus, Paul receives news from Corinth by way of a visit from several Corinthian believers. There seem to have been at least two groups who visited Paul and who reported of the situation at Corinth.

1. An Official Delegation.

And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. (1 Corinthians 16:17).

From what Paul says a few verses earlier, it is evident that Stephanus was one of the founding members of the church at Corinth. He seems to have headed up an official delegation from the church that carried a letter to Paul asking key questions that were at issue in the church.

Now concerning the things about which you wrote... (1 Corinthians 7:1).

This letter from the church at Corinth to Paul asks questions about divorce and remarriage (chapter 7), about the eating of foods that had been sacrificed to idols (chapters 8-10), about the proper use of spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14) and about the doctrine of the resurrection (chapter 15).

2. An Unofficial Delegation.

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. (1 Corinthians 1:11).

Another group of people had also paid a visit to Paul. This groups had been sent by Chloe, possibly members of her family or her servants. They reported problems that were in the church that may have been omitted by the official delegation. This problems included...

- ♦ Divisions within the church (1:11).
- ♦ An exaltation of secular philosophy (3:18).
- ♦ Spiritual arrogance (4:18).
- ♦ Immorality within the church (5:1).
- ♦ Christians bringing lawsuits against other believers (6:1).
- ♦ Disorder in the Lord's Supper (11:18-21).
- ♦ Abuse of spiritual gifts (12:1 - 14:40).

Paul writes this epistle in response to these problems and questions, sending it with Timothy who is charged with making certain that his teachings are carried out (4:17).

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS EPISTLE FOR TODAY

There is no other epistle in the New Testament which so directly deals with the problems of the church in the 21st century United States.

- ♦ We are a smelting pot of many peoples.
- ♦ We have become known as the nation of the cults.
- ♦ We have a reputation for being a “Christian nation,” yet for all of our religion we are plagued with immorality.
- ♦ Our churches are plagued by division.
- ♦ Divorce is reaching epidemic proportions.
- ♦ In our colleges and universities there is a trend to glorify the scientific and to ridicule the spiritual.
- ♦ The role of men and women in the church has been challenged.
- ♦ Questions of the uses and misuses of the spiritual gifts are at an all time high.

Each of these areas had its counterpart in the city of Corinth. Paul will deal with each of these areas within this epistle. When doctrines are presented at all, they will appear in a very practical form. This is a picture of shirt-sleeve Christianity.

That is what Christianity is all about. If your Christianity only works on Sunday morning, then it doesn't work. It isn't real. Real Christianity continues throughout every day of the week. Real Christianity touches every aspect of your life.

Real Christianity says that God loves you just the way you are, but that He also loves you too much to leave you the way you are. If you have been born into His family and have become one of His children, then your life is in for a change. He is the God who changes lives. He can change yours.

OPENING SALUTATIONS

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, ² to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:1-3).

Ephesians is an epistle. That doesn't mean it is the wife of an apostle. Rather, it means that it is written as a letter. We are used to getting letters mailed to us in an envelope which contains the address and the return address and the stamps. In that day, letters were hand delivered and often carried by a trusted servant or friend.

PAUL

It has been customary to think that Paul changed his name from its original "Saul" to "Paul" so that he could better identify with the Gentiles (Saul is a Hebrew name, while Paul is a Latin name). However, I do not believe that this is completely the case. In the days in which Paul lived, all Roman citizens had three names.

1. Praenomen - an individual name given at birth.
2. Nomen - a tribal name. In Rome there were about 1000 tribes which could trace their ancestry back to a common origin.
3. Cognomen. At first, the cognomen was given as a family nickname. You know what a nickname is. A nickname is a name that is given to you to describe some feature about you. For example, when I first joined the Fire Department as a young man, I was given the nickname, "the Preacher." It was given because the people who

worked with me soon recognized that characteristic. In the same way, the cognomen, usually referring to some outstanding feature in the individual. Here are a few examples...

Crassus (Fat)
Longus (Tall)
Rufus (red)
Felix (Happy)
Paulus (Little)

Eventually these cognomen became family names and were perpetuated from father to son, even after the meaning of the name no longer applied. One of the most famous family names was that of Caesar. As I said, all Roman citizens possessed three names. Here are a few well-known examples...

- Gaius Julius Caesar
- Publius Cornelius Scipio
- Lucius Sergius Paulus

As you have seen in the above examples, *Paulus* was a cognomen. It was always used as a cognomen. As such, it was a family name. This means Paul had both a Jewish name as well as a Roman name. He had a Jewish name because he was Jewish. His Jewish name was Saul. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and he had been named after the leading figure of the tribe of Benjamin.

Although Paul was a Jew, we learn from his own testimony that he had also been born as a citizen of Roman. At some time in the past, one of his ancestors has been “adopted” into one of the families of Rome and given a Roman name. Thus when Paul uses this name for himself, he is not making it up. He is merely using one of his names which would serve to better identify himself with the Gentiles. His Roman name was Paulos.

CALLED AS AN APOSTLE

In addition to the Praenomen, Nomen and Cognomen, the Romans also occasionally used an agnomen. This would be a special title of honor and/or authority.

Praenomen	Nomen	Cognomen	Agnomen
Gaius	Julius	Caesar	Imperator
Publius	Cornelius	Scipio	Africanus

Paul also uses an Agnomen. He calls himself an “apostle.” *Apostolos* is also the Greek translation of the Hebrew “*sheliach*.” A well-known Hebrew proverb states: “The authority of the send one (*sheliach*) is equal to that of the sender.” Thus authority is inherent in the term “apostle” from both its Greek and Hebrew backgrounds.

While the word “apostle” comes from the root verb “to send from” it seems to have a more specific meaning. Indeed, the Greeks of the Peloponnesian Wars used this as a military term for the admiral of their fleet who was “commissioned” with a special duty.

When used in this sense, it seems to speak of one who is sent out with special authority. The authority of which he speaks is that which is given to him directly by Jesus Christ. He had been *called as an apostle*. Just as the other apostles had been chosen by Jesus, so Paul had also been called by Jesus. It had not taken place during the earthly ministry of Jesus, but some time later.

...and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Corinthians 15:8-9).

The Lord appointed Paul to be an apostle long after the early church had been established. His apostleship was special. He was appointed as an apostle and sent to a ministry different from that of the other apostles. He was sent to Gentiles.

This brings us to a question. Why does Paul mention his apostleship? There are some people who cannot resist throwing around their titles. I recall after I was ordained and the church secretary asked how she should address me. I replied, “How about with my name?” Some people cannot resist throwing around their titles. But I don’t think that was the case with Paul. He mentions his apostleship for a reason. He mentions it because his apostolic authority has been called into question.

If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:2).

Paul wants to make it very clear from the outset that his preaching comes with authority from God. The truths that will be presented in this book are not going to be Paul's opinion. This is a message from God. It has been given through Paul and he has been commissioned to preach it to the church at Corinth.

BY THE WILL OF GOD

Paul's apostleship was not his own idea. He did not say to himself one day, "I think that I will become an apostle." He didn't take a course in apostleship or graduate from seminary with a degree in apostling. He became an apostle "by the will of God." God chose Paul to be an apostle. God took him and set him apart from the rest of the human race for a special purpose. God singled him out and gave him a special spiritual gift and commissioned him to do a special job.

Maybe you are thinking that it would be nice if God had singled you out and had given you a special commission and a special purpose to fulfill. I have news for you. He has done exactly that. If you are a believer, it is because the God of the universe said to you, "I have chosen you out from the rest of the human race to do a job that only you can do. You are my special person for this special job. I created you for just this purpose."

Does that sound exciting? It certainly ought to. God has placed each believer into his own special place in the body of Christ, each with his own special gift. One such believer was a man by the name of Sosthenes. He is mentioned here in verse 1 when Paul speaks of *Sosthenes our brother*.

In Acts 18:17 we are told that the leader of the Jewish synagogue at Corinth was named Sosthenes. He took the place of the original synagogue leader when he became a Christian. At that time, Sosthenes was leading a Jewish mob and trying to bring Paul to judgment. Instead Sosthenes himself received a terrific beating at the hands of the mob.

We do not know for certain, but perhaps that beating knocked some sense into the head of Sosthenes. Perhaps as a result of that incident he had come

to Christ. Now we see him as Paul's partner in the cause of the gospel.

RECIPIENTS OF THE EPISTLE

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours (1 Corinthians 1:2).

This epistle is addressed to a particular group of people. Though it has application to us today, its original audience was very specific. They are addressed in three ways.

- ♦ The church of God which is at Corinth.
- ♦ Those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling.
- ♦ Those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All three of these designations are used to identify the recipients of this epistle as Christians. These three descriptions form a definition of what is a Christian.

1. The church of God which is at Corinth (1:2).

A Christian is one who is a member of the church of God. The word church refers to an assembly of people. A Christian is one who has joined the ranks of God's people. He is no longer just another member of the human race. Now he is part of a group.

This ought to be manifested in a very practical way. It ought to be manifested by those believers who are in the same geographical area coming together to worship and to pray and to fellowship together. If you are one of God's people, then it ought to be manifested by your involvement in a local church.

There are many people today who have divorced themselves from the local church, yet who consider themselves to be a Christian and in fellowship with the Lord. Such a dichotomy has no parallel within the Scriptures. The Bible knows nothing of a follower of Christ who is separated from God's people.

2. Those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling (1:2).

Paul says that he is writing to the Corinthian saints. He writes to those who have been “sanctified.” What does it mean to be sanctified? That which is sanctified has been set apart for a special use.

For example, we have a small measuring cup in our household that we use only for that purpose. It sits in the cupboard with all of the other cups, but it has a special use that none of the other cups in the cabinet have. It has been set apart for measuring.

The words “sanctify” and “saint” do not sound very much alike in English. But in the Greek language they are virtually the same. They both come from the same root word. The Greeks used the word ἅγιος (*hagios*) to describe something that had been set apart. It is often translated “to be holy.” A saint is someone who has been set apart or sanctified or made holy. Thus to make something holy and to sanctify it are the same thing.

The Greeks used ἅγιος to describe that which had been set apart and consecrated to the gods. The word was used in this way of temples, altars, offerings and even of people. For example, Herodotus tells us that the shrine of Aphrodite at Corinth was set apart (ἅγιος) to the worship of that particular goddess.

This same word could be used to describe an offering that would be given at a temple. Money that was given would now be set apart for the use of the priesthood of that temple. The money itself had not undergone a physical change. But it was now set apart for a special purpose.

When you trust in Jesus Christ, you are immediately set apart from the rest of the human race to become a special possession of God’s. You enter into a special union with Jesus Christ. As a result, you share in all of the spiritual blessings that belong to Jesus.

- ♦ Because He rose from the dead, you will also partake in a resurrection.
- ♦ Because He has eternal life, you are also given eternal life.

- ♦ Because He is the Son of God, you are adopted into God's forever family.
- ♦ Because He is righteous, you are also declared to be righteous.
- ♦ Because He is the heir to the Kingdom, you become a co-heir with Christ.

In the mind of God, you were crucified and buried and resurrected and are presently seated at the right hand of the Father. You are a participant in all of the communicable attributes of Jesus.

Now I want you to notice something. This sanctification is true of all of the Corinthian Christians. This becomes especially significant when we remember the practical experiences of the believers at Corinth. As we read through this epistle, we shall learn some amazing things about the Corinthians.

- ♦ They had broken up the church over petty disputes.
- ♦ They had allowed immorality to come into the church.
- ♦ They were hauling each other into court and suing one another.
- ♦ They were dishonoring the Lord's Supper.
- ♦ There were even some who were questioning the resurrection of the dead.

Yet in spite of all these things, Paul calls them "saints" -- set apart ones. He says that they have been sanctified in Christ Jesus. Their identity was no longer rooted in their sinful condition. They had been given a new identity. They were now in Christ. It is because of their new identity that Paul could say all of these wonderful things about them.

There is a very practical lesson for us to learn here. It is that my identity is no longer rooted in my performance. Why is this so important? Because my performance will always fall short of what it should be. I am a sinner and I am going to go on being a sinner as long as I am in this life. My performance as a Christian will always fall far short of what it ought to be. What will this do to my self image and my sense of security? If my focus is upon my performance, then it will drive me to frustration. It will destroy my self image. I will end up doing one of two things.

I might give up. If I honestly try to build up my self esteem on the basis of my performance, I will quickly come to the place where I am totally defeated. That might be for the best. God often has to bring us to the place where we are totally defeated because only then can we see that “His grace is sufficient for me, because power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Or I might try to fake it. There are many Christians who are hiding behind a mask of pseudo-spirituality. The New Testament Greek had a word for this. It is called a *hypokrites*. It described the Greek actor who held a mask in front of his face as he played a part in the theater. It is from this term that we derive our English word “hypocrite.”

Churches today are full of people who are hiding behind a mask of good works and church attendance, seeking to satisfy their self esteem by impressing other people. The reason for this is because of our tendency to build our self esteem on the basis of what we think other people think about us. What we need to focus on is what God thinks about us. God sees us with a new identity. He has an image of us that is exactly the same as the image of Christ Jesus.

3. Those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:2).

The third distinction of a Christian is that he is one who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am often asked whether it is enough to merely believe in God. It is not.

There is a growing movement in the United States that says it does not matter what you believe as long as you believe it. This amounts to a faith in faith. But faith in itself has no value. Faith is no stronger than the object in which it is placed.

Our faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that He is Lord. We believe that He is Jesus. We believe that He is the Christ. Each of these is vitally important.

- He is Lord. This is a title of deity. We believe that Jesus is no mere man. We believe that He is God in the flesh -- that God became a man so that He could come to earth and die for our sins.

- ♦ He is Jesus. He is the One who was born in a stable and who grew up to walk our dirty streets and to die upon our dirty cross to pay for the dirty sins of men and to make them clean again.
- ♦ He is the Christ. The word “Christ” is not the last name of Jesus. Rather it is a transliteration of the Greek word *Christos* (χριστος) which describes one who has been anointed. It is the counterpart of the Hebrew word “Messiah.”

THE GREETING

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:3).

We have already taken note of the normal format for opening a letter in the ancient world. The writer would begin by introducing himself, then he would give the name of the recipients and finally he would give a greeting. Paul is using this same format in his epistle to the Corinthians.

1. The words of Greeting: *Grace to you and peace (1:3).*

This is Paul’s usual greeting in his epistles. The only exception to this is in his two epistles to Timothy where he uses, “Grace, mercy and peace.” In most letters penned in the Greek language, the salutation utilized was the single word *χαίρειν* (*charein*), which means “greetings.” This form of salutation is used in James 1:1.

Instead of the usual *χαίρειν*, Paul uses *χαρις* (*charis*), the word for “grace.” But that is not all. He also adds the word “peace.” The Hebrew equivalent (*shalom*) was used by the Hebrews as the greeting at the beginning of their letters, just as *charein* was used by the Greeks.

Paul’s greeting to the Corinthians combines both the Greek and the Hebrew salutations into a single greeting. But there is a deeper significance than this. There is a definite order to the arrangement.

Peace must always come after grace. Without grace there is no

peace. Grace is the undeserved favor of God directed toward us. It excludes all human merit. It is the sum total of what God has done for you.

This is the problem of the world today. It is trying to find peace without grace. It is only as man meets the grace of God and accepts it that he can find peace with God and then peace with himself and with others.

2. The Source of Grace and Peace: *...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3).*

Here is the source of all grace and all peace. It is from God. First the Father is mentioned. Since the Father is positionally higher than the Son (John 14:28), He is given the first priority.

Our grace and peace also comes from the Son. This is not a separate source. It is the same source. There is a oneness among the persons of the Godhead. From this one source, grace and peace are available to the Corinthians who will be reading this epistle. The Corinthians do not deserve this. They have done nothing to earn the favor of God. That is how grace always works. It is always given to the undeserving.

God offers His grace and peace to you. You can come and be at peace with God instead of remaining His enemy. You can do that right now by trusting in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

What problems are you facing in life? God has made provision for you. He made provision for your problems before you were even born. He made provision for them before time began. You can trust in Him and experience the resulting grace and peace.

THE BASIS FOR GODLY LIVING

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

The church at Corinth was on the skids. They held the unenviable record for having more problems than any other church in the New Testament.

- ♦ There were divisions in the church.
- ♦ There was an exaltation of secular philosophy.
- ♦ There was spiritual arrogance.
- ♦ Immorality was rampant within the church.
- ♦ Christians were bringing lawsuits against other believers.
- ♦ A Christian Woman's Equal Rights Movement was doing its part to add to the general disorder.
- ♦ There was disruption at the Lord's Supper.
- ♦ There was an abuse of spiritual gifts.

Paul is going to be dealing with all of these problems within this epistle. This will be a “nuts-and-bolts” approach to Christianity. It will be a shirt-sleeve Christianity.

This is what Christianity is all about. It is more than a mere series of lessons that are to be filed away in a notebook and forgotten. It is more than merely a series of doctrinal beliefs where you sign on the dotted line and join a club. Real Christianity touches every aspect of your life. It affects how you work and how you relate to your wife and kids and how you view yourself. It relates to the business world and the bus stop and the bedroom and the beach. If that is not what you have been experiencing, then maybe it is because you have swallowed a counterfeit.

God loves you just the way you are, but He also loves you too much to leave you the way you are. If you have been born into His family and have become one of His children, then your life is in for a change. He is the God who changes life and if you are one of His people, then He is out to change your life.

This is Paul's purpose as he begins this epistle to the Corinthians. They have some serious problems and he is writing to give them the solution. He is going to call them to godly living. But before he can do that, he has to give them the proper foundation. Before he can tell them to be godly, he first will show them WHY they ought to be godly.

Why should you try to live a godly life? Let's face it, it isn't always easy to try to live for God. There is often a lot of work involved. It is often inconvenient. So why should you even try? The reason is because of what God has already done for you. This is important. The reason that your life as a Christian is to be different is because you are now different.

The story is told of the young World War One lieutenant who was called into the presence of his commanding officer and awarded a medal. "You are hereby awarded this medal for heroism," he was told. "Now go out and lead your men up that hill."

God has done the same thing with you. He says, "I have given you a new position. You have been promoted to the position of co-heir with Jesus Christ, entering into a special union with Him. Your identity is no longer rooted in who and what you are. It is now rooted in who and what Jesus is. I have set you apart as a special possession and have declared you to be holy. Now go out and live a holy life."

You have received a new position. You did not earn that position. You did not deserve that position. It has been given to you as a free gift of God's grace. Now God commands that you should live in accordance with that new position.

God has blessed you with some wonderful blessings. These blessings call into three categories: Past, present and future.

THE PAST BLESSINGS OF GRACE

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, ⁶ even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you (1 Corinthians 1:3-6).

Paul begins by focusing on those blessings that were given to the Corinthians when they first believed. These blessings are given to all believers. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you share in these blessings.

1. These Blessings are Cause for Thanksgiving: *I thank my God always concerning you (1:4).*

You would not think that there would be much about the Corinthians for which Paul would be able to thank God. They were not very pleasant people. They did not present a very good testimony.

They were divided into schisms and clicks. They were proud and boastful of their knowledge of secular philosophy. They were arrogant. They rejoiced in immorality. They were out for number one. They had poor table manners at the Lord's Supper. Yet in spite of all of these negative qualities, Paul is able to thank God concerning them.

There is a tremendous truth here. Perhaps you have been feeling spiritually inferior as of late. Perhaps you are suffering from a spiritual inferiority complex. You look around the church and you see all of these smiling people who seem to have it all together and you look at your own life and you know that you do not measure up.

I have some good news for you. No matter how bad your present condition appears to be, there are some things in your life for which you can thank God. You are the possessor of some fantastic spiritual blessings.

These blessings do not depend upon how good you are. They depend upon how good God is. These blessings have been given to you on the basis of your new identification with Christ.

2. These Blessings were given to you because of Christ: *I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus (1:4).*

When you trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you entered into a spiritual and a mystical union with Him. You received a new identity. That new identity is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ. It means that you share certain blessings that belong to Him.

- ♦ Because He is the Son of God, you are also called a son of God.
- ♦ Because He is holy, God has set you apart and made you holy.
- ♦ Because He is righteous, you are also declared to be righteous.
- ♦ Because He has eternal life, you also have eternal life.
- ♦ Because He is the heir to the Kingdom of God, you are a co-heir with Christ.
- ♦ Because He is seated at the right hand of God, you can come boldly before the throne of grace.

All of these blessings come under the title of “grace.” Grace is the sum total of all that God has done on your behalf. It has not been earned. It has not been deserved. It is His free gift to you.

3. These Blessings Enrich you in what you Say and in what you Know:
In everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge (1:5).

The Corinthians had been made spiritually rich. They were wealthy with a great abundance of spiritual gifts. They possessed the riches of the Spirit. But in the midst of their riches, they failed to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

You have those same riches. If you are a Christian, then you have been blessed with great spiritual wealth. You have been given the knowledge of eternal life. You have met Jesus. You have become a partaker of His divine nature.

With those riches come great responsibility. The greatness of your responsibility is in direct proportion to the greatness of your spiritual wealth.

THE PRESENT BLESSINGS OF GRACE

...so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7).

As a result of God's grace toward the Corinthians, they now possess everything that they need in their Christian life. If they have a problem, it is not because they lack the resources.

There is a story of an Indian who lived on a reservation in the area of Oklahoma. One day, he received a letter from the United States government. Because he valued the letter from the Great White Father, he kept it in a pouch that he wore around his neck. Times grew bad for the Indian and he died of malnutrition. Those who found him opened the pouch and read the letter. It informed him that the land that had been parceled to him had been found to contain oil and he was a rich man. He had lived in poverty when great wealth was his for the taking.

There are many Christians who seem to go through life like that Indian. They have been blessed with great things, yet they live as though they were spiritual paupers. You are wealthy beyond measure. You have been chosen by God to be one of His special people. You have a wealth that money cannot buy, that thieves cannot steal and that time cannot fade. Everything that Paul is going to say to the Corinthians is based upon this truth. They are already rich. Now they need to live a lifestyle that is consistent with their position.

THE FUTURE BLESSINGS OF GRACE

...so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:7-9).

Paul gives a promise to the Corinthians for the future. It is a promise that God will find them *blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1:8).

This is a fantastic promise, especially when we consider the fact that it is given to the Corinthians. These people did not look blameless. In fact, as we read through this epistle, we shall see that they are full of blame. If you look at these Corinthian Christians right now, they appear to be anything but blameless. That is because God isn't finished with them yet.

This is a great truth. There is coming a day when we shall stand before the Lord and we shall be judged and we shall be found blameless because Jesus took our blame upon Himself and credited us with His righteousness in return.

That is what happened on the cross. God looked down from heaven to where Jesus hung on the cross and God reckoned you to be on that cross. The penalty for your sins was paid in full. In the same way, you are going to stand before God to be judged and He will look at you and He will see Jesus.

1. There is a Future Confirmation of Blamelessness: *Awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:7-8).*

This is the doctrine that we know as the perseverance of the saints. Notice that it is not ultimately the perseverance of the saints. It is really the perseverance of the Lord Jesus Christ. The saints do not persevere because of the strength of their own will or because they grit their teeth and struggle over every obstacle. They persevere because God is faithful.

2. Your Future Blamelessness is Confirmed by the God who is Faithful: *God is faithful (1:9).*

The reason we know that we shall be blameless is because God is faithful. He has promised that He will bring us to perfection and He can be trusted to accomplish His promise.

A promise is no stronger than the character of the one who makes the promise. If I promise you something, it might not come to pass because I might fail to make good on my promise. But God never fails. He never changes His mind. If He has promised you something, then you can bank on it.

None of those who have been saved will ever be lost. You have God's work on that. If you belong to Him, then you are eternally secure.

3. God's Faithfulness brings you into Fellowship with His Son: *God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1:9).*

It was this very faithfulness of God that brought us to His Son. It was at a time when we were at enmity with God that He called us to Himself. It was when we were dead in our sins that He made us alive. It was when we were children of wrath that He gave us a new birth and made us children of the light. As a result, we have come into fellowship with Jesus.

What does this mean? To have fellowship with someone means to share things in common with that person. We share things in common with Jesus. We share His righteousness. We share His holiness. We share His eternal life. We share His sonship. We share His kingdom.

Now that we share all these things with Jesus, we are called upon to live like Jesus lived. Our calling in Christ and our conduct in Christ are closely bound together. They cannot be separated.

A teenager was out in the country driving his first car. He had worked on the engine until it was fine-tuned and now he was out for a ride. He was driving down the road at a high rate of speed when he saw an intersection up ahead. As he looked, he saw two cars approaching the intersection on the crossroad and he adjusted his speed so that he would pass between the two cars. It would take great skill and exact timing, for they were also moving at a good speed, but he felt confident of his ability. He only made one miscalculation. The first car was towing the second car. That young man learned the results of trying to separate two things that are bound together.

The Corinthians were much like that young man. They were attempting to separate that which was bound together. They were trying to enjoy a calling in Christ while demonstrating a conduct that was devilish. The results were tragic.

God has bound our position in Christ with our practical day-by-day living. They two cannot be separated. Any attempt to do so will result in a collision with God's natural laws.

How about you? Have you been trying to separate that which was not meant to be separated? Have you been running head on against God's laws lately?

Maybe it is time for you to make a course correction. Maybe it is time for you to recognize that God knows what He is talking about when He tells you

the best way to run your life. It is not too late. God is still faithful and He is patiently waiting for you to come back to Him.

DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Once upon a time there was a body. It had enjoyed a healthy birth and a normal growth. Although there had been times of brief sickness and discomfort, these went through the usual healing processes and the body continued to grow and to function.

Then one day, the toes began to discuss among themselves the importance of wearing comfortable shoes. In the course of the conversation, it was observed that no other part of the body was in the habit of wearing shoes.

“But shoes are necessary for the protection of the body!” exclaimed one of the big toes. “We need to convince the other members of the body that they should also take to wearing shoes. But alas, the other members of the body could not see the need and would not comply with such demands. The toes decided that, for the good of the body, they would separate themselves from the other members of the body.

This had raised the question of what the various members of the body ought to wear. The legs stated that trousers were the only proper apparel. The torso claimed that a shirt ought to be worn. The hands disagreed, claiming that nothing was necessary, but that gloves were acceptable upon occasion.

The members of the body began to quarrel with one another with the result that each member decided to withdraw from those other members with whom there was disagreement. In the end, the body died.

Sounds a little silly, doesn't it? Yet this simple story serves to illustrate why there are so many dying churches in the world today.

Corinth was a church divided. There were divisions within the church. These divisions were threatening to tear the church apart. In far off Ephesus, Paul had heard the news of these divisions that plagued the church. He moved to deal with this problem.

THE PROBLEM PRESENTED

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.

Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:10-12).

The church at Corinth had some serious problems. They had polarized themselves into a series of exclusive communities. If you were not a part of their particular group, then you did not count in their eyes.

Notice also that the case of this disunity was not of a doctrinal nature. There may have been some doctrinal problems in Corinth, but this disunity was not a part of that. There are times when there ought to be division in the church. When someone holds to a false teaching or when someone rejects a Biblical teaching, then it is time for some disunity. A person who rejects the teaching that Jesus is the Son of God does not belong in the church. A person who does not believe that salvation is a gift from God has no place within the community of believers.

This was not a doctrinal division at Corinth. These groups had not been formed on the basis of their doctrinal beliefs. We know this because we know something of the leaders that were used as the centers for each of these groups.

Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:12).

These Corinthians had held a popularity contest and there had been four nominees. They had separated themselves four groups and they each claimed to be following after a man.

1. The Paul Group.

This first group wanted to be loyal to Paul. After all, he was the one who had begun the church at Corinth and he deserved their undivided loyalty.

2. The Apollos Group.

Apollos was a young preacher who had visited Corinth and who had preached there for a time. Acts 18:11 says that he was “an eloquent man” (άνηρ λογιος). Apparently he was known for his impressive speaking ability. The people who followed him may have been impressed by the big words that he used.

3. The Peter Group.

This group may have been the working class. They could identify with the tough, gruff fisherman from Galilee who had been given the keys to the kingdom.

4. The Jesus Group.

It could be that this group had a false piety that said, “You other people can listen to all of those other Bible teachers, but we won’t listen to anyone but Jesus.” They had a party in which they burned all of their commentaries and now they walked around with their nose in the air and dismissed all that did not belong to their party.

Paul does not advocate any of these groups. He does not even advocate the Jesus Group. He says that they are all wrong because they are all dividing the church. People were arguing over which group you ought to belong and they were disassociating themselves from anyone who did not belong to their exclusive group.

There is a lesson here. It is that the church of God ought to be unified. When we speak of the church, we often think of a building where you go on Sunday to hear the teaching of the Bible. But this is not the church at all. The church is not the building, but the people inside the building. The church is a living thing. It is a body.

Notice that Paul’s exhortation comes *by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1:10). When we read this, we ought to remember that Paul could speak ex cathedra. He was an apostle. He could say, “You guys straighten up or I’m

going to come and bust some heads!” But that was not his approach. Instead he gives an exhortation by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, “In light of the fact that you are now saved and in fellowship with Jesus Christ, I am giving you a message in the name of that One with whom you have been identified.”

Paul calls these Corinthians “brethren.” They were believers in Jesus Christ. They were already Christians. That means this is a family letter. If you are not a member of the family of God, then this is not written to you. You are an outsider who is looking in. But you don’t have to stay on the outside. You can come and join God’s family. You can trust in the work that Jesus accomplished on the cross and you can receive the free gift of eternal life. If you do so, you will find that this exhortation is also written to you.

Notice the specifics of Paul’s exhortation. It is an exhortation...

- ♦ That they all agree.
- ♦ That there be no divisions among them.
- ♦ That they be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

These three points can be summed up in a single word. Unity. There is to be unity among the members of the body of Christ. Paul says, “Because you are in fellowship with Jesus Christ (1:9), you ought to be in fellowship with one another.”

QUESTIONS OF UNITY

Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:13).

Paul asks a series of question. These are rhetorical questions. The answers to these questions are obvious. They point to the supremacy of Christ.

Paul was not crucified for you, was he? You can take out Paul’s name and replace it with Peter’s or with that of Apollos. You could replace it with the name of any popular religious leader of today.

John Calvin was not crucified for you, was he?
Or were you baptized in the name of Martin Luther?

The problem hasn't been limited to the church in the first century. The church in every age has faced the temptation to exalt certain men higher than they ought. Martin Luther, the famous Protestant Reformer, made this plea against the growing trend toward denominationalism in his day:

I pray you, leave my name alone, and do not call yourself Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for any one. Saint Paul would not that any one should call themselves of Paul, nor of Peter, but of Christ. How then does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes to give my name to the children of Christ? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to those party names and distinctions -- away with them all and let us call ourselves only Christians, after Him from whom our doctrine comes. It is quite proper that the Papists should bear the name of their party; because they are not content with the name and doctrine of Jesus Christ, they will be Papists besides. Well, let them own the Pope, as he is their master. For me, I neither am, nor wish to be, the master of anyone. I and mine will contend for the sole and whole doctrine of Christ who is our sole master. (Martin Luther).

I have no intention of picking on the group that has taken the name of Martin Luther. Other groups have been just as guilty of taking a single man and elevating him to a position that only belongs to our Lord.

The point is that Jesus Christ is to be seen as preeminent. If we are in Christ, then we are welded together by a common bond of unity that supersedes and denominational boundaries.

There are many people with whom you will disagree over minor matters. But on the major issue of Jesus Christ, we are called to *be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment* (1:10).

The story is told of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, having a dream in which he was transported to the gates of hell. He stood there and called out:

“Are there any Roman Catholics here?”

“Yes,” came the reply.

“Are there any Presbyterians?”

“Yes,” was the answer.

“Any Congregationalists?”

“Yes.”

“Are there any Methodists here?”

“Yes,” came the reply.

As Wesley thought on this last answer, he was suddenly transported to the gates of heaven. Once again, he called out:

“Are there any Roman Catholics here?”

“No,” came the reply.

“Are there any Presbyterians?”

“No,” was the answer.

“Any Congregationalists?”

“No.”

“Are there any Methodists here?”

“No,” came the reply.

Puzzled, he asked, “Well then, who is here?”

The answer came back, “Christians.”

There is coming a day when all of the party denominations and separations will be done away. One of these days we will see Jesus and then everything else will come to be unimportant by comparison.

THE PRIORITY OF THE GOSPEL

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ that no man should say you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. (1 Corinthians 1:14-17).

Paul goes on the record to show that he only baptized a handful of people at Corinth. Why does he want to make this point?

Evidently there was quite a large group at Corinth who were claiming to be disciples of Paul. Some might have been bragging, “Paul himself led me to the Lord,” or, “I was baptized personally by Paul.” He goes on record to tell exactly who were the people that he did baptize at Corinth. He does this in order to knock the props out from under those who would place their status upon their identification with Paul. He says, “I didn’t baptize you, so you can’t possibly be identified with me.”

Then he says by way of explanation, *Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel* (1:17). He was not sent to start a cult of people who could be baptized by him. Neither are we sent forth to call people into membership of our own particular denomination. We are sent in the same way Paul was sent. We are sent to preach the gospel.

The present participle could be translated to say, <i>Christ did not send me to be a baptizer, but to be a gospilizer.</i>
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This brings us to a question. What is the gospel? The word “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον) literally means “good news.” The gospel is the good news that God is in the salvation business. God loves you a lot more than you ever dreamed. He loved you enough to send His Son to die on your behalf. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became flesh so that He could die on the cross for your sins. When He died, it was in your place. He died so that you do not have to die. He was judged for your sins. Then He rose again from the dead to prove that your sins were eternally forgiven. As a result, you can have God’s free gift of eternal life.

How do you get it? Not by working for it. Not by being good. Not by being baptized. Not by joining a particular denomination. It is a gift. Like any gift, it does not depend upon the person receiving the gift, but only upon the giver. God has given you this great gift that you can receive by faith.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8).

THE WISDOM OF GOD

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

A number of years ago, I found myself speaking with an agnostic -- a man who did not deny the existence of a god, but who believed that such a god or, as he preferred to call him, this “supreme being” must be unapproachable and unknowable. After a conversation that lasted for several hours, I finally asked him, “You admit that you yourself do not know God. Do you think that it just might be possible that the Bible really is the word of God as it claims to be and that Jesus Christ really has made a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world?”

He thought for a moment before answering, and then he slowly replied, “No, I don’t think that I could bring myself to believe that such a thing is true.”

“But why?” I asked. “You have already seen that there are many fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, that it is historically accurate, that it contains no real contradictions, and that it speaks correctly when it refers to matters of science. The testimony of those eyewitnesses who saw Jesus rise from the dead was held under pain of death. In view of all of these evidences, why couldn’t you conclude that it is even a possibility that the Bible is correct when it promises that you have eternal life through faith in Christ?”

His only answer was, “It’s just too simple to believe.”

There are many people who have been thus confronted with the gospel who have come back with this charge. “It’s just too simple.” And yet, it is in the midst of this simplicity that we find the power and wisdom of God.

In our last chapter, we saw the problem of divisions within the church. Christians were breaking fellowship with other Christians as a result of divided loyalties toward various leaders within the church.

Paul went on to say that this was wrong and that believers are to realize that they are one in Christ. He illustrated this by the principle of baptism. It was very obvious that none had been baptized in the name of Paul or of Peter or

of Apollos. By the same token, those who refused to recognize any other teacher had no right to exclude other believers from fellowship who might feel differently on this subject.

In verse 17, Paul concludes that Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel, “not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void.”

This introduces a new subject. It is the introduction of “cleverness of speech.” In this section, Paul is going to contrast the natural man’s “cleverness of speech” with Paul’s “word of the cross.”

The World’s Wisdom	The Wisdom of God
Relies on cleverness of speech	The Word of the Cross

This brings us to a question. How does all of this relate to the initial problem of divisions within the church? It is only as we realize that it is the gospel that is the power of God rather than a certain preacher’s “cleverness of speech” that we can stop the divisions over certain key leaders of the church.

The World’s Wisdom	The Wisdom of God
Relies on cleverness of speech	The Word of the Cross
Puts the emphasis on... <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Paul◆ Apollos◆ Cephas	Puts the emphasis and focus upon Christ

Paul is not the power of God. It is not the “cleverness of speech” of Apollos that has saved anyone. The wisdom of Peter has no atoning work. Instead of lifting up these various leaders, we ought to turn our attention to the Lord.

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The ancient Greeks were in love with philosophy and knowledge and wisdom. Indeed, our word “philosophy” comes from the joining of the two Greek words φιλεω, “to love” and σοφια, “wisdom.” It describes “the love of wisdom.”

The Greeks believed that philosophy was all-important. They loved to come together and to argue for their own favorite philosophical ideas. This was one of their favorite pastimes. When Paul had first come to Athens, he had found a place that was representative of this sport: *Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new* (Acts 17:21).

Unfortunately, this tendency had carried over into the church. There was a growing movement in the church at Corinth to set the word of God up against the philosophies of men, as if one were on equal par with the other.

This tendency is still with us today. During the last 150 years there has been a growing movement within the church to judge the Bible through the eyes of modern philosophy.

- ♦ Julius Wellhausen (1844-1910) popularized the theory that Moses did not write the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Instead, he taught that these books were thrown together and compiled over many hundreds of years. This meant they merely related stories about early man’s philosophies of his origins and were not to be regarded as the word of God.
- ♦ Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976) was a German theologian who came to the conclusion that miracles were impossible. He went through the Bible and edited out all of those parts that did not agree with his beliefs in an attempt to “de-mythologize” the Bible. In his book on the life of Christ, he concludes that we can know almost nothing about the life and personality of Jesus.
- ♦ Hugh Schonfield published in 1966 his book “The Passover Plot” in which he said that the disciples of Jesus had plotted together to commit a great hoax when they stole the body of Jesus to make it appear that He had risen from the dead.

In each case, these “theologians” placed their own opinions over the authority of the Bible. This is the way of human philosophy. It always tries

to elevate man and to lower God. It rejects the truth of the cross because the cross leaves no place for the exaltation of man's pride.

This trust in human wisdom is not modern. Its origins go all the way back to the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve placed their own opinions above those of God's and it resulted in their fall.

Am I saying that a study of man's philosophy is unimportant? That is exactly what I am saying. When man's philosophy disagrees with the Bible, then it is wrong. Such philosophy can only be misleading. It has nothing to offer. Furthermore, when man's philosophy happens to agree with the Bible, it is unnecessary because it is merely repetition.

I am not putting down human learning. There have been some great technological advances throughout human history. I regularly enjoy the benefits of these technological advances. But man's advances have not enabled him to answer the questions that really count. They have not helped him to accurately answer the questions of life:

- ◆ From where did we come?
- ◆ Why are we here?
- ◆ Where are we going when we die?
- ◆ How can we get along with ourselves?
- ◆ How can I find fulfillment in life?

When it comes to answering these questions, human philosophy is silent. It is without any adequate answer. By contrast, when we come to the message of the gospel, we find the answer to all of these questions.

The word of the cross is...		1:18
To those who are perishing	To us who are being saved	
It is Foolishness	It is the power of God	

1. The Unbeliever and the Word of the Cross: *For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing (1:18).*

There is nothing more foolish to human reasoning than the message of the gospel. The idea that one obscure Galilean carpenter could die on a piece of wood on a nondescript hill in and out of the way part of

the world and thereby determine the eternal destiny of all men seems silly.

Do you remember what happened when Jesus first told His disciples that He was going to be crucified in Jerusalem? Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. He could not conceive of the idea of a crucified Messiah. Such a plan was beyond the comprehension of his own human wisdom. What he did not understand was that to do away with the cross was to do away with the gospel.

2. The Believer and the Word of the Cross: *But to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1:18).*

There is a very sharp contrast between the wisdom of the world as opposed to the wisdom of God.

The Wisdom of the World	The Wisdom of God
Sees the message of the cross as foolishness	Sees the message of the cross as the power of God
“Those who are perishing” (1:18)	“Those who are being saved” (1:18)
Tried to come to know God through its wisdom (1:21)	Came to know God by the preaching of the gospel (1:21)

The world looks at the cross and sees only foolishness. The Christian looks at the cross and sees the ultimate demonstration of the power of God.

The cross is the center of everything for the Christian. It is the basis for all that we have. There can be no Christianity without the cross.

3. The Ongoing Work of the Cross: *For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1:18).*

Notice the strength of the two present participles. Paul speaks of those who *are perishing* and he speaks of those *who are being saved*. This tells me something of people and their relation to the gospel.

All people are going through a process. No one is ever stagnant.

♦ The Unbeliever.

The unbeliever is perishing. It is not only true that one day he will perish, but that death principle is already at work in his life right now. He is spiritually dead. He is a walking corpse.

♦ The Believer.

The believer is also going through a process. He is being saved. This does not mean that the process might be interrupted at some point so that this “half-baked believer” would find himself only partially saved. What it does mean is that the believer is going through a process. He is being saved.

It is true that he entered into salvation at a point in time. There came a time in his life when he heard the preaching of the gospel and he believed the message and he was saved. At that very moment, he came into possession of eternal life.

But that was only the beginning. As he grows as a new believer, a process begins. It is a process of growth. This process is not instantaneous. It is progressive.

There is coming a day when that process will be completed. When Jesus returns to gather all of His elect to live with Him, we shall realize the goal of our growth.

THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD

For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.”²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:19-21).

Having shown that there is a difference between the outlook of the unbeliever and the outlook of the believer, Paul proceeds to show why the outlook of the unbeliever is inferior. There are three reasons given in these three verses.

The Testimony of the Old Testament	<i>For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." (1:19)</i>
The Testimony of Experience	<i>Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1:20)</i>
The Testimony of Ignorance	<i>For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1:21)</i>

1. The Testimony of the Old Testament: *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." (1:19).*

Paul is quoting from the Old Testament. The quotation is taken from Isaiah 29:14. Isaiah prophesied in a day when the world was being turned upside down. The stability of the nation was being threatened by the modern armies of the Assyrian Empire. In the midst of these troubled times, the Lord tells Isaiah that the grand strategies of the Assyrian military experts will fail. No nation was able to stand before the military might of the Assyrians. But God will accomplish what man finds impossible.

Even though common sense might tell you that Isaiah's prophecy has no chance of success, history bears out that common sense fails when it is pitted against the word of God.

2. The Testimony of Experience: *Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (1:20).*

Paul launches into a series of rhetorical questions. The answers to

these questions are not given because the answers are obvious.

There are three groups mentioned. These three groups represented all that was exalted in human philosophy.

- ♦ The wise man refers to one who is schooled in the world's wisdom. He is like Solomon of old. He knows all that there is to know in the learning of the world, but in the end, it is all empty.
- ♦ The scribe may be a reference to the Jewish scholar who was learned in all of the Scriptures and in the other Jewish writings. Knowing the Talmud and all of the other writings of the rabbis did not bring him any closer to a knowledge of God.
- ♦ The debater of this age is a reference to the Greek philosophers. Socrates and Plato and Aristotle each epitomized such a man. Their words were eloquent and their arguments were forceful, but in the end, where did it get them?

The wise man is lost in his wisdom. The scribe is empty in his learning. The debater of this age is silenced. Why? Because God has made foolish the wisdom of the world.

3. The Testimony of Ignorance: *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God (1:21).*

Notice that the ignorance of the world is a part of the plan of God. He set it up that way. He planned it so that no man could come to Him on the basis of his own reasonings and intellect.

Man cannot come to understand and know God through human reason. Man cannot dream up a philosophy that will allow him to comprehend God. He can only come to God on the basis of the preaching of the gospel.

This leaves no room for pride. You cannot glory in your great intellectual achievements when you hear the gospel and believe. God does not save the self-sufficient. He is unknown to the independent.

They have no need for God. He saves only those who believe.

4. The Testimony of Faith: *God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1:21).*

When Paul speaks of *the foolishness of the message preached*, he is not talking about foolish preaching. Neither is he speaking of preaching from ignorance. Rather he is pointing to the simplicity of the message that was preached. He is speaking of the message that the world things of as foolish.

God chose a plan that is so simple that even a child can understand it. It was a plan that took all of man's accomplishments and all of man's ability and placed it to the side. It was a plan that magnified God.

Yet as simple as this plan is, it is not understood by the world. The wise men of the world fall short of understanding the simplicity of the message of the gospel.

THE MESSAGE OF WISDOM: CHRIST CRUCIFIED

For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1:22-25).

Paul has been contrasting the supposed wisdom of the world with the supposed foolishness of God. This contrast is now widened and expanded to include the Jew, the Greek and the Christian.

The World	The Lord
In the wisdom of God	God was well-pleased...

The world through its wisdom did not come to know God		Through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe
The Jews ask for signs...	The Greeks search for wisdom...	We preach Christ crucified
To the Jews a stumbling block	To the Greeks foolishness	To us the power and wisdom of God

Notice the three groups: Jews, Greeks and Christians. The first group describes those who are religious. The second group describes those who are secular. The third group describes those who are the true people of God.

1. The Jews: *For indeed Jews ask for signs* (1:22).

The Jews were always looking for a sign. They felt that only through a miraculous sign could their faith be established. To this end, they repeatedly asked Jesus to show them a sign. They witnessed miracle after miracle and still they would ask Him for another sign. Finally He told them that they would only receive one more sign. It was the sign of the resurrection.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; ⁴⁰for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:38-40).

They asked for a sign and they were given the ultimate sign. They were given the sign of the cross. They were given the sign of the death and the burial and the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection was the proof that Jesus was truly the Son of God and that His death had paid the penalty demanded by sin.

Did they believe it? They did not. When they heard that Jesus had risen from the dead, they made up a story to cover up the truth. They paid the Roman soldiers to say that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus.

There is a lesson here. It is that the desire for proof is often just an evasion. It is often merely a smoke screen and an excuse for not believing. The unbeliever often asks for evidence and then will not accept that evidence when it is clearly presented. He does not reject the gospel because there is a lack of evidence. He rejects the gospel because he is condemned by the gospel.

2. The Gentiles: *Greeks search for wisdom* (1:22).

The Greeks were no closer to the truth than were the Jews. They searched for wisdom. But they only wanted wisdom of their own choosing. They only wanted a wisdom that would inflate their pride. They rejected a wisdom that would give all of the glory to God. They gloried in wisdom that gave credit to the initiated. They reveled in their mystery cults in which the initiated held special knowledge.

3. The People of God: *But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness* (1:23).

We do not ask for a sign, for we recognize that we have been given the ultimate sign. We do not search for wisdom, for we have seen the wisdom of God manifested. We preach Christ crucified. This is the center of our faith. It is the cross.

Jews	Greeks	Believers
The Jews ask for signs (miracles)	The Greeks search for wisdom (philosophy)	We preach Christ crucified
To the Jews a stumbling block	To the Greeks foolishness	To us the power and wisdom of God

The cross is different things to different people.

- To the Jews it is a stumbling block.
- To the Gentiles it is foolishness.

- To the believer it is the power of God.

The Jew stumbled at the cross. The hardest thing for the Jew to accept is a Messiah that was crucified. This went completely contrary to popular Jewish theology. The Jew wanted a Messiah that would be a political liberator, a military leader that would throw out the hated Roman legions.

The Greek was in love with philosophy. He felt that all answers could be found through a process of reasoning. He was offended at the simplicity of the cross. Here was something that even a child could understand. If it were that simple, then it must not be very valuable. This was the whole basis of the mystery cults. The harder a philosophy was to understand, the more valuable it was considered to be.

4. A Contrast of Faith: *but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1:24).*

Now we see a strong contrast. The contrast is not between the Jew and the Greek. It is between those who are called and those who are perishing. That same message which to the unbeliever is a message of failure and a message of foolishness is to us a message of power and wisdom.

If we are to glory, let us not glory in our teachers or our philosophies or our seminaries or our Bible College degrees or our systems of thought. Rather let us glory in the cross.

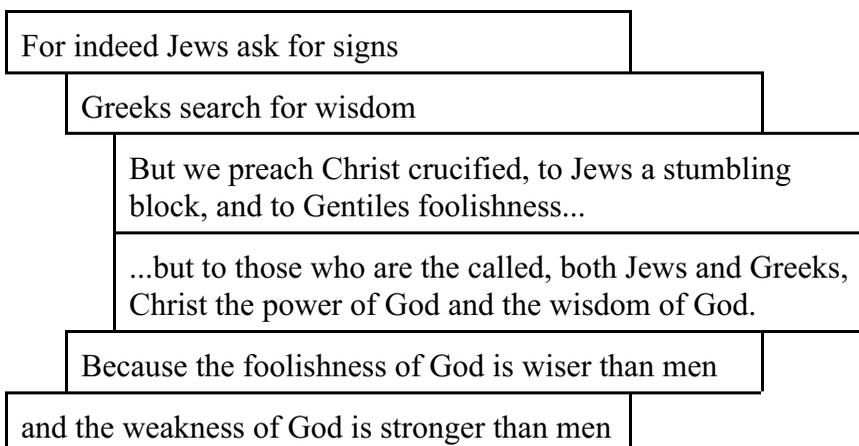
Notice that believers are described by a distinctive title. They are referred to as “the called.” We are people who have been called. That calling is twofold. It is both external and internal.

- ♦ We were called externally when we first heard the preaching of the gospel. We heard the message that Christ had died on the cross for sins and that He was buried and that He rose again from the dead. We were called to repent of our sins and believe the gospel and trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.
- ♦ We were also called internally. The Holy Spirit worked a special work in our hearts to make us alive and bring us to the

cross in faith.

5. The Strength of God: *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men* (1:25).

With these words, Paul completes a chiasmic thought that was begun in verse 22. By doing so, he brings us full circle.



The foolishness of God and the weakness of God both refer to the way the world views the cross. The Jews view the cross as a sign of weakness and the Gentiles view the cross as a sign of foolishness.

Man thinks the cross is weak and foolish. He claims that the death Jesus died on the cross was to no effect. Indeed, if Jesus did not pay for sins on the cross, then the cross becomes the epitome of foolishness and weakness. If the cross is not the atonement, then it is the biggest failure of all time.

To those who are perishing, the cross is weak and foolish. But to us, it is the very power of God. This foolishness is more wise than any of man's wisdom and this weakness is stronger than any of man's strength.

WHOM DOES GOD CALL?

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not

many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, 29 that no man should boast before God.

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

The point that Paul has been making is that men do not come to God on the basis of their intellectual reasonings. It is not the intelligent that are chosen. In fact, it is often just the opposite.

- ♦ Not the WISE, but the FOOLISH
- ♦ Not the MIGHTY, but the WEAK
- ♦ Not the NOBLE, but the BASE and the DESPISED

I think it very likely that Paul sat back for a moment and thought over the status of the membership of the church at Corinth. He asks the Corinthians to do the same thing: *For consider your calling, brethren (1:26).*

There were very few among the Corinthian believers who were rich or powerful or famous or influential. To be sure, Paul does not say that there were not any wise or that there were not any mighty or that there were not any noble.. But the majority of the members of the church did not fit into those categories.

Why? Why do most Christians come from the ranks of the foolish and the weak and the base and the despised? Karl Marx suggested that it was because the oppressed classes and the weak turned to religion as a crutch to hold them up and to stabilize them. But this is not a Biblical answer. Paul says that the reason Christianity is filled with the foolish and the weak and the base and the despised is because God has chosen those kinds of people to be in His kingdom.

Notice the emphasis that Paul places upon God's election. Three times in this passage, Paul repeats that it is God who has chosen.

For consider your CALLING... 27 but GOD HAS

CHOSEN the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and GOD HAS CHOSEN the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised, GOD HAS CHOSEN, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, 29 that no man should boast before God. 30 But BY HIS DOING you are in Christ Jesus...(1 Corinthians 1:26-30).

Paul could not be any more plain. God chose you. It is because of His having chosen you that you are in Christ. Paul says this in verse 30; it is *BY HIS DOING you are in Christ Jesus*.

1. This Choice took place before the Creation.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love (Ephesians 1:3-4).

The Bible teaches that God chose His people *before the foundation of the world*. If you are a believer, then this verse is describing you. God chose you before the world began.

Think of the implications of this. Since the beginning of creation, you have been in the plan of God. He formed the earth with you in mind. Throughout all of history, there has never been a time when God did not know you and when He has not chosen you to be in Christ.

2. This Choice was made according to the Will of God.

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will (Ephesians 1:5).

I also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11).

We are never told in the Bible that we have predestined ourselves or that the basis of God's determination was based upon our own actions. We were not even in existence when our predestination was already an established fact.

This means that God did not choose us according to any merit or action on our part. He did not choose us on the basis of our faith. His choice of us did not depend upon us. His choice was on the basis of His own will.

3. God not only Chooses, He also Draws Men to Christ.

In the sixth chapter of John, we have a sermon of Jesus in which He points out that those who have been chosen by the Father will come to Him.

All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (John 6:37).

Certain people have been given by the Father to Jesus. All of these who have been given will come to Him. There are not any who have been given who will not come.

This is not speaking of some extra-credit discipleship program that is an optional addition to your walk in Christ. This is speaking of salvation. Jesus is speaking in this passage to the unbelieving multitude. He says that many of them will not come to Him because they are not among those whom the Father has given.

No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (John 6:44-45).

The only ones who come to Jesus are those whom the Father draws to Him. Unless a man is drawn by God, he simply will not come.

This brings us to a question. Why hasn't God chosen the wise? Why have

the mighty and the noble been rejected? The answer is given in verse 29. It is so *that no man should boast before God.*

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Not many wise according to the flesh ◆ Not many mighty ◆ Not many noble 	God has chosen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The foolish things of the world to shame the wise ◆ The weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong ◆ The base things of the world and the despised ◆ The things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are
...that no man should boast before God.	
But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us... wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption	
...that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.”	

Notice the purpose clause that is given both in verses 29 and 31. The reason why God has chosen the foolish and the weak and the base and the despised is so that no man will be able to boast on his own account.

No man can ever say, “I found God as a result of my great intellect.” No man has ever been accepted by God because he was of noble birth. No man has ever performed deeds mighty enough to merit entrance into God’s kingdom. You can’t even boast that you were saved because you chose God and exercised faith in Him. He is the one who chose you.

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

The Corinthians believers had been very much impressed by secular philosophy. They had been raised on Plato and Aristotle. They loved nothing better than to argue for their different points of view. This argumentative spirit had infiltrated the church at Corinth. As a result, the church was in danger of being split by warring factions.

That is what always happens when God's people get their eyes off the basic truth of the gospel. The simplicity of the message of the cross does not split Christians apart. To the contrary, it binds them together. It is the glue that unites the church.

Therefore in order to heal the hurts of the church at Corinth, Paul set out to show the superiority of the gospel over man's philosophical systems.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31	1 Corinthians 2:1-5
Consider your calling...	When I came to you...
What kind of people did God choose?	What type of tactics did I use?

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, Paul used the experiences of the Corinthian believers to show that it was not secular wisdom that brought them to God. Instead, God chose the weak and the foolish and the base and the despised.

Now in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul will turn to his own personal experiences with the Corinthians to show that it was not the discussing of philosophy that saved them, but the preaching of the gospel.

PAUL'S PREACHING

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).

Paul was the first to bring the gospel to Corinth. Up to that point, none of the philosophy or the learning or the education of the Corinthians had been of any use in bringing them closer to God. The Corinthians worshiped gods of their own making, but they were totally ignorant of the God of the universe. That only changed when Paul arrived on the scene preaching to gospel of Jesus Christ.

He first tells us how he did not come and then he tells us how he did come. *I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom (2:1)*. Paul was a down-to-earth preacher. He did not use big or impressive-sounding words when he spoke. Neither did he attempt to impress his audience with philosophical terms. Instead, he spoke a simple message. It was the message of the gospel.

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (2:2). This is the message of the gospel. It is the message of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. This is the center of Christianity.

There are many who have tried to take the moral teachings of Christianity and to divorce them from the message of the cross. It doesn't work. Such teachings are meaningless and powerless. There can be no Christianity without the cross. What is so special about the cross? What makes it so significant?

1. Christ Bore our Sins on the Cross.

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2:24).

It is no mere coincidence that Jesus was crucified on the day of the Passover. As the High Priest in the Temple was slaughtering the

Passover lamb, the Lamb of God was hanging on a cross outside Jerusalem. He is the fulfillment of the Passover lamb. Indeed, He is the fulfillment of every animal sacrifice of the Old Testament.

When He went to the cross, Jesus bore our sins in His body. Our sins were put to His account. God judged the Son as though He were a guilty sinner. The wrath of a righteous God was poured out on Him. From His lips was torn the cry, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken Me?" Why such a cry? Because for the first time in all of history, the Father turned His back on the Son.

2. The Demands of the Law were met on the Cross.

God is righteous and His law is righteous. God's law demands righteousness. The law of God demands that any deviation from righteousness receives the just reward of death. The good news is that the just demands of the law were fulfilled on the cross.

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14).

When a criminal was being crucified, it was customary to write his name and a list of his crimes on a tablet. This tablet would then be taken and nailed to his cross. It would serve as a public warning to others who might be tempted to commit similar transgressions.

The law of God was a tablet that was the certificate of our debt. It consisted of all our crimes. It was a list of all our sins. It pronounced our guilt. It declared that we were worthy of death. We had all broken the law of God and we had all fallen short of its perfect standard of righteousness. It condemned all of us.

But now it condemns us no longer because it was taken out of the way and nailed to the cross of Christ. Those were the crimes for which Jesus was punished. The demands of the law were met on the

cross.

3. The Cross was Designed to Bring us to God.

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

Many people seem to think that they were once searching for God and that they finally found Him and came to Him and were saved. The Bible says something quite different. The Bible says that Christ died in order that He might bring us to God.

If you are a Christian, it is because Christ brought you to God. The unbeliever does not seek after God. He isn't interested in knowing the God of the Bible. The only god he wants is one of his own making. He does not seek God.

*As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one;
There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God" (Romans 3:10-11).*

There is none who seeks for God. This means that the only reason a man comes to God is because Christ, on the basis of His work on the cross, moves in that man's life and brings him to God.

This is the message that Paul preached in Corinth. He did not lecture on future events. He did not try to get people to speak in tongues. He did not campaign against godless government. He proclaimed the message of the cross. There is a saying that advises: "Make the main thing the main thing." That is good advice. Paul recognized that the cross is the "main thing."

PAUL'S PRESENCE

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. (1 Corinthians 2:3).

We often think of Paul as some great powerhouse for God. But he was no

super saint. He was probably not much to look at. He was not necessarily an eloquent speaker. A second century description of the apostle refers to him as “a man small in size, with meeting eyebrows and a father large nose, bald-headed and bow legged.”

This is important for you to know. I used to think that there was someone out there who had it all together. His family didn't have arguments. He never became impatient with his co-workers. When a car cut him off on the Interstate, he merely smiled and said, “God bless you!”

I've come to learn that there is no such thing as the super saint. There are merely saints with a great God. Even the Apostle Paul did not have it all together. What he did have was the gospel. That gave him the greatest message of all time. He had the message of the power of God. That gave him a holy boldness and a means by which to change the world.

You have the same thing. You may not have a doctorate. You may not be eloquent. You may be nervous about sharing your faith. You may not come across as cool, calm and collected. But you do have the greatest message of all time. The resources that were available to Paul are also available to you today. God has not changed. His message has not changed. It is still the same gospel that is preached today.

PAUL'S PURPOSE

And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

Throughout chapter one, we have seen a continuing contrast between the wisdom of the world as opposed to the foolishness of the cross. The point was not to say that the cross was in any way foolish, but to show that the methods utilized by the world are at contrast with the way in which the Lord works. Now the contrast continues between the world and the Lord. It can be seen in the following chart:

The World	The Lord
I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom (2:1)	I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (2:2).
My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom (2:4)	My message and my preaching were... in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (2:4)
That your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men (2:5).	That your faith should... rest...on the power of God (2:5).

Paul did not resort to gimmicks to try to win the Corinthians to Christ. He did not impress them with big words. He did not attract them with a contemporary music program. He did not try to motivate them with calculated theatrics. These things did not fit his purpose. To have used such means would have negated the purpose that he had in coming to Corinth.

What was Paul's purpose. It was that the faith of those who believed should not rest on the wisdom of men, *that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (2:5).*

The church today has gotten away from this basic concept. In this age of the mega-church, how many people have their faith based on the wisdom and the understanding of a single man? We in the Protestant and Reformed churches are quick to point out finger accusingly at the Roman Catholic Church for having a trinity that is too crowded. But we are often guilty of raising our own leaders to a pedestal that ought to be reserved for Christ.

When I was a student in Bible College, there was a scandalous affair in which the president of the college left his wife and ran off with a young girl. As a result of this scandal, quite a number of the students were spiritually uprooted. To this day, there are people whose spiritual lives have been shipwrecked by that affair. This was a direct result of holding a man in an exalted position. I believe that many of those students had based their faith on the persuasiveness of a man's preaching rather than on the power of God.

Our faith is to have a stronger foundation. It *should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (2:5).* This brings us to a question. What is the power of God? Paul has already answered this question here in this epistle. The power of God is seen in the cross.

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).

...we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

The crucifixion of Christ is the ultimate manifestation of the power of God. It was there that sin was conquered. It was there that Satan was defeated. It was there that our redemption was obtained.

THE WISDOM OF THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Some time ago I was talking to a Christian who was contemplating leaving the church he was attending and looking for another church. When I asked what the reason might be, I was told, “Because I am tired of hearing the same old teaching and I want to be taught some of the ‘deeper things.’”

I want you to know that I can identify with that answer. When I was a very young Christian, I came under some Bible teaching that was very simple in nature. It consisted of going to each passage of the Bible and seeing how it related to the gospel and how we ought to be witnesses of Christ. After a while, I began to see the shallowness of this kind of teaching. I became unconvinced that this was all there was to the Bible and I began to turn to other Bible teachers and commentaries to search for those “deeper truths.”

For many years, I searched and studied, digging into the Greek and Hebrew texts and searching out the historical backgrounds and comparing Scripture with Scripture. Finally I began to realize that there was indeed a “deeper truth” that provided a foundation for the entire scope of the Bible. It was the truth of the gospel. The problem that my original teachers had was not in looking for the gospel in every passage, but only in that they held to a very shallow view of what the gospel really was. All too often, they had fallen short of the depth of the riches of the cross.

This same problem was evident in the church at Corinth. These people had heard the message of the gospel and had believed. But now they had departed amidst a search for those elusive “deeper truths.”

Paul calls them back to their point of departure. The problem is that they are looking for that which they already possess. Their problem is not some hidden truth that is yet undiscovered. Their problem is that they have not fully realized the truth that is already theirs.

There is a principle here of which you need to be aware. A lot of well-

meaning people are running round today, trying to find some sort of “second blessing.” You need to know that, if you have already come to Jesus in faith and repentance, then you have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing. You have it all. Every blessing that belongs to Jesus Christ is your present possession. The problem is that these blessings are not visible to the naked eye. They cannot be measured in a test tube. They are hidden.

GOD’S HIDDEN WISDOM

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:6-9).

Paul has just finished telling the Corinthians that his preaching has been of such a nature that their faith should not rest on the wisdom of men (2:5). He did not come to them with superiority of speech or with wisdom in his message (2:1). And yet, he wants them to know that there is indeed wisdom in his preaching.

1. God’s Wisdom is spoken among the Mature: *Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature (2:6).*

Paul speaks words of wisdom, but that wisdom is only recognized as being wisdom among a certain group of people. It is only those who are “mature” who receive and understand God’s wisdom.

This brings us to a crucial question. What does it mean to be “mature?” Most commentaries have tried to define this as a certain level of Christian growth. They point out that when a Christian is first saved, he cannot understand complex doctrine and so he must be fed “baby food.” Then as he grows and develops as a Christian, he can handle some of the heavier things of the Bible. It is a very nice

interpretation, but I believe it to be dead wrong.

Paul has been contrasting God’s wisdom with the wisdom of the world. He has been contrasting the outlook of the Christian with the outlook of the unbeliever.

Unbeliever	Believer
Sees the message of the cross as foolishness	Sees the message of the cross as the power of God
“Those who are perishing” (1:18)	“Those who are being saved” (1:18)
Tried to come to know God through its wisdom (1:21)	Came to know God by the preaching of the cross (1:21)
“The Jews ask for a sign and the Greeks search for wisdom” (1:22)	“But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness: (1:23)
That your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men (2:5).	That your faith should... rest...on the power of God (2:5).

As Paul begins this next section, the contrast that was started in the previous chapter will continue.

Unbeliever	Believer
The wisdom of this age	The wisdom of God
The natural man	The spiritual man
The person who has merely dabbled in the wisdom of men	The one who has partaken of the complete and mature wisdom of God

The word “mature” is misleading. It is translated from the Greek word *τελειος*. This word is usually translated “perfect.”

- ♦ It is used by Jesus when He commands His followers, “*Be*

perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:46).

- ♦ It is used in Hebrews to describe *the greater and more perfect tabernacle* (Hebrews 9:11).
- ♦ It will also be used by Paul here in Corinthians when he says that *when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away* (1 Corinthians 13:10).

Who does Paul speak of when he describes “the perfect”? It is the believer. The one who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior has been perfected because he has been identified with the One who is perfect. It is to him that Paul speaks wisdom. This wisdom is the same wisdom that we saw in the previous chapter. It is the wisdom of the cross.

This does not mean that we do not preach this message to unbelievers. It does mean that the unbeliever does not recognize it as wisdom. He hears the message and thinks that it is foolish.

2. God’s Wisdom is not of this Age: *A wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away* (2:6).

The wisdom of the cross has not been recognized as true wisdom by the people of this age or by the rulers of this age. The mighty Roman empire took no notice of the death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus. Life went on as usual. People did not recognize the significance of the cross.

The same is true today. Many people think that a little bit of religion is okay as long as it is confined to a one hour time slot at the neighborhood church. But they do not recognize the cross as being the center point in all of human history.

3. God’s Wisdom has been Previously Hidden: *But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory* (2:7).

There are three things that are mentioned here with regard to God’s wisdom.

- ♦ It is God's wisdom.

This is not something that men dreamed up. It is not the result of man's philosophical speculation. It did not originate with man. It was not even known by man until it was revealed by God.

- ♦ It is hidden wisdom.

Paul says that *we speak God's wisdom in a mystery*. When we think of a mystery, an image of a suspicious looking butler from an Agatha Christi novel comes to mind. But that is not what the Greeks thought of when they spoke of a mystery. To them, a mystery referred to a hidden knowledge that was only possessed by the initiated. They had a whole series of mystery cults into which the initiated were reputed to have some secret knowledge.

When you were initiated into the cult, you were given the secret knowledge of the cult. In so doing, you became initiated into its mysteries. These mysteries were kept from the outsider. They were only for the initiated.

Christianity is like that. You cannot stand on the outside and look in and understand its truths. It is only when you have come to Christ in faith and have been initiated into the family of God that you can begin to understand the glorious wisdom of the cross.

- ♦ God predestined this wisdom before the ages: *The hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory (2:7)*.

The cross was not a last minute idea that God had. He did not create Adam and Eve and watch them sin and throw up His hands and say, "Oh no! What will I do now? My creation has fallen and death has come in and ruined everything and I don't know what to do!" The cross was not a divine afterthought. Rather the world was created with the cross in mind. Before any of the ages began, God planned to send His Son to the cross to die for sins.

4. God's Hidden Wisdom was not Understood by the Rulers of this Age: *The wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (2:8).*

Neither the Jews who plotted His death nor the Romans who carried out the crucifixion had any idea that Jesus would be able to rise from the dead. The fact that they crucified the Son of God is evidence that they did not understand the wisdom of God.

The rulers of this world still do not understand the wisdom of God. They remain blissfully ignorant of who Jesus really is and what He has done.

5. God's Hidden Wisdom was Promised in the Old Testament: *But just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (2:9).*

The fact that God's wisdom has been hidden from mankind in general and from the rulers of this world in particular was promised in the Old Testament. To make this point, Paul takes us back to the Old Testament book of Isaiah (64:4). It is a passage that promises blessings to the people of God.

I used to think that this passage talked about the blessings that will someday be ours when we arrive in heaven. But Paul is not talking about heaven. He is not talking about the sweet by and by. He is talking about the nasty here and now.

Don't miss this! God has prepared some wonderful blessings for us and we possess those blessings right now. You do not have to wait until you are in heaven to become a child of God. You have already been adopted into the family of God and the benefits of being God's child are yours right now. Eternal life is a present possession of those who believe in Him. His people have a righteous standing and are co-heirs of the Kingdom of God. All of these things are present possessions.

The world cannot comprehend those blessings. The human eye has not seen them. No ear has heard them. Man's rationality has not

revealed it to them. They are not visible. They cannot be seen. They cannot be tasted. They can only be known as God had revealed them to us.

GOD'S REVEALED WISDOM

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

Just as it is impossible for the unsaved man to see or to hear or to imagine the wisdom of God, so also it is unnecessary for the Christian to attempt any such means to learn of that wisdom. It is unnecessary because God has freely revealed His wisdom to us.

God is not playing hide-and-seek so that you have to go and look for Him and then one day you find Him. God has revealed Himself to us and He has revealed His plan to us. He did this through His Spirit.

1. The Manner of God's Revelation: *For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God (2:10).*

In Old Testament times, God revealed Himself in a wide variety of ways. Hebrews 1:1 says that it was *in many portions and in many ways*.

- ♦ He spoke to Job out of a whirlwind.
- ♦ He spoke to Joseph in dreams.
- ♦ He spoke to Moses in a burning bush.
- ♦ He spoke to Joshua through an angel.
- ♦ He spoke to Samuel in a voice in the night.
- ♦ He spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice.
- ♦ He spoke to Daniel in a vision.

In each of those ways and means, God was speaking to us through His Spirit. He continues to do so today, not necessarily in those specific means, but primarily through His Word. The Bible is the in-

breathed (“in-spirited”) word of God.

2. The Qualifications of God’s Revelation: *For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God (2:11).*

There is no one more qualified to tell us about God than the Spirit of God. He alone is competent to reveal to us the mind of God. We have been given God’s wisdom from the very highest source. We have been given God’s wisdom from God’s Spirit.

Only God knows how God thinks. The only way you can think the way God thinks is by having the Spirit of God reveal those thoughts to you. That is exactly what God has accomplished.

GOD’S RECEIVED WISDOM

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).

Two spirits are mentioned here. They are contrasted with one another. They are the spirit of the world and the Spirit who is from God.

The Spirit of the World	The Spirit who is from God
We have not received this spirit (2:12)	We have received this Spirit (2:12)
They speak of this spirit in words taught by human wisdom (2:13)	We speak in words taught by the Spirit (2:13)
The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God (2:14)	But he who is spiritual appraises all things (2:15)

When we refer to the “spirit of the world,” we are speaking of the outlook of the world, that which motivates the world and gives it a distinctive character. It is that which makes the world what it is. We are familiar with the world’s outlook on life. We know how the world views Jesus Christ and the cross and spiritual life. The world views these as foolishness.

On the other hand, we have received *the Spirit who is from God* (2:12). God has provided His Spirit. That Spirit teaches us the wisdom of God. What is the wisdom of God? It is the gospel.

Don’t miss this! It is the Spirit of God who teaches you the gospel of God. No man ever hears the gospel and believes it and is saved unless the Holy Spirit has been at work in his heart teaching him.

GOD’S REJECTED WISDOM

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:14).

In contrast to the believer who receives the Spirit of God is the natural man who does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.

Who is the “natural man”? The phrase in the Greek is ψυχικος άνθρωπος (*psuchikos anthropos*), the “soulish man.” He is the unbeliever. He is the man who is still in his sins. He is the man who holds within his heart the spirit of the world. He has the world’s outlook. He has the world’s concept of wisdom and of power and of might and of nobility.

1. The Unbelief of the Natural Man: *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him* (2:14).

When the natural man is confronted with the things of the Spirit of God, he does not accept them. To what “things” does this refer? It is the wisdom of God and the power of God. What is the wisdom of God and the power of God? It is the gospel!

I don’t want you to miss the point that this is speaking directly to how the natural man reacts to the hearing of the gospel. He does not

accept the gospel. He does not believe the message of the cross. He does not accept the truth that Jesus is the Son of God who died for sins. He does not believe the gospel. Indeed, Paul goes on to say that he cannot even understand the gospel.

2. The Inability of the Natural Man: *For they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (2:14).*

The reason that the unbeliever cannot understand the message of the cross is because there is something missing inside him. It is not a matter of religious training or seminary education. The scribes and the Pharisees were trained in the highest schools of the land, yet they could not comprehend the teachings of Jesus. They were versed in the Old Testament, but they had missed its central message. They knew all about what the Scriptures said concerning the Messiah, but when He stood before them, they did not recognize Him.

It is impossible for the natural man, the unsaved man, to understand the things of God. Did you know that there are a host of sounds, voices, movements and images all around you that you are unable to see? There are hundreds of colors in the air around you that your eye cannot detect. But if I were to bring in a television set and a satellite dish and turn them on, you could tune in on those sounds and voices and movements and images. They are coming through the air into the room where you sit. But you cannot understand them unless you are equipped to understand them.

By the same token, the unbeliever cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God because he does not have the equipment needed to receive it. If he hears the word of God, it seems to him to be foolishness. Just as the physically blind man cannot see the sun, so also the spiritually blind man cannot see the Son. On the other hand, the man who has a spiritual base (the believer) can understand the things of God because he has the mind of Christ.

GOD'S RECOGNIZED WISDOM

But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For who has known the

mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:15-16).

There is a man who hears the wisdom of God and who recognizes it for what it is. He is the one who is spiritual.

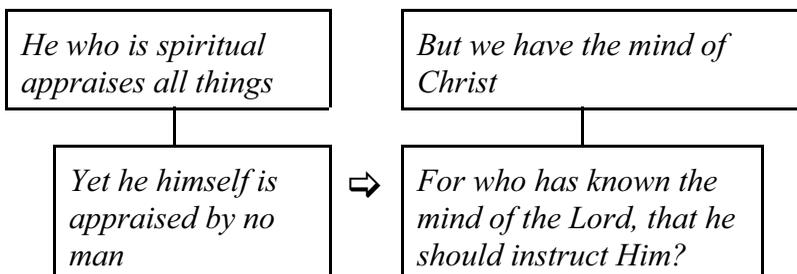
Paul does not say that it is the intellectual man who recognizes the wisdom of God. He does not say that it is the gifted man who discerns God's truth. He says that it is the spiritual man who appraises all things.

Who is the spiritual man? Is he some sort of exceptional saint? Is he the bionic believer? Is he the Christian who has reached some sort of exemplary plateau? I do not think so. I believe the spiritual man is simply the man who is operating under the influence of the Holy Spirit. You might argue, "But all Christians are under the influence of the Holy Spirit." That is exactly right. The spiritual man is a reference to one who is a Christian. He is the man who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. As a result, the Spirit of God has come into his life and, forever after, his life will be influenced by the Spirit of God.

And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1 John 2:27).

The Holy Spirit indwells each believer. In fact, the indwelling of the Spirit is one of the evidences that you are really a Christian. The result of this indwelling is that we have a teacher living within us who teaches us all things.

Verses 15-16 are presented in the format of a chiasm:



1. The Christian Appraises Spiritual Things: *But he who is spiritual appraises all things (2:15).*

Just as the natural man is unable to appraise or to discern things of the Spirit of God, so the spiritual man appraises and discerns all the things of the Spirit. One of the marks of the Christian is that he is able to discern spiritual truths.

Paula and I were talking to some old college friends a number of years ago and the subject turned to the Bible. I suddenly noticed that their faces had gone totally blank. They were completely lost in the conversation, almost before it had started. I stopped in my tracks and asked about their understanding of the gospel. They had none. They thought of themselves as “Christians,” yet they had never come to trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The reason they couldn’t follow the conversation wasn’t because we were using big theological words or difficult concepts. The reason they could not understand spiritual truths is because they were not spiritual. They were not Christians and did not have the Spirit of God within them.

The story has a happy ending. They did come to believe in Jesus Christ and the next time we came together to talk about spiritual matters there was a dramatic change. It was as though someone had turned on the lights inside. They had a new ability to discern spiritual truths.

2. The World is unable to Appraise Anything: *But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man (2:15).*

The world looks at the spiritual man and cannot correctly discern why he is different. To all outward indications, he appears to be the same. He looks the same. His facial characteristics are the same. He has the same intellect. He has the same natural ability.

It takes another spiritual man to understand a spiritual man. Just as it is impossible for the world to understand the message of the cross, so also it is impossible for the world to understand the people of the cross.

3. The Natural Man is unable to Understand the Mind of God: *For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? (2:16).*

This question is echoed from the Old Testament. In Isaiah 40:13, this challenge is issued to those who claim to understand the plans and purposes of God.

Unbelievers often try to set Christians straight. They want to argue about the truthfulness of the teachings we believe. It is as though they want to tell God what He can and cannot do. “God can’t send people to hell because that would not be loving and God has to be a God of love.”

They meddle in that which they do not understand. There is no way they can judge the truths of God because they are not equipped to understand those truths.

4. The Christian has the Mind of Christ: *But we have the mind of Christ* (2:16).

Christ thinks God’s thoughts. He understands God’s wisdom. He is thoroughly acquainted with the wisdom of the cross. We have the mind of Christ.

Do you see the point? If no one can judge God and His truths and if we have the mind of Christ, then no one can judge us. Except God. Except for others who also have the mind of Christ.

This is important for you to know. You need to know this because, as you live the life of Christ before an unsaved world, you are going to come under the judgment of the world. The world is going to look at you and criticize your beliefs and your manner of life. If you are living for Christ, then the world is going to label you a fanatic. But the world has no basis from which to judge you. The world can no more judge you than it can judge God. You stand strong in this truth. You have the mind of Christ.

THE MINISTRY AT CORINTH

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

I was a lot younger when I read Mark Twain's novel *The Prince and the Pauper*. It told the story of two boys who were the exact same age and who, though unrelated, bore an uncanny resemblance to one another. One boy was of the lowest strata of society. He was a beggar and the son of a beggar. The other boy was the crown prince of England, the son of the king and the heir to the throne.

By chance, the boys met one day and decided that it might be fun to change roles for the afternoon. The beggar boy donned the royal robes while the young prince put on the beggar's rags. Their resemblance was so close that they could not be told apart.

The story goes on to tell how the two boys were separated. The little beggar found himself in the palace while the young prince was cast back into the dirty streets. They each proclaimed their true identity, but in each case their protests were met with disbelief. After all, the young beggar who was wearing the clothes of the prince looked every bit like the prince whose place he had taken. Neither did the young prince who was dressed in rags have the look of royalty about him. The rest of the book tells of their adventures as the young prince attempts to regain his proper position.

The Corinthians were a lot like that crown prince. They were sons of the king and co-heirs with Jesus Christ and possessor of every spiritual blessing. But they had changed their royal robes for the rags of beggars. They had traded their lifestyle of the believer for one that suited the unbeliever. The resemblance was uncanny. To look out their outward manner of life, you would not have been able to tell the difference between them and the pagans of Corinth.

It is to this end that Paul addresses the church at Corinth. He points out to them that they have the look and the actions of those who are of the flesh.

THE FORMER CONDITION OF UNBELIEF

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

Before Paul can point out where the Corinthians are now in their spiritual life, he first wants to go back to the point of their conversion. He pictures their original condition to that of babyhood.

When Paul first came to Corinth, he did not find a full grown church awaiting him. He did not find a church of any kind. What he did find were those whose hearts had been prepared to hear the message of the gospel. He simply preached and they believed. It is for this reason that he begins this chapter by calling them “brethren.”

1. **An Infantile Condition:** *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ (3:1).*

Paul says that he was not able to address the Corinthians as spiritual men, but only as men of flesh and babies in Christ. This brings us to an obvious question. What does it mean to be a “spiritual man” and what is a “man of flesh” and a “baby in Christ”?

I want to suggest that these terms can only be understood in the light of the context of the previous two chapters. Throughout those two chapters, Paul has been contrasting God’s wisdom with the wisdom of the world. He has been contrasting the outlook of the Christian with the outlook of the unbeliever.

Unbeliever	Believer
Sees the message of the cross as foolishness.	Sees the message of the cross as the power of God.
Those who are perishing (1:18).	Those who are being saved (1:18).

Tried to come to know God through his wisdom (1:21).	Came to know God by the preaching of the cross (1:21).
The Jews ask for a sign and the Greeks search for wisdom (1:22).	But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness (1:23).
The wisdom of men (2:5).	The wisdom of God (2:5).
We have not received the spirit of the world (2:12).	We have received the spirit of God (2:12).
The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God (2:14).	But he who is spiritual appraises all things (2:15).

Now as Paul begins this next section, the contrast will continue. It will be between those who are of this age versus those who are of God. It will be between the natural man and the spiritual man. It will be between the one who has partaken of the complete and mature wisdom of God versus the person who has merely dabbled in the wisdom of men.

When Paul first came to Corinth, he did not find spiritual men there. There were no believers in Corinth. There were none in Corinth who had heard and believed the gospel and who had the Holy Spirit.

The people of Corinth had originally all been men of the flesh. When it came to the message of the gospel, they were babies. When Paul came to Corinth, he gave them baby food. He gave them the gospel.

2. *An Infantile Nutrition: I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able (3:2).*

The milk that Paul gave to them was the gospel. This brings us to a question. If milk represents the gospel, then what does solid food represent? What is the difference between milk and solid food?

I believe that they both refer to the gospel. Milk represents the

preaching of the gospel that is directed to the natural man. Solid food is that preaching of the gospel that is directed to the man who has God's Spirit.

What is the difference between the two types of teaching? I think that it is primarily one of degree and depth. To the natural man we preach the gospel so that he will believe and come to Christ in faith. To the spiritual man, we preach all of the intricacies of the gospel so that he can grow in his faith.

When Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians, he did not try to explain all of the depths of that message. He made it simple so that they could understand its simple message.

What is the simple message of the gospel? It is the message of the cross. It is the message that God became man and came to earth to die on a cross for our sins. It is that He died and rose again from the dead. It is that we can receive His free gift of eternal life through faith in Him.

A PRESENT INCONSISTENCY

...for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:3-4).

Now Paul turns from the past condition of the Corinthians to their present condition. He says that the two conditions are not notably different. Although they are now Christians, they are still acting as though they were unbelievers.

1. Fleshly: *For you are still fleshly (3:3).*

The Corinthians claimed to be spiritual men but they were acting like fleshly men. They claimed the name of Christ but they were acting like pagans. They claimed to be citizens of God's kingdom, but they were acting like Corinthians.

A Christian is one who has been born again into the family of God. If he is a member of God's family and if God is his father, then there ought to be a family resemblance. There ought to be certain family traits that are evident in his life.

He ought to be righteous as God is righteous.

He ought to be holy as God is holy.

He ought to be loving as God is loving.

He ought to be forgiving as God is forgiving.

The Corinthians were none of these things. They were manifesting none of the family traits of their spiritual Father. Instead of being spiritual, they were fleshly. Instead of walking like Jesus Christ, they were walking like mere men. This was evidenced by the fact that there was jealousy and strife among them.

2. Mere Men: *For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (3:3).*

The divisions that existed within the church of Corinth were evidence of the fact that they were fleshly. Do you want to know whether you are fleshly? It is very easy to find out. How do you get along with other Christians? This is a spiritual barometer. If you often find yourself at odds with your Christian brothers and sisters, then it is probably because you are of an incompatible nature. Flesh never gets along with spirit. They are always at odds.

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Galatians 5:17).

The flesh has different desires than the Spirit. The flesh has a different outlook than the Spirit. The flesh has different goals than the Spirit.

The Corinthians could not get along with one another. Instead of unity and love, there was jealousy and strife. Notice that jealousy and strife are mentioned together. There is a reason for this. Jealousy is an inward attitude of the heart. It is an attitude that says, "I want to have better for me than for my neighbor." You cannot see

jealousy. You cannot see an attitude. You can only see the visible effects of that attitude. The visible effects of jealousy is strife. The reason that there is strife in the church is because there is jealousy in the church.

GOD'S LABORERS

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. (1 Corinthians 3:5).

Paul sees the cure for a divided church in taking our eyes off people and putting them back on the Lord. We are often inclined to take Christian leaders and place them up on a pedestal. We give them titles like “reverend” or “pastor.” But this is not the Biblical picture that we see of the leaders that God raises up in the church. They are ultimately servants.

1. God's Laborers are Servants: *What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed (3:5).*

Although Paul held the office of apostleship, he refers to himself here as a servant. The Greek word for servant is δῆκονοι.

- ♦ It is used in John 2:5-9 to describe the house servants at the wedding feast where Jesus turned water into wine.
- ♦ It is used by Jesus when He says, “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 20:26).
- ♦ It is used in 1 Timothy 3 to describe those who hold the office of a deacon. This is where we get our word “deacon.”

Paul viewed himself as a servant of God. A servant is nothing special. He is merely one who carries out the will of his master. No one starts a movement around a servant. You do not build statues to honor a servant.

If you were to be invited to the house of a rich man for a lavish banquet, you would not send a thank you note to the servant who

served the meal, but to the master who invited you. It is a fitting analogy. A servant of God is one who serves the gospel. He did not make the gospel. It was not his creation. He simply serves what God has provided.

2. God's Laborers have been given Opportunity from Him: *What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one (3:5).*

Paul and Apollos were merely servants who were given an opportunity to serve. Notice who it was who gave the opportunity. It was given by God. There is a wonderful truth here. It is that God is the one who makes it possible for a man to believe. If you have come to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then it is because God gave you opportunity to believe. He brought the gospel to you and He also brought you to the gospel.

"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me." (John 6:44-45).

Jesus says that the reason men come to God is because He has drawn them. Why is this? Because men will not come on their own initiative. The natural man does not seek the things of God. The flesh does not desire the things of the Spirit.

If a man comes to Christ, it is because God has done a special work in that man's heart. By the same token, if a man grows in Christ, it is because God has given the increase.

GOD CAUSES GROWTH

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

The reason you ought to view Paul and Apollos and any other Christian leader as a mere minister is because they were never able to cause growth. Only God can do that.

Paul uses the illustration of a farmer. He can plant the seeds in the ground. He can pull out the weeds. He can water the plants. He can harvest the fruit. But he cannot cause growth. Only God can do that.

The modern scientist, in all of his magnificent wisdom, still cannot make a seed that will grow into a tree. Mister evolutionist, eat your heart out. It takes God to produce growth.

MINISTRY IS A TEAM EFFORT

Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:8-9).

Now we come to another aspect of being a servant. It is the principle of the unity of God's servants. We are called to be one and to see that ministry is a team effort. The cause of Christ would be completely revolutionized if Christian leaders believed this principle and lived accordingly.

1. A Unity of Labor: *Now he who plants and he who waters are one (3:8).*

The work of ministry is designed to be a team effort. Do you know what a team is? It is a group of people who work together to achieve a common goal.

Take the example of a football team. If each member is not working together, they cannot hope to win. Can you imagine what would happen if the linebacker said, "I'm tired of trying to stop that defensive tackle from getting to the quarterback. I think that this time I am going out for a pass." Would it make a difference to the entire team? You bet it would!

We are involved in a team effort and the actions of each member on the team affects every other member. Is there a part of the team that

is not supporting the rest of the team? If this is the case, then the whole team will suffer. There will only be strength within the church when the members of the church are working together in unity.

At the same time, we should also remember that there is also a certain amount of diversity within a team. Just as a football team is not composed exclusively of quarterbacks, so also there is a diversity within God's team.

Paul alludes to this truth when he says that he planted while Apollos watered. They did not both plant. Each had his own task. They were not in conflict with one another. They were complimentary to each other.

2. A Division of Responsibility: *But each will receive his own reward according to his own labor (3:8).*

Even though we are involved in a team effort, each of God's laborers will be paid in accordance with his own labor. Notice that it does not say that each laborer will be rewarded according to what he accomplished. There are a lot of Godly men who labor with great diligence and yet who seem to accomplish very little. Jeremiah was such a man. He preached for 40 years and no one listened. But his reward is not according to his accomplishments. His reward is according to His labor.

This is important for you to know. You may not be able to accomplish a lot. You may not be filled with natural talent. I know that I am not. If I focus only on the visible results of my labors, I will be inclined to become discouraged. But God promises to reward me on the basis of my labors. If I do not see the results that I expected, He says, "That is okay, John. I can see the bigger picture and I am going to reward you accordingly."

NO OTHER FOUNDATION

1 Corinthians 3:10-17

The building was an architectural delight. It stood perched on the edge of Fort Lauderdale's Intercoastal Waterway like a great jewel lowered from heaven. In the night, its shimmering reflection would glisten across the bay. Glass elevators carried people swiftly and silently up and down its smooth surface. The top floor held a restaurant that slowly rotated on a mechanical axis, giving the delighted customers a panoramic view of the entire cityscape.

There was only one problem with the building. It was built on an insecure foundation. Millions of dollars have been spent trying to firm up the faulty foundation. More pilings have been driven in and many tons of concrete have been poured to firm up the foundation and to bring stability to an unstable building. It has been a number of years since the problem first surfaced and I don't know what the eventual outcome will be.

As Paul writes his epistle to the Corinthians, he addresses a people who are in danger of the same drastic mistake. These people are building their ministry upon an insecure foundation. They are building upon the foundation of human wisdom and human resource and human effort. As a result, their lives are filled with imbalance and instability.

THE MASTER BUILDER

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. (1 Corinthians 3:10).

In the previous paragraph, Paul has been viewing the ministry at Corinth through the analogy of farming. In verse 9 there is a transition. He says that the Corinthians are "God's field, God's building." This marks a pivotal point.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9	1 Corinthians 3:9-17
Analogy of Farming	Analogy of Building
God's field (3:9).	God's building (3:9).

From this point, Paul switches to the analogy of a building. He sees himself as a builder for God's heavenly construction company. He first of all begins with the foundation. This makes sense. After all, you don't try to start construction on a building by laying roof tiles. You don't start with the walls. You always begin the same way. You begin with the foundation.

1. Paul was a Wise Master Builder: *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation. (3:10).*

Paul calls himself a "wise master builder." This is a significant title. It implies that there might be such a thing as a foolish master builder. The point is that everyone is building something. Either you are building wisely or you are building foolishly.

The phrase "master builder" is translated from the single Greek word ἀρχιτεκτον (architetkon). It is from this word that we get our English word "architect."

Paul was both a builder as well as a planner of churches, but his specialty was in foundations. Over the years, Paul had planted foundations in many cities. Often he would come into a city and preach the gospel and then leave. The seeds of his message would eventually spring up into a growing church. But Paul would have by this time moved on. And so, others would come in and water and nourish the growing church.

2. Paul was not Alone in the Construction Project: *I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it (3:10).*

Apollos was only one example of someone who was building on the foundation that had been initially laid by Paul. Indeed, we are still building upon that foundation today. But that foundation is not centered upon Paul. The church is not Paul's church. Neither is it Peter's church. It is Christ's church. When we come to verse 11 we

shall see that the foundation is Jesus Christ.

3. A Warning to all who Build: *But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. (3:10).*

There is a warning here. The warning brings us up to the present. Paul has been speaking of what he did in Corinth in the past, but now with this warning, he moves up to the present. It is a warning to all who build.

You might be thinking, “This doesn’t apply to me. After all, I am not a preacher or an evangelist or a Bible teacher.” I have news for you. If you are a Christian, then you are one of God’s workers. You have joined the ranks of the army of God. You are an ambassador for Christ. You are an heir of the kingdom. You are a son of the living God. You are engaged in God’s building project, whether you like it or not. There are only two questions:

- ♦ On what foundation are you building?
- ♦ What building materials are you using?

THE FOUNDATION

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11).

The only foundation of Biblical Christianity is Jesus Christ. He is not merely a part of Christianity. He is Christianity. Many people seem to think that Christianity is merely a code of morality that says, “Do this” and “Don’t do that.” Many have tried to hold to these codes without the reality of Jesus Christ. But this will not work.

Some churches have been built upon traditions. Others have been built upon a code of conduct. Still others attempt to build on sentimental love or an emotional experience. But Jesus is the only solid foundation of the church. A church built upon any other foundation is not a church of God and, as such, is doomed to spiritual failure.

THE BUILDING MATERIALS

Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

Having secured an adequate foundation in Jesus Christ, the next question that faces the builder is the choice of building materials. Paul describes two basic types.

- ♦ Valuable materials: *Gold, silver, precious stones.*
- ♦ Inferior materials: *Wood, hay, straw.*

What are the differences between these two categories? The most obvious difference is that one is relatively fire-proof while the other burns very easily. But there is something else. Wood, hay and staw are very easy to come by, especially if you live in an agricultural economy as did Paul's readers. Gold, silver or precious stones are not nearly so commonplace.

What do these materials represent? Do they represent natural abilities? Do they represent spiritual gifts? No. I would suggest that the identity of these building materials cannot be understood apart from the context of the previous two chapters of 1 Corinthians. Paul has been making a series of contrasts between the believer and the unbeliever.

Unbeliever	Believer
Sees the message of the cross as foolishness	Sees the message of the cross as the power of God
Those who are perishing (1:18).	Those who are being saved (1:18)
Tried to come to know God through its wisdom (1:21)	Came to know God by the preaching of the cross (1:21)
The wisdom of men (2:5)	The wisdom of God (2:5)
The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God (2:14)	But he who is spiritual appraises all thing (2:15)

Must have a diet of milk (3:2)	Able to receive solid food (3:2)
Builds with wood, hay and straw	Builds with gold, silver and precious stones

This contrast continues here. The wood, the hay and the straw refer to those things that are built by the natural man. The gold, silver and precious stones are those things that are built by the spiritual man.

Paul has already established that the foundation is Jesus Christ. He is building upon that foundation and others are also building upon that foundation. But not everyone is using the same building materials. Some are using building materials that are of the Spirit. Others are using building materials that are of the flesh.

It is interesting to note that Paul lists three different types of building materials when speaking of the positive qualities brought forth by the Holy Spirit. He does not say that gold is better than silver or that precious stones are not quite up to the proper standards. And yet, I think that there is a very specific reason that three different appropriate materials are mentioned. It is because not all of the building materials of the Spirit are the same. If I may be permitted to mix my metaphors, let me point out that Paul planted while Apollos watered while another may have weeded. Not all of God's work is the same work. Just because one man has a ministry of evangelism does not make it wrong for another to have a ministry of teaching. What is important is that we are using the proper building materials and that we are building upon the correct foundation.

You are building for eternity. You may object, "But John, I'm not building anything. I'm not an apostle or a prophet or a preacher or a Bible teacher." It doesn't matter. You are still building. The only question is whether you are using the right building materials. You are either building with gold, silver and precious stones or else you are building with wood, hay and straw.

This is the problem. It is possible for the Christian to use the wrong building materials. It is possible for the Christian to build with the building materials of the flesh. It is possible for the Christian to act like the unbeliever.

This is dangerous. It is dangerous because there is coming a time of judgment. It is dangerous because there is coming a time when the Heavenly Building Inspector of the universe will pass judgment on the quality of your

work.

THE BUILDING INSPECTION

...each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (1 Corinthians 3:13).

A new building usually must pass an official inspection before a certificate of occupancy can be issued. Government officials come out to the site of the building and test its structure to make sure that it is built according to the proper codes. This is to insure that the building is sound. God also has a set of standards by which He will judge the quality of our labors. There is coming a day of judgment.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10).

There are several observations that we ought to make from this passage:

- ♦ Notice that no one is exempt from this judgment. Paul says that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.
- ♦ Observe that the purpose of the judgment is to recompense each one for his deeds in the body. This judgment is action-oriented. This will be a judgment that looks back at the actions you took while you were in the body.

At this point, you might object, "I thought that God judges the heart." Indeed He does. But your outward actions always come forth as the fruit of what is in your heart. The way you live is a direct result of what you believe. Don't tell me that you love Jesus if you do not obey His commandments. Show me your faith by your works and they I will know that it is true faith.

- ♦ Notice that this judgment will include everything that you have done, both the good and the bad. Nothing is going to be hidden. It will all

be brought out into the open.

I was working with the fire department when Hurricane Andrew swept across South Florida in 1992. I had opportunity to go down to where the greatest damage had been done by that massive storm. There were hundreds of houses that had been completely blown away. Entire communities were gone. But in the very center of the worst devastation, I noted one house that was virtually untouched. It was a house made of coral rock. It had weathered the storm. It had been tested and the storm had not been able to hurt it.

There is a storm warning. A storm of testing is on the horizon. It shall come and it shall test the building of your life. You will be tested to see of what it is you are made.

1. The Day of Testing: *Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it (3:13).*

Your work is not evident today. I can look at the things that you do and I cannot always be certain whether they are of the Spirit or of the flesh. But there is coming a day when such uncertainty will vanish away. There is coming a day when the true character of your life will be known. It is the day of judgment. It is the day when Christ shall return.

2. The Means of Testing: *It is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work (3:13).*

The means of testing is through a revelation with fire. Fire is used throughout the Bible as a symbol of judgment.

- ♦ God rained down fire from heaven on the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24).
- ♦ The sacrifices that were made in the tabernacle were to be burned with fire (Leviticus 1:7; 2:2; 3:3; 4:12).
- ♦ Joshua ordered that Jericho be burnt to the ground and, when Achan stole some of its plunder, he and his family and all of their possessions were burned with fire (Joshua 6:24; 7:15).

- ♦ John the Baptist warned that the coming Messiah would baptize in the Spirit and in fire (Matthew 3:11).
- ♦ Jesus told the parable of the wheat and the tares and how those who had been planted by the enemy would be gathered into the furnace of fire (Matthew 13:42).
- Paul said that Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire (2 Thessalonians 1:7).

Now Paul tells us that the fire will actually be the means by which our works shall be judged. They will have to stand up to a trial by fire. This fire will not harm gold or silver or precious stones. The only thing that fire will do to such materials is to purify them. The same fire that brings judgment and destruction on one sort of material bring purity and praise to another.

THE REWARD OF THE LABORERS

If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:14-17).

Paul describes three types of laborers in this passage. They are as follows:

- ♦ The man whose work remains (3:14).
 - ♦ The man whose work is burned up (3:15).
 - ♦ The man who destroys the temple of God (3:17).
1. The Man Whose Work Remains: *If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward (3:14).*

This is the first type of laborer. He is the laborer who is faithful to the Master. He is the laborer who builds on the proper foundation

and who uses the proper building materials. God rewards this faithful laborer.

2. The Man Whose Work Is Burned up: *If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire (3:15).*

This is the second type of laborer. His work is on the proper foundation, but it is of the wrong materials. He is a believer in Christ and is rooted on the foundation of salvation, but his life and his work has too often resembled that of the unbeliever. As a result, he suffers loss. His life's work has been wasted. It is burned up.

Yet God is gracious. This unfaithful laborer is still saved, though all that for which he has worked has been lost to the flames of judgment. He did not deserve to be saved (none of us did). But God does not give him what he deserves. God gives him grace. God never gives any of us what we deserve. If He did, we would be in hell right now.

3. The Man Who Destroys the Temple of God: *If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him (3:17).*

Here is the third type of individual. He is the man who attempts to destroy the temple of God. He is not a faithful laborer. He is not even an unfaithful laborer. He is an enemy. He is one who attempts to tear down rather than to build. He is one who tries to divide rather than to promote unity. He is one who is more interested in holding up the distinctions between Paul and Peter and Apollos than in building the kingdom of Christ.

What is this "temple of God" that he tries to destroy? It is the church. We see this in the previous verse. Paul says that *you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (3:16).*

That is a striking description. It is one that is reminiscent of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the place where God's presence had once been manifested. It signified the presence of God on earth. Within the innermost part of the temple had been a special treasure. The ark of the covenant. This was a wooden chest overlaid with gold. Inside had been kept the pieces of the ten commandments. On the top of the ark was a golden cover known as the mercy seat.

The statues of two cherubim spread their wings over the mercy seat. This mercy seat was the royal throne of God. It was the most holy place on earth.

But there is another holy place today. It is the church. I do not mean that it is a building. The church is not a building. The church is the body of believers. This is the most holy place of God. The Spirit of God dwells inside the heart of each and every believer and within the church collectively.

Are you a believer? Are you one of God's people? If so, then the Spirit of God lives inside you. You are God's holy place on earth. You need to remember that. You need to be aware that you are God's place of holiness in the midst of an impure world.

God takes very special care of His holy place. He says that if any man destroys that holy place, then God will destroy him.

This is serious. There were those within the Corinthian church who were trying to destroy the church by bringing in division. This strife was a threat against the very existence of the church. Paul warns that there is coming a judgment against those who work such division.

The day of judgment is coming. In light of that truth, you need to ask yourself where you stand. What kind of laborer are you?

THE RICHES OF THE BELIEVER

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Many years ago there was a television show called “The Millionaire.” It was about an eccentric rich man who had willed a million dollars to a number of unsuspecting people. This was filmed in a day when a million dollars was a lot more money than it is today and each show of the series would focus upon a different person’s reaction to suddenly finding himself a millionaire.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be rich? How would your attitudes change toward the importance of your job, your church or your leisure activities?

The Bible tells us that we have riches beyond measure. We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Our problem is that we all too often ignore our wealth.

On the street where my wife grew up there lived an old woman in a little, shabby, run-down house. The woman dressed in discarded clothes and made a living for herself by begging for food. One day she died. When the city officials entered her house, they found every room to be full of bundles of newspaper from floor to ceiling. Wedged between the pages of all of these newspapers were hundreds and thousands of dollars. This woman was rich, yet she chose to live the life of a pauper.

The Corinthians were guilty of doing the same thing. They were rich in spiritual blessings, but they were living like spiritual paupers. And so, Paul sets out to show them their great wealth. He lists four distinct areas in which they possess the wealth of God.

- (1) They have a Heritage from God (3:16).
- (2) They have the Protection of God (3:17).
- (3) They have the Wisdom of God (3:18-20).
- (4) They have the Possessions of God (3:21-23).

The implication is that, with all of this great abundance of spiritual wealth, the ought to have a lifestyle to match, especially with regard to division in the church.

THE HERITAGE OF GOD’S PEOPLE

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The first thing that we see about God’s people is that they are the “temple of God.” This is a reference to the church, the entire body of Christ. We often refer to the church as the body of Christ and as Christians, but we rarely refer to it as the temple of God.

When we talk about the temple of God, we usually think of Solomon’s temple in the city of Jerusalem. The temple in Jerusalem was the place where God made His presence known. It signified the presence of God upon earth. Within the innermost part of the temple was the sanctuary in which was once found the ark of the covenant. This was a wooden chest overlaid with gold. Inside were kept the pieces of the ten commandments. On the top of the ark was a golden cover known as the Mercy Seat. This Mercy Seat was the royal throne of God. It was the most holy place on earth. No one was ever permitted to enter into the room in which it stood. Only the high priest was even permitted to enter the room and then only once a year in order to offer the sacrifice of atonement.

There were two different words that could be used to describe the temple.

1. Ἱερον (*Hieron*): Comes from a root word meaning “sacred.” It signified the building and the entire precinct, including the outer courts.
2. Ναος (*Naos*): The ναος referred to the inner sanctuary into which only the priests were permitted to enter.

It is this second word, ναος, that Paul uses here when he says that the church is the inner sanctuary of God.

The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70. It was never rebuilt. But today there is another temple of God. It is the

church. It is the body of believers. This is the most holy place of God on earth today. The Spirit of God dwells inside the heart of each and every believers. And when believers come together to worship, that gathering becomes the holy place of God.

The Temple	The Church
Stood in Jerusalem	Started in Jerusalem
The Holy of Holies signified the presence of God	The Holy Spirit indwells the members of His church
Only the priests were permitted into the Temple	All believers have entered into a Royal Priesthood

While the physical temple was destroyed on several occasions, God gives a sober warning against any who might seek to destroy His spiritual temple.

THE PROTECTION OF GOD’S PEOPLE

If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:17).

God takes very special care of His holy place. He says that if any man destroys that holy place, then God will destroy him. The word translated “destroy” has a wide range of meanings. It can mean “to destroy” or it can mean “bring to ruin.” Its most common idea is to “desecrate” or “to defile” or “to corrupt.”

- ♦ *Do not be deceived: “Bad company **corrupts** good morals.” (1 Corinthians 15:33).*
- ♦ *Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we **corrupted** no one, we took advantage of no one (2 Corinthians 7:2).*
- ♦ *But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be **led astray** from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).*

There was a rottenness and a corruption at work within the Corinthian church. It was not an attack from without at the hands of Roman or Jewish

persecutions. This was an attack from within.

To be fair, there had been external attacks against the church. The Jewish community had, on one occasion, brought a civil lawsuit against the church and had dragged Paul before the Roman Proconsul Gallio. The charge had been dropped and those who were instrumental in bringing the false charges were themselves attacked.

But there were also those within the Corinthian church who were trying to destroy the church. They did this by bringing in division. This strife was a much greater danger to the church. Paul warns those who bring such division, “Don’t mess with God’s temple! He destroys those who destroy His temple.”

THE WISDOM OF GOD’S PEOPLE

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness”; 20 and again, “The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.” (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

Paul has already spent a considerable amount of time in the first two chapters of Corinthians in showing the superiority of the wisdom of God over the wisdom of the world. Now he issues an exhortation to any who might think of himself to be wise in the world’s wisdom. It is an exhortation to abandon the wisdom of the world, to become foolish in the world’s eyes, in order to grasp the wisdom of God.

Much division within the church would cease if believers understood the uselessness of the wisdom of the world. Instead, the world’s way of thinking too often infiltrates the church. This affects the church’s view of...

- ♦ Male/female relations
- ♦ Marriage
- ♦ “Grey areas”
- ♦ The way in which we worship

Paul is going to deal with each of these issues as he writes to the Corinthians. But at the heart of each of these issues is the simple question — to whom should we turn for our answers? Who is our authority? Is it the world or is it the Lord?

THE POSSESSIONS OF GOD’S PEOPLE

So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, ²³ and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God. (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

The phrase “so then” introduces a conclusion. It looks back to the injunction of verses 18-20 and draws a conclusion from what was stated there. Because the wisdom of the world is foolishness, we should not boast in men.

1. A Principle of Possession: *For all things belong to you* (3:21).

This is stated as a general principle. It is given in the broadest of terms. It is said to include the world and life and death and what exists and what will exist. No more universal terms could be used.

Here is the principle. All of the things in the universe exist for your benefit. Paul says much the same thing in Romans 9.

What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory (Romans 9:22-23).

Don’t miss this. The reason that God allows sin to continue in the world today is for your benefit. His patient endurance of vessels of wrath is so that you might experience the riches of His glory, not because you are worthy of such honor, but because that makes you a vessel of His mercy and He is honored thereby.

That is incredible! It means that God has given all things to His people. If you are one of His people, then the world is your personal possession. This is what Jesus promised when He told His disciples, “*Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5:5).

This is not a new idea. This same promise was first given to Abraham when he was promised, not merely a parcel of land over in the Middle East, but the entire world.

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. (Romans 4:13).

Abraham and his descendants were made heirs to the world. This is the promise that God made to His people. When we come to God in faith, we enter into that promise. We become children of Abraham through faith and the world becomes our promised possession.

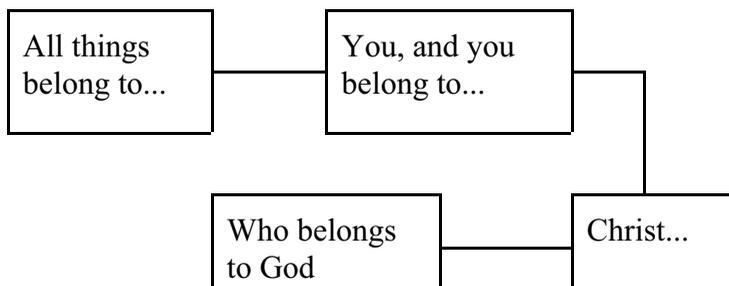
If the entire world is your possession, then why are you so impressed with the wisdom of the world? If you have everything, then why do you desire anything?

Have you ever imagined what it would be like to find out that you had a wealthy long-lost relative that had died and left all of his riches to you? It has happened. The relative is your elder brother. His name is Jesus.

2. A Pattern of Possession: *All things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God (3:22-23).*

There is a chain of possession within all that exists. It is a chain of possession as well as a chain of command. It is a chain that traces both the obedience that is demanded of us as well as the line of possession in which we find ourselves.

This chain of possession moves in a direct line from you to Christ to God. It is pictured in the following chart:



All things have been placed under the authority of God's people. We, in turn, are under the authority of Christ. And Christ is under the authority of God.

Notice that Christ does not ask us to do anything that He has not already done Himself. When He calls us to come to Him and to submit ourselves to Him, He has already submitted Himself to the Father.

That is the kind of leader you can follow. Don't you hate it when a leader says, "Do as I say, not as I do"? There is no respect there. By contrast, we have a leader who commands both our admiration and our respect. The great truth of the incarnation is that the Son came and emptied Himself of His glory and became obedient.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8).

Jesus once existed in the form of God. He is the very image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). In Him all of deity exists in bodily form (Colossians 2:9). All rights and privileges were His.

Yet this One who was equal with God did not regard that equality with God as something to be retained. He did not choose to remain equal with God. Instead He became flesh. He became an obedient Son. He emptied Himself. He became a man. Hebrews 5:8 says that

“He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”

God became obedient. The One who was sovereign over all things placed Himself into a position of submission. He became obedient to the point of death. The One who became man experienced the death of the cross for you. He experienced death so that you can experience life.

Have you entered into that life? Have you become an heir to the world and a co-heir with Christ? Have you been born into the family of God? Take hold of the wisdom of God. Come to the cross and see the One who died for sins. Believe in Him and entrust yourself to Him. Enter into the riches of God.

THE SERVANTS OF CHRIST

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

He was recognized as a leader within the local church. His preaching was eloquent and his personality was dynamic. Over the years, his popularity and his influence within the church grew. But then pride crept in. He grew to love and then to desire the holding of his exalted position within the church. Those who disagreed with him were put down. When other Christians spoke up against this abuse of his position, he ordered that they leave the church.

His name was Diotrephes. His story is found in the third epistle of John.

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. 10 For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church. (3 John 9-10).

Diotrephes was a man who had taken himself out from under authority. He recognized no authority but himself. He refused to listen to the apostle of Christ. He refused to listen to other Christians in the church. He had set himself up as the head of the church. There was no room for another head. Neither was there any room for a difference of opinion. You either agreed with Diotrephes or else you packed your bags and left the church.

I fear that there are many preachers who have followed in the footsteps of Diotrephes. It happens whenever a single man is made the head of the church.

In Paul's day, the problem was raising its head in Corinth. There were groups of people within the church who were aligning their loyalties to various men. Some were choosing Paul. Others were choosing Apollos. Peter was also in the running. These men were not even present within the church. But the members of the church were aligning themselves into

segregated groups based around these men. There was even a Christ group that sought to exclude everyone else.

Paul writes to unify the church. He seeks to give the people a proper view of leaders within the local church. He wants to show that church leaders are not to be put up on a pedestal. Church leaders are merely servants.

THE POSITION OF A SERVANT

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

Paul is dealing with the danger of holding certain spiritual leaders up on a pedestal. The reason that you ought not to exalt a spiritual leader is because he is merely a servant.

You know what a servant is. He is one who serves. He has no authority of his own. If he has any authority at all, it is because it has been delegated to him by another.

1. The Titles of Servanthood.

- a. Servant: *Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ (4:1).*

The word that is translated “servant” is different from the term we saw in 1 Corinthians 3:5. That passage where Paul described himself and Apollos as “servants through whom you believed” used the term δεακονος (*deakonos*). This is a different word here. This is the word ὑπερετας (*huperetas*). It literally means “an under-rower.”

The Roman warships used large, square sails, but they depended primarily upon a large number of slaves whose task it was to wield the oars. On the larger ships, there would be two levels of oars; a higher and a lower level. The slave who sat in the lower level was called the “under-rower.” This was

the most menial of positions.

This title came to be used of certain Roman officials who had been appointed to their position by a higher authority. We have a similar term when we speak of a “civil servant.”

Do you see what Paul is saying? He says that he has no authority of his own. He is merely acting upon the authority of another. Jesus Christ is his authority. He is a servant for Christ.

Notice what Paul does not say. He does not say that he is a servant of the church or of the board of elders or of the people. He is the servant of Christ. This means that his primary responsibility is not to please people. A man who strives to please people is not being a faithful servant to Christ.

- b. Steward: *Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God (4:1).*

The word “steward” is οἰκονομος (*oikonomos*). It is a compound word made up of οἶκος (“house”) and νομος (“law”). It describes one whose job it is to see that the house rules are carried out.

Within each wealthy home of the ancient world there was a steward. He was the chief slave, the head of all of the other slaves. His job was to see that the entire household ran smoothly. He was the manager of the household.

Joseph held such a position over the house of Potiphar. He was made the steward over Potiphar’s house and given command over all that Potiphar owned. This does not mean that the house now belonged to Joseph or that he was on an equal footing with Potiphar. He was still a slave. He did not make the laws, but he was given the authority to enforce them.

He was still a slave, but now he was a slave with a special task. Potiphar would lay down the laws of his house and

Joseph would see to it that those wishes were carried out.

Similarly, Paul was a steward of the mysteries of God. We have already seen Paul refer to the mysteries of God in 1 Corinthians 2:7. There we saw that it pointed to the fact that the wisdom of God was hidden from the world, but revealed to God's people. Now we see the means by which the mystery of God has been revealed.

It has been revealed through God's stewards. Paul was a steward of the mysteries of God. It was his job to reveal those mysteries to God's people.

This brings us to a question. What is the mystery of God? It is the cross. It is the message that God became flesh and died for sins to save men. This is the message that has so confounded the world. It is the message over which the Jew stumbled and which the Greek found to be foolishness.

Paul was a steward of the message of the cross. It is was his job to preach that message to others. This tells me something about the job of a pastor. Its primary focus is to communicate the word of God, to teach it to others and to apply its truths to their lives. There are a great many other things that a pastor may be called upon to do, but at the center of his ministry ought to be the clear teaching of the Scriptures.

2. The Requirement of a Servant-Leader: *It is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy (4:2).*

The most important quality of a steward is that he be trustworthy in carrying out his responsibilities. He has been entrusted with his master's house and possessions. Unless he is faithful, he will bring them to ruin.

God requires the same thing of His stewards -- that they be found faithful. He does not require a high I.Q. He does not require that you be good-looking. He does not require creativity. He does not require popularity. He does not require eloquence. He requires one thing, faithfulness.

What is faithfulness? It involves commitment. It involves committing yourself to carry out the job assigned to you, no matter what the cost. It also involves perseverance. It demands that you keep on keeping on. It means that you don't turn back once you have begun.

God can require faithfulness of His stewards because He has first been faithful to us. He has been faithful in saving us. He is faithful in sustaining us. He is faithful in answering our prayers. He is faithful in protecting us. He is faithful in providing the means by which we can serve Him.

EVALUATING THE SERVANTS OF GOD

But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

The requirement of a servant is that he be found faithful. This is the standard by which he is to be evaluated. But how is such an evaluation to be carried out? Should we check out the size of his ministry? Should we judge his faithfulness by listening to what other people say about him? Should we determine how popular he is?

Paul suggests that there are three possible methods of evaluation:

- ◆ See what the world says about you.
- ◆ See what you say about yourself.
- ◆ See what God says about you.

Only one of these methods is appropriate for a correct evaluation. Only what God says really counts.

1. World Evaluation is Unimportant: *But to me it is a very small thing*

that I should be examined by you, or by any human court (4:3).

The Corinthians had held a popularity contest. The object of this contest was to find out the best senior pastor for their church. Some chose Paul. Others chose Apollos or Cephas. But Paul was not upset that he might not have won a majority vote in this contest because he knew that it did not really matter how the Corinthians evaluated him. Their evaluation was not the one that mattered in the long run.

2. Self Evaluation is not much better: *In fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted (4:3-4).*

Paul was careful not to spend too much time focusing upon himself or on a self evaluation of his ministry. He was aware that it is all too easy to fall into the trap of spiritual introspection.

How many times have I fallen into this trap? Before I know it, I am trying to rank myself and compare myself to other Christians. Instead of focusing my attention upon myself, I need to focus my attention on the Lord.

This does not mean that I ignore the presence of sin in my life. Paul makes this clear when he says, *“I am conscious of nothing against myself” (4:4)*. He had looked for sin in his life and was not aware of any serious deficiency. He had picked the two-by-fours out of his own eyes before looking for splinters in the eyes of others. He had checked out his own life and could see no major problems.

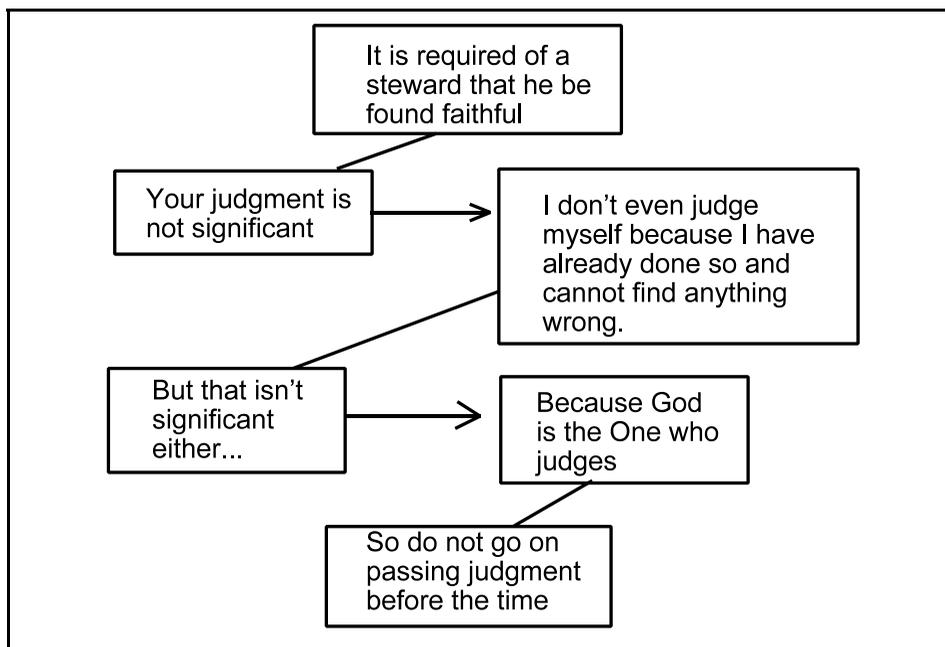
And yet, he knows that this is not necessarily a flawless evaluation. There is only one way that he and his ministry can be accurately evaluated. It is by the judgment of the Lord.

3. God’s Evaluations is what Counts: *The one who examines me is the Lord (4:4).*

God’s evaluation is the only evaluation that counts. His examination is the only one that sees everything there is to be seen. We see everything from a very limited perspective. You even look at your own life from a limited perspective. You cannot see what effect your life has had on others. You cannot see where your life is going.

But God can see your life in a single glance. He can see the entire scope of who you are. There is nothing that is hidden from Him. Even your most secret thoughts and motives are an open book to Him.

Because of the previous three truths, Paul gives the Corinthians an exhortation. It is expressed, first in negative terms and then in positive terms. He has said everything in this chapter to say this. Notice the flow of thought. It brings us to the conclusion presented in verse 5.



- ♦ The Exhortation Negatively Expressed: *Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time (4:5).*

This is the first part of Paul's conclusion. He begins with what they should not do. The reason he tells them not to go on passing judgment is evidently because they were passing judgment.

This command is given in the present imperative. When a negative command is given in the present imperative, it can mean one of two things:

- (1) A command to stop doing an action already begun: "Stop passing judgment before the time."
- (2) A command against habitual action: "Do not make it your habit to pass judgment before the time."

The Corinthians were trying to hold their own judgment seat. But it was not yet time to do so. There will be a judgment, but it has not yet come. Paul warns against jumping the gun.

There is a serious message for us here. We ought not to try to pass judgment upon the motives of our Christian leaders. We have no basis upon which to judge them. We cannot see the whole picture. We have not been appointed as their judge.

Does this mean that we ought to ignore their sin or their false doctrine? I do not believe so. Rather, I think that it means I must realize that I do not have the full picture and that my judgment is going to be limited. It means that I cannot judge those things that are hidden. It means I cannot judge someone's motives. Only the Lord can do that.

- ♦ The Exhortation Positively Expressed: *But wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (4:5).*

There is coming a day when all will be brought to light. The judgment of God will be a complete judgment. Nothing will be left out. Nothing will remain hidden.

Are you ready to meet that judgment? You might be able to fool me about your spiritual condition. You might learn all of the right things to say so that you sound very spiritual. You can fool me and you might even fool the rest of the church, and you might even manage to fool yourself. But you will never fool God.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. (Galatians 6:7-9).

THE PORTRAIT OF A SERVANT

1 Corinthians 4:6-13

No greater example of humility can be found than that of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who was the Lord of the universe came down from His throne in heaven to become a man. As a man, He exemplified humility. He who had every right to glorify Himself instead gave all glory to His heavenly Father. He who had the right to boast of Himself refused boasting. He who had the right to all of the wealth of the world forsook all.

He had nothing that was His own.
He was born in another man's stable.
He was laid in another man's manger.
He preached from another man's boat.
He ate His last supper in another man's upper room.
He died upon another man's cross.
He died for the sins of other men.
He was laid in another man's tomb. (Author unknown)

That is not all. He also said that we who are His followers are to live the same way. We are to live for others.

“For I gave you an example that you should also do as I did to you.” (John 13:15).

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:5-7).

In both of these passages, we are reminded that being a Christian means that we are to try to live as Christ lived. The Corinthians had gotten away from

this basic principle. Instead of being humble, they had become proud. Instead of repenting of their sins, they had become arrogant. Instead of listening to the exhortations of godly men, they had become critical of these various spiritual teachers.

And so, Paul sets out to show them where they ought to be. He does this by pointing to himself and to Apollos. He contrasts the condition of himself and Apollos with the condition of the Corinthians.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PORTRAIT

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Paul has been speaking against the divisions that were taking place in the church at Corinth. These divisions were over leadership. The Corinthians were holding to certain leaders and they were turning against others.

As such, there were some who were passing judgment upon Paul himself. It is for this reason that Paul pointed out in verses 1-5 that only God is our judge. Now, as we come to verse 6, he summarizes his teachings on this matter.

1. A Personal Application: *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes (4:6).*

Paul did not relate his ministry experiences merely to show what a wonderful person he is. He isn't giving his resume in order to land a job. He has been using himself and Apollos as examples of what a servant ought to be so that the Corinthians might learn and apply these lessons to their own lives. He says, "You go and be like this, too."

2. A Lesson in Moderation: *That in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other (4:6).*

This is directed to those who were thought of as the spiritual leaders at Corinth. Paul has not mentioned them by name. Instead he has used himself and Apollos as examples of what a spiritual leader ought to be. He is to be a servant. He is not to try to exalt himself. He is not to try to win a popularity contest.

Paul says, “Watch what we do and do not go beyond that example. He lived his life in such a way that he could say, “Do what I say and also do what I do.”

There was evidently a problem in the church at Corinth. The Corinthians had been setting up their own standards of what a minister of God ought to be.

- ♦ A lofty theologian - Paul
- ♦ A great orator - Apollos
- ♦ A personal disciple of Christ - Cephas
- ♦ Only Jesus Himself

Furthermore, there is no indication that this short list was exhaustive. There might have also been other parties that glorified other leaders within the church and even some who tried to elevate themselves to such a position. If this is the case, Paul chooses not to name them. Instead, he uses himself and Apollos as examples. If the Corinthians will follow this example and see themselves as servants and stewards of God, then this party spirit will cease.

3. Lessons to be Learned.

- ♦ We can follow the example of Paul in ministry.

How should we conduct ourselves within the church? Look at Paul and see how he conducted himself. Sometimes it is difficult to ask, “What would Jesus do?” After all, Jesus was perfect and never made mistakes. But in times like that, we can ask, “What would Paul do?”

- ♦ We have a pattern after which to regulate our church.

The church has changed in many ways since the days of the New Testament. Some of those changes are good. Some are

for the worse. The writings of Paul can be used as a measuring rod to tell us what the church ought to be like.

- ◆ We have a calling to be a pattern for others.

We should be able to say, “If you want to know what it means to be a Christian, then follow me around for a week and watch what I do and watch what I say.” We ought to be able to make disciples by telling people to follow our example.

Do you remember what Jesus said about the Pharisees? He told the Jews to follow their teaching, but not to follow their example. Why? Because they were hypocrites. They taught one thing and they did another. Don’t be a hypocrite. If you say that you believe in Christ, then live like it.

THE ARROGANT SERVANT

For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? 8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. (1 Corinthians 4:7-8).

Paul now brings his focus upon those who would regard themselves as superior. They did not receive this outlook from the Scriptures. God did not tell them to glorify themselves. The Bible does not command for you to honor yourself.

They had developed a spiritual superiority complex. They became impatient with anyone who did not see things exactly the way they did. They became arrogant with any who disagreed with them. The reason for this is that they had lost sight of the principle of grace.

1. The Reality of Grace: *And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (4:7).*

Notice the principle of grace. It states that everything you have was

given to you. You did not earn it. You did not deserve it.

This truth ought to bring forth an attitude of humility. A true understanding of grace always results in humility. There is no room for boasting in the life of the Christian. Everything you have and everything you are was given to you by God. If you are going to boast, then you can only boast about how great God is.

A bumper sticker proclaims, “There is no limit to what you can do if you don’t care who gets the credit.” The truth is that you can take no credit because you owe everything to the Lord. You can only give the credit to Him.

2. The Reaction of Sarcasm: *You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you (4:8).*

Paul lapses into a sanctified sarcasm. He makes some statements about the Corinthian believers that reflect their own opinions of themselves. He says, “You have left us mere apostles far behind in your spiritual growth. We are still only lowly servants while you have become mighty kings.”

The Corinthians were so exalted in their own estimation that they had lost all sight of what it means to really be a Christian. It is for this reason that Paul contrasts himself and the other apostles with these Corinthians.

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT

For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. ¹¹ To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; ¹² and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when we are

slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now. (1 Corinthians 4:9-13).

Paul now points to what a true servant of Christ looks like. It is not a pleasant picture. It is not a portrait of comfort. Far from being the most glorious and proud, the servant of Christ is presented as being the most despised. There is a reason for this. The world will always despise the servant of God. To be a servant goes contrary to that which is desirable in the eyes of the world. The world honors those who are noble and strong and independent. But God honors those who are weak and foolish and who trust in Him.

1. *A Spectacle of Death: For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men (4:9).*

The word “spectacle” is translated from the Greek word *θεατρον*, from which we get our English word “theater.” In the Roman world, when a conquering general returned victorious from a war, he enjoyed the honor of a triumph. This procession would make its way through the streets of Rome and the general would ride in an ornate chariot pulled by white horses. Behind him would come his soldiers carrying the riches and wealth of the conquered kingdom.

Last of all would come the captives and those who had been condemned to death. These would be paraded in chains before the entire city. They would be a spectacle to the world, open in the shame of their sufferings.

This is the imagery that Paul uses of himself and the other apostles. They are suffering for the cause of Christ. Their sufferings are open and plain for all to see. They are looked upon by the world and they are mocked and taunted.

This is what it means to be a disciple of Christ. It is not the position of a king. It is not the position of nobility. It is the position of a slave.

2. *Foolish and Weak for Christ: We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are*

distinguished, but we are without honor (4:10).

Paul continues with his sarcasm. He continues his contrast of himself and the other apostles over against the Corinthians.

The Corinthians	The Apostles
They are kings	They are servants
They are prudent in Christ	They are fools for Christ's sake
They are strong	They are weak
They are distinguished	They are without honor

The Corinthians still considered the cross of Christ to be foolish. They considered its message to be childish. They were ashamed of being Christ's servant. They wanted wisdom and power and recognition and popularity.

3. *Hardships: To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless (4:11).*

How different is this from the Prosperity Theology that is preached from so many pulpits today. It is often taught that, if you are a child of God and are faithful, then God will give you lots of money and will meet every need and everything will go well for you. They teach that, if you are going through hardship, it is because there must be some hidden sin in your life.

This is not what Paul portrays as the lot of a servant of Christ. He pictures a servant of Christ as one who is all too familiar with such hardships.

4. *A Lowly Estimation: We have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now (4:13).*

The Corinthians saw themselves as being high-class Christians. Paul presents no such picture of the servant of Christ. He says that, in the world's eyes, God's servants are seen as the very lowest of the low.

Do you see what Paul has done? By presenting himself and the other servants of Christ in such a lowly manner, he has exposed the pride and the boasting and the high-mindedness of the Corinthians.

Paul recognized that the root problem of the Corinthians was their conceit. This is the root of most spiritual problems. It was seen in man's fall in the Garden of Eden. It was seen in Cain's murder of Abel. It was seen in Saul's persecution of David. It was seen in the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus.

It is still seen today. When there is a problem in a marriage between a husband and a wife, the root problem is usually that of conceit and self-will. When a conflict arises between a parent and a child, the cause of that conflict is almost always because of the high-mindedness of one or both parties. When two Christians come into conflict, it is because one has begun to think himself as more important than the other.

Are you in the midst of a conflict with another Christian? Here is the root of your problem. It is a problem of self-will. It is a problem of conceit. It is a problem caused by a lack of servanthood.

You have been called to a high calling. It is to be a servant of God. And one of the ways you can know that you are a true servant is how you act when you are treated like one.

WARNINGS FROM A SPIRITUAL FATHER

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Many years ago when our daughter was still a child, our family went out to a restaurant with my parents. The waiter came to our table and we began to order our food. When he came to our 11-year old daughter, I suggested that she order a hamburger or some equally Americanized dish. I was immediately overruled by her grandmother who insisted, “Let her order whatever she wants.” I warned her that my daughter was very selective as to the kinds of foods that she ate and that she might not find Mexican food to her taste. Finally, I gave in and Sky, our daughter, ordered something with a Spanish name affixed to it. To this day, I don’t really know what it was.

When the meal was served, Sky bravely took a single bite of her dinner. That’s all it took. Her face froze in an instant of embarrassed agony, but she bravely swallowed and then said in a small voice, “I don’t think I’m all that hungry.” To make a short story even shorter, we ended up ordering a hamburger for Sky.

As we come to this section of the epistle to the Corinthians, we see another father who is warning his children. The father is Paul and his children are those whom he has brought to know the Lord.

Up to this point, he has been very hard on them. He is about to get even harder. But this does not mean that he does not love them. To the contrary, this warning is a mark of his love. He says to them, “You Corinthians are about to bite into something and you aren’t going to like the taste of it.”

A FATHER’S ADMONITION

I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many

fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. (1 Corinthians 4:14-16).

Over the last four chapters, Paul has spanking the Corinthians. If you had a father that was anything like my father, then you know what it means to be spanked. When I was a boy, my father seemed to have a theory that intelligence could be magnified by an increased flow of blood to the brain through the stimulation of the gluteus maximus. He used this theory as a working hypothesis and applied its mechanics on a regular basis.

I don't know that my father enjoyed applying his theory. He certainly seemed to give it his all and, in my young mind, I imagined that he took a fiendish delight in meting out my punishment. The Corinthians may have begun to feel the same way. Because of this, Paul pauses from their verbal whipping to let them know that this is taking place for their best.

1. The Purpose for the Admonition: *I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children (4:14).*

Paul derives no pleasure in saying these things about the Corinthians. He did not rub his hands and murmur to himself, "Wait till I get my hands upon them." Neither was he seeking to shame them. Certainly, the things that he said to them were bound to bring shame, but this was not his purpose. Instead, his purpose is to admonish them as his beloved children. His purpose is to warn them that they are getting themselves into trouble.

There is a lesson here for us. There are a lot of commandments and exhortations given to us by God. It is important to realize that they are given to us for our own good. God is not some cosmic killjoy who is out to stop His people from having fun. He simply wants to protect His people from hurt. He wants our best and He tells us exactly how to achieve it.

Sometimes we don't understand this. We are like the child who cannot understand why he shouldn't play with matches or ride his bicycle in the street. We think that it is merely to stop us from having a good time. Sometimes we have to be spanked. This is what Paul is doing to the Corinthians. He is spanking them.

2. The Rights of Admonition: *For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel (4:15).*

The reason Paul has the right to correct the Corinthians is because he is their spiritual father. I don't discipline the kid who lives down the street. Goodness knows, he often deserves it. There are times when he needs some correction. But I have never done it. I don't have any right to discipline that child because he is not my child. Only his own parents have the right to discipline him.

The same is true on the spiritual level. There are churches within my community where terrible things are going on. There are pastors who are wrapped up in false teachings. There are members who have fallen into sin. There are Christians who are stabbing one another in the back. But I have not done anything about this. I do not have the right to go into those churches and to pass judgment upon them because I am not their spiritual father.

Do you see what Paul is saying? He says that he can talk to the Corinthians in this manner because he is their spiritual father. He brought them to know the Lord and he changed their spiritual diapers. He has earned the right to talk to them this way.

3. The Results of Admonition: *I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me (4:16).*

Because Paul was their spiritual father, he can say, "You ought to take on the family resemblance of your spiritual father." I have heard preachers say, "Live as I say, not as I do. Don't follow me, follow Jesus." But that is not the Biblical pattern of leadership. That is what Jesus accused the Pharisees of doing.

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them." (Matthew 23:1-3).

The scribes and the Pharisees had all of their doctrines in order. They

believed in the supernatural and they knew their Biblical prophecy and they could quote the law and they could cross their tau's and dot their iota's when it came to doctrine. There was only one problem. They did not have a lifestyle to match.

Paul says that if you are going to imitate him, then you will not go wrong. How can he say this? Isn't this a case of open conceit? Not at all. Paul could say this because he was an imitator of Jesus Christ. To follow Paul was to follow one who was following Christ.

That doesn't mean that Paul wanted people to put him up on a pedestal and worship him. What it does mean is that Paul's life was an example of how a Christian ought to live.

Can you say that? Can you tell people, "If you live the way I live, then you will be living a victorious Christian life"? If you can't say that, then something is wrong in your life that needs to be fixed. At this point, you might be tempted to retort, "But we cannot all be like Paul. Nobody could live up to that kind of standard!" You would be wrong. Paul decides to send to the Corinthians a man who has done exactly that. He is a disciple of Paul's. He is a man who has imitated Paul. His name is Timothy.

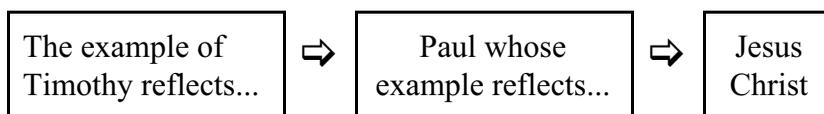
A FATHER'S EXAMPLE

For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. (1 Corinthians 4:17).

Paul sends Timothy to Corinth to be a living example of what the Corinthian believer ought to be. Notice that Paul does not say that Timothy will become the pastor of the Corinthian church. He is not appointed to the status of overseer or elder. We are not even told that Timothy will hold a series of Bible studies.

Timothy is to do one thing. He is to be a reminder. He is to be an example in his life of how the Corinthians ought to live. When they look at Timothy and the way he lives, they will be reminded of Paul and the way he lived when he was among them. Neither are Paul's ways an end to themselves, for

they in turn are “*in Christ.*”



A FATHER’S REPROOF

Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power. 21 What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness? (1 Corinthians 4:14-21).

There are times when a father has to resort to discipline. It is written in his job description that he must exercise discipline over his household. Sometimes this means spanking. It sometimes means the inflicting of pain upon the posterior of a child.

Do you know what happens if a child goes a long time without being spanked? He becomes arrogant. He comes to think that he is above any such discipline. That is what had happened at Corinth.

There was an arrogance of absence. Paul says, “*Some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you*” (4:18). The Corinthians had begun to think that they were safe from any reproof. They thought that they had grown up and they assumed that Paul would be intimidated by their new status. They could study the Scriptures for themselves. They could pick out their favorite spiritual leader and ignore those for whom they did not care. They didn’t need Paul or anyone else telling them how to live. Paul says, “*Watch out! You don’t think that I’m going to come, but I will show up one of these days and then the fur will fly and heads will roll.*”

There is an application here for us. Jesus is coming back one of these days. You might think that He has more important things to do, but you haven’t been overlooked. He knows what you have been up to and He is going to come back both in judgment and in gentleness.

For those who have been faithful, this will be a time of rejoicing as they are rewarded. And for those who have not prepared themselves, it will be a time of judgment. The message is the same for all. Get ready.

IMMORALITY WITHIN THE CHURCH

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

When my older brother was still a teenager, he came home from work complaining of a sharp pain in his side. He went to his bedroom and lay down, hoping that it would go away, but it continued to persist. After two days, the pain had grown steadily worse and finally my parents drove him to the hospital. When the doctors examined him, they found that his appendix had burst and that he was in need of an immediate operation. They quickly wheeled him into the operating room and put him to sleep and cut into his body to remove the diseased organ.

The doctors later told my brother that if the operation had been delayed for another day, he would have died as the toxins from the burst appendix poisoned his body.

The church at Corinth was in need of a similar operation. There was within the church a diseased part of the body that was poisoning the rest of the church. Paul, like a skillful surgeon, makes his diagnosis and calls for the immediate removal of that part of the body which is infected with the disease of immorality.

A DEADLY DIAGNOSIS

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. ² And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. (1 Corinthians 5:1-2).

The morality of the city of Corinth was much like the morality of Fort

Lauderdale in the 21st century. It was commonplace to hear of couples who were living together outside the bonds of marriage and homosexuality was considered to be an acceptable alternative.

The believers of the church at Corinth had been saved out of that immorality. They had been called by the righteous Son of God to be pure and holy and set apart as a special people to the service of God.

There was a problem. They still lived in the city of Corinth. While living within this city, they began to be influenced by its low moral standards. Instead of living like Christians, some of them began to live like Corinthians. In this way, immorality crept into the church.

1. *A Report of Immorality: It is actually reported that there is immorality among you (5:1).*

Paul had heard some disturbing news from Corinth. Reports had reached him of a crippling disease that was infecting the wholesomeness of the church. Like a cancer, it was slowly spreading its poison throughout the body. It had now reached a point where the immorality that was going on within the church was even surpassing that of the pagan city of Corinth.

2. *The Kind of Immorality Involved: Immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife (5:1).*

There was a case in the church at Corinth in which a man was living in open incest with his father's wife. Presumably this was his stepmother.

Not only was this kind of relationship forbidden in the Scriptures (Leviticus 18:7-8; Deuteronomy 22:30), but it was not even practiced among the Gentiles. Such a practice was even considered to be immoral in the ungodly society of Corinth. The Corinthian Christians had managed to shock a city where homosexuality and adultery were commonplace. There are several things we ought to note about this situation:

- a. This is an on-going situation.

Paul speaks in the present tense (*someone has his father's wife*). He is not referring to a sin that took place once and then was followed by sorrow and repentance. He is describing a continuing relationship that is still in progress.

- b. There is a member of the church involved in this situation.

The one who was involved in this sin was a member of the church at Corinth. He was still accepted as a member of the Christian community, even though he was living in open immorality.

This person is claiming loyalty and devotion to Jesus Christ while he is living a sinful lifestyle. He is passing himself off as a follower of Christ while living a life that is in accordance with Satan.

- c. The church has been tolerant of this situation.

Paul's complaint is not merely that the sin has taken place, but that there has been no outcry within the church to have this sinning member removed. There has been no exercise of any form of church discipline. The sinful condition was allowed and accepted by the rest of the church. The only attitude that the church had manifested in the face of this sin is that of arrogance.

3. The Response to the Charge of Immorality: *And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst (5:2).*

The sin that had reared its ugly head in Corinth was only the tip of the iceberg. Its presence brought to light a more sinister problem — that of spiritual arrogance.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4). Instead of mourning over the sinful condition that had infected their church, the Corinthians Christians became proud and arrogant. They had rationalized their allowance of this sin in their midst by claiming that it was a sign of their liberty. They were using the concept of grace to excuse sin.

Many years ago, I found myself sharing the gospel with a little girl who lived in the neighborhood. I explained to her that we have all sinned and that Christ died to take away sin. I told her that she needed to believe in Christ to have her sins removed. As I was summarizing, I asked her, “What do you have to do to go to heaven?” She thought for a moment and then replied, “Sin a lot!”

Some of the Corinthian Christians seem to have suffered a similar misconception. They reasoned that, if Christ died to pay for sins, then it is okay to sin a lot. They not only excused sin in their midst, but they were proud of its presence. They were proud of their “gracious attitude.” Their pride led to arrogance.

Pride is like that. A proud heart has the effect of blinding the eyes to that which is wrong. But Christianity is not a religion of pride. We have nothing about which to be proud because everything we have has been given to us.

A PRESCRIBED TREATMENT

For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:3-5).

Paul moves from the diagnosis of the disease to its treatment. He calls for an immediate operation. He calls for a surgical removal of that part of the body that has been infected.

Up to this point in his epistle, Paul has been calling for the unity of the church at Corinth. Now he points out that there is also a need for division. There are times when the church of God needs to be divided. This is such a time.

1. An Absent Judgment: *For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this,*

as though I were present (5:3).

Notice that we have a continuous chain of thought in these three verses. In the Greek this is a single sentence. The main clause looks like this:

*For I... have already judged him... as though
I were present... to deliver such a one to Satan.*

Paul imagines himself present in Corinth and tells them what he has already done in his own mind with regards to this matter. He pictures himself at the meeting of the church. He stands during the meeting and speaks a solemn word of rebuke. He directs the body to remove the sinning member from its midst. This is the principle of church discipline.

2. A Present Spirit: *In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus (5:4).*

The church is to exercise this discipline “in the name of our Lord Jesus.” There is a reason for this. The church has no authority of its own. The only authority it has is that which has been delegated to it by Jesus Christ. This authority includes the authority to exercise discipline.

“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. (Matthew 18:15-17).

Jesus sets forth the process by which church discipline is to function. When you first become aware that another member of the church is involved in some specific sin, you are to go to him in private. It may be that he will listen to your reproof and that he will repent. At that point, the church discipline has reached its desired objective -- the

restoration of the sinning believer.

If this sinning believer refuses to listen to you, then you are to take one or two other Christians with you and once again confront him with his sin. If he repents of his sin, then you have accomplished your purpose and the matter is at an end.

If the believer refuses to listen to you and to the others who have come with you, then the sin is to be taken before the ruling body of the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then he is to be removed from the church. He is to be considered a pagan and treated as though he were “a Gentile and a tax-gatherer” (18:17).

The discipline against the rebellious Christian does not end here. Christ continues in the following verses:

“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.” (Matthew 18:18-20).

The church is given some very real authority here. It is given the authority to bind and to loose both on earth and in heaven. It is given the power-of-attorney for our Lord.

Notice what I have said. I did not say that the pope of the Roman Catholic Church has this power. I did not say that the pastor of your church has this power. It is the church as a collective group that is given this authority.

This is exactly what Paul is describing when he speaks of *when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus*. This is the meeting of the church. At this meeting, the church is to move as a unified body in expelling that member that is infected and that has repeatedly refused to be cured.

3. A Destructive Deliverance: *I have decided to deliver such a one to*

Satan for the destruction of his flesh (5:5).

This has been a troublesome verse for Bible scholars. There are two primary interpretations that have been suggested.

- ♦ This refers to the excommunication of the sinning man from the church, the act of placing him out of the realm of God and into the realm of Satan.
- ♦ This means the body of the sinning man is handed over to the power of Satan so that Satan is permitted to do as he wishes to that man.

Which view is the correct one? I believe them both to be correct. This act includes the removal of the sinning man from the assembly of the church, but it goes far beyond that. This man is handed over to Satan. The mighty hand of God's protection is removed. Satan is given full reign to do to this man as he wishes.

That is what happened to Job. It is not that Job has sinned. He had not. He was not the victim of church discipline. Yet his body was nevertheless handed over into the power of Satan. His possessions were destroyed, his family killed and his body tormented with disease. It was by the hand of Satan that all of these calamities befell him. Why would God allow one of His special children to undergo such torment?

4. A Spiritual Salvation: *I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (5:5).*

The reason the sinning member of the church is to be expelled from the church and delivered over to Satan so that his body will suffer destruction is for his ultimate spiritual benefit.

I have to admit that this sounds a little far fetched on the surface. It reminds me of when my father used to take off his belt to spank me. He would say, "This is for your own good." Frankly, I was more than a bit skeptical.

Do you want to know something? He was right! It was for my own

good. My daughter heard similar words from me when she was little and she was probably skeptical, too. But now she is grown with children of her own and she believes it, too.

The reason the sinning believer is to be delivered to Satan is so that *his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*. The discipline of the sinning believer is an integral part of the salvation process.

This is important. When you first came to Christ in faith, you began a process. You were saved, but you also began to be saved. You were set apart and made holy, but that holiness also began to be worked out in your life in a very practical way. You are not perfect, but you are better than you were. You are moving toward a goal. That goal is to be like Christ. God is very concerned that you reach that goal. When you begin to deviate from that goal and to fall into sin, God does something drastic to bring you back. He gives His people, the church, the authority to call you back and, if that does not work, He gives His people the authority to deliver you into the power of Satan.

Satan would love to get his hands on you. He would delight in doing to you what he did to Job. He would love to destroy your body. God will allow it if it means bringing you back to Himself. He will allow it if it means the saving of your spirit.

At this point, you might be thinking to yourself, “This is a little extreme, isn’t it? Couldn’t God just stand us in a corner and send us to bed without any supper?” Yes, it is extreme. But sin is also extreme. God wants His people to be free from sin and He will go to any length to accomplish that end. He even went to the extreme of sending His Son to die for us. That is how important your salvation is to God.

THE LESSON OF LEAVEN

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with

old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

Paul now moves to illustrate the truths that he has been teaching. His illustration revolves around the use of leaven. What is leaven?

When bread was to be baked, a small piece of dough would be broken off and put to the side. This small piece would sit there for several days until it began to ferment and turn sour. Once it had turned sour, this piece of “leaven” would be placed into a sack of flour from which the next batch of bread would be made. It was this kind of process that caused the bread to rise when it was baked.

1. *A Common Phenomenon: Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? (5:6).*

Paul uses the leavening process to illustrate what is going on within the church at Corinth. Just as a little pinch of leaven causes the entire lump of dough to be affected, so also, a little sin allowed to remain within the church will cause the entire church to be influenced by that sin.

Sin always has a negative influence. It is like gangrene. If it is allowed to remain, it will spread to the entire body. You can have a big church and a great Sunday School and an active evangelism program and be caring for the poor, but if sin is allowed to remain, then the church will ultimately die.

Only a little leaven is required to begin the process of fermentation. It quickly mingles with and permeates any product into which it is introduced. Sin is the same way. It has a tendency to grow and multiply itself until it has infected the entire environment. It is like taking a white glove and rubbing it in mud. You do not see the mud become “glovey.”

2. *A Concluding Command: Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened (5:7).*

This brings Paul to his conclusion. It is to remove the infected areas -- those who continue to live in sin. It is an exhortation to remove sin

from the church. If there is sin in your life, then you are to remove that sin. There is a reason for this. It is so that you can become what you have been declared to be.

You are to clean out the old lump of leaven so that you can be a new lump because you already are a new lump. You are told to clean yourself. And yet, you have already been declared by God to be clean in your position. Your experience needs to match your position. You need to live like what you are. You don't live a holy life so that you can be holy; you live a holy life because you are holy.

As a result of such holy living, you will be a new lump. This is interesting. You would have thought that holy living would make you into something else that is not connected with leaven, but Paul says that you will be a new lump.

This tells me something about leaven. Leaven doesn't necessarily represent sin. Rather leaven represents influence. It might be a bad and a sinful influence ("old leaven"). Or it might be a good and a positive influence ("new lump"). Here is the lesson. You are an influence in your world. The question is what kind of influence are you going to be?

3. A Picture from Passover: *For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed* (5:7).

The figure of leaven was closely tied in the Jewish mind to the Passover. The Passover and the week that followed was a time when every Jew was required to eat unleavened bread. This was to symbolize that they were God's people and that they had left their old ways behind when they came out of Egypt in the Exodus.

Each year, they would eat the Passover lamb that had been sacrificed for them and they would eat unleavened bread and they would remember what God had done for them.

Now the image has changed. We do not look to a once-a-year sacrifice. We do not remove the leaven from our tables once a year. Our Passover is a continuing Passover. Christ died with respect to sin once and for all. He is the ultimate Passover Lamb. He died on the cross and the wrath of God passed over us and rested upon Him.

That sacrifice needs never to be repeated.

Every day is a Passover for us. Therefore we do not remove leaven once a year. Instead we are to keep the leaven of sin away every day.

LIMITS OF SEPARATION

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

Paul has told the Corinthians to separate themselves from the member who is sinning. He now moves to define the limits of which this separation is to have. The Corinthians have a tendency to do everything to the extreme. There have been those who heard the message of grace and liberty who have assumed that it is okay to remain in sin. But there are also those who take separation to the point where they are separating from everyone and won't even evangelize because it means talking to an unbeliever. And so, Paul defines the limits of separation. This separation applies only to those who claim to be Christians.

5:1-5	5:6-8	5:9-13
Separation Commanded	Separation Illustrated	Separation Explained
Believers ordered to separate from the sinning believer	Leaven illustrates the need for separation	Believers are not to try to separate from pagans, but only from the unrepentant who claim to be believers

1. The Fact of Separation: *I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people (5:9).*

This has been taken by some scholars to refer to a previous letter that Paul had written to the Corinthians. But such an interpretation is not necessary.

Paul has just finished telling the Corinthians not to associate with immoral people. That has been his message in the first part of this chapter. Now he is going to explain what he means by “immoral people.”

2. The Disclaimer of Separation: *I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world (5:10).*

Corinth was filled with immoral people. Outside of the church, there were hardly any people to be found in Corinth who could not be described as immoral people.

If the Corinthians are not to associate with immoral people and if there are only immoral people in Corinth, then that means the Corinthians believers will not be able to associate with anyone who lives in Corinth. Right? Wrong! Paul doesn't mean for them to disassociate themselves from all sinners. To do that, they would have to build a rocket ship and leave planet earth.

What Paul does mean is that the Corinthian believers are not to associate with an immoral person if that person is claiming to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

3. The Clarification of Separation: *But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler (5:11).*

You don't have to deliver a sinning unbeliever over to Satan because he already belongs to Satan. An unbeliever lives *according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air* (Ephesians 2:1). He is by nature a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:2).

This separation that is commanded by Paul applies only to those who are “so-called brothers.” It applies to the man who claims to be a Christian and yet lives a lifestyle that is like the world. Paul gives a list of sins that describe such a lifestyle:

He is *an immoral person,*
or covetous,
or an idolater,
or a reviler,
or a drunkard,
or a swindler.

I want you to notice something about this list. There are a lot more serious sins that are left out. This list doesn't say anything about murder or rape or armed robbery. It is made up of sins that would have been “socially acceptable” within the city of Corinth. But Christians are not to live like Corinthians. Christians are not to live like Americans. Christians are to live like Christ.

The man who claims to be a Christian and yet who continues to live like the world is to suffer discipline. He has been warned. He has been exhorted to repent. He has refused to listen. He has been put out of the church. Now you are to have nothing to do with him.

4. The Extent of Separation: *Not even to eat with such a one (5:11).*

Every social contact is to be broken off with the man who claims to be a Christian and yet who continues to live in his sin. It is not merely that he is not permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper. It is not only that he is excluded from the worship of the church. He is to be shunned by the Christian community until he has returned to repentance. He is not to be permitted to attend home Bible studies. He is not to be invited over for dinner. He is to be totally shunned. There are several reasons for this.

- ♦ It is so that sin will not contaminate the church. Paul has already used the illustration of leaven to show how just a little bit of sin can influence the entire body.
- ♦ Because the outside community must see that there is a difference between the church and the world. The world is to

look at the church and see the love and the holiness of Jesus Christ.

- ♦ The pain of such an excommunication is designed to drive the sinning believer back to God. If he is allowed to remain in his sin without the benefit of any discipline, then he will never be motivated to forsake that sin.

Does this mean that we hate the man who has fallen into sin? Not at all. But we do hate the sin in which he is involved and we cannot accept him as long as he lives in a way that is inconsistent with what he claims to be.

The story has been told and retold of a soldier in the Macedonian army who was brought before Alexander the Great on a charge of cowardice. Alexander heard the charge and then asked the man, “What is your name?” In a barely audible voice, the man replied, “Alexander.”

“What is your name?” asked Alexander again? Once more, the wretched soldier replied, “Alexander.” The king stood up before the man and ordered, “Either change your behavior or change your name.”

That is what Jesus says to us. He has declared us to be righteous and holy. We have been made sons of God. We are a holy people. Now we are called to live accordingly. Are you a Christian? Are you living the part? Either change your behavior or change your name.

CHRISTIANS IN COURT

1 Corinthians 6:1-8

Law courts and legal arbitration were a part of the way of life among the Greeks of Corinth. The Roman government had set up a system of legal courts. The courts were held in the agora, the city marketplace. Today you can go to the ruins of Corinth and stand in that same marketplace. To one side was a large stone seat. It was known as the Bema Seat, the seat of judgment. It was from here that the local governor would preside over each case, rendering his judgment after all sides of the question had been heard.

The Jewish way of doing things was somewhat different. The Jews believed that, since they were the chosen people of God, they ought not to take their disputes into pagan courts. They thought that to do so would be to imply that God's law was inferior to pagan law. Thus among the Jews it was considered to be a form of blasphemy to take another Jew to court.

Roman law recognized this attitude of the Jews and so the Jewish synagogues were empowered to try any case and to pass any sentence upon a Jew as long as it did not carry a penalty of death.

With the rise of the church at Corinth, it was not long before legal disputes arose between the new converts. Perhaps Brother Marcus is in the market for a new camel. He goes down to Alexander's Used Camel Dealership in downtown Corinth. He picks up a camel but does not purchase the warrantee. As soon as he gets the camel home, he notices that it is cross-eyed. Nobody wants a cross-eyed camel, so he immediately returns to the dealership and demands to speak to the manager. Lo and behold, the manager is none other than Deacon Alexander from church. Brother Marcus explains his predicament to Deacon Alexander who listens and then says, "I'm so sorry that this had to happen to you and I wish that you had taken our low-cost camel warranty, but there is nothing that I can do for you."

At this point, Brother Marcus decides that he has one of three options. First, he can beat Deacon Alexander with a big stick. This might be fun, but it is obviously not the spiritual thing to do. Besides that, Deacon Alexander might have an even bigger stick. Secondly, he can take his case to the Jewish

synagogue and have it tried there. However neither he nor Deacon Alexander are Jewish. So the only alternative is for him to take Deacon Alexander to the civil court of the city. In this way, it will be a Gentile judge who is bringing judgment upon two Gentiles.

This situation was evidently becoming more commonplace in Corinth. The law courts were filling up with Christians who were filing suit against other Christians. Paul moves to direct his attention to this problem.

In chapters 5-6, Paul deals with three specific problems that were infecting the church:

5:1-13	6:1-11	6:12-20
Sexual Misconduct that called for church discipline	Legal Lawsuits that called for church oversight	Lustful temptations that called for a connective reminder
Unity broken by sin	Unity threatened by disagreements	Unity shared in Christ

It is interesting that this one is sandwiched between two issues that deal with sexuality among Christians. The real issue was one that goes back to the earlier chapters of the book. It was the issue of unity.

THE PROBLEM STATED

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? (1 Corinthians 6:1).

Paul has a very interesting way of dealing with this problem that was taking place in the Corinthians church. Instead of making accusations, he asks a series of questions. He will ask a total of nine questions in the first seven verses. The implication is that, as the Corinthian Christians read this passage and ask themselves these nine questions, they will be passing judgment upon themselves.

1. A Question about the Unrighteous: *Does any one of... dare to go to law before the unrighteous? (6:1).*

This reference to “the unrighteous” does not necessarily mean that the pagan rulers of Corinth were particularly bad people or that they did not have the means to judge the issues of their society. It does not mean that they were any worse than the Corinthian Christians. This could be pretty bad at times.

What it does mean is that the Christians are to be different. They have been credited with the righteousness of Christ. It might not show at the moment, but Christians are righteous.

Paul is not concerned that the Corinthian Christians might not receive a fair hearing before the civil courts. Fairness is not at issue here. What is at issue is that the Corinthian Christians have such a low view of their authority and the position of the saints.

2. A Question about the Saints: *Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? (6:1).*

What is a saint? We have a false view if we think of a saint as some super stained glass spiritual mighty man. If you have come to Jesus Christ in faith, then you are a saint. You have been “saintified” -- set apart as a special person who is God’s personal possession.

This is a special position. Not everyone is called to be a saint. Only God’s people are thus called. If you have such an exalted position, then you are qualified to be a judge. There is coming a day when you shall be a judge.

REASONS FOR REMAINING OUT OF COURT

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?

Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?

If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?

I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not

among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, 6 but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren. (1 Corinthians 6:2-8).

Paul now goes on to explain why the Corinthian Christians were wrong in taking one another to court. The fact that Paul gives such an explanation tells me something about Christianity. It tells me that Christianity is not merely a list of arbitrary rules. There are reasons for my faith and for my new lifestyle. When I come to church, I am not instructed to leave my brain outside in the parking lot. No one tells me, "Pick up your brain when you leave and don't forget it, lest you lose your mind." Christianity isn't like that. It is a religion with reasons. Paul is going to give six reasons why we ought to settle disputes between Christians within the church.

1. Because Saints will Judge the World: *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? (6:2).*

Paul asks a rhetorical question. He asks this question in such a way because his readers should already be aware of a promise that had previously been given. Jesus promised His disciples that one day they would sit in judgment over the nation of Israel.

And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28).

This promise of rulership is not limited to the twelve disciples. Jesus offers this same promise to all who obey Him.

"And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to

pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father” (Revelation 2:26-27).

There is coming a day when the meek shall inherit the earth. Right now, the earth belongs to the strong. But it is going to change hands. God is going to take back this planet and He will give it to His people. His people will judge the world.

Here is the point. If you are going to be in a position to sit on the supreme court of the whole world, then you are certainly qualified to sit on a civil dispute between two Christians. If you can judge the major matters of the world, then you can judge the petty disagreement between the two who sit in a pew on Sunday morning.

2. Because Saints will Judge Angels: *Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? (6:3).*

It is one thing to say that you are going to judge the world. It is quite another thing to say that you are going to pass judgment on angels. Angels are most impressive beings. They hold a high position in God’s kingdom; but your position is even higher. If you will be considered capable of judging angels, then you ought to consider one another as capable of judging between your present issues.

3. Because Saints have a Higher Position than Unbelieving Judges: *If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? (6:4).*

Corinth was the seat of the local proconsul over all of Achaia, the country that we know today as Greece. His authority was second only to the Roman Emperor. Yet the proconsul and even the emperor of Rome held a lower position than the least believer at Corinth.

The justice who sits upon the Supreme Court is of no account in the church. He will not judge the world. He will not judge angels. He will not rule in the kingdom. His judgment is of a limited nature. Taking a case to his domain is to take it to a lower court.

4. Because Saints have a Higher Wisdom than Unbelieving Judges: *I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren (6:5).*

Disputes between believers ought to be settled by believers because saints have a higher wisdom than unbelieving judges. In the first three chapters of this epistle, Paul develops how the wisdom of God is greater than the wisdom of the world. The secular jurist has no basis for a correct judgment over believers because he cannot see the bigger picture. His judgment has only the temporal in view. He does not have a correct perception of the eternal picture. Therefore his judgment must be viewed as inferior.

Why didn't the Corinthian believers go to other Christians to help them judge their disputes? I think that one reason might have been because each person within the church thought himself a capable judge, but considered that no one else was. Perhaps each member of the church thought that he or she was the only person qualified to judge.

It reminds me of a story I heard of a church that met one night to discuss some matters. During the meeting, a newcomer stood up and asked, "Does this church have any spiritual leaders?" There were several people within the church who had considered themselves to be spiritual leaders, but no one else did. They sat waiting for someone to stand up and to mention their name so that they could swell up with pride. Eventually one man did stand up. To their surprise, he reported, "Leaders? No, we don't have any spiritual leaders."

5. Because Saints are Brothers: *Brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers* (6:5).

Another reason that disputes between believers ought to be settled by believers is because believers are brothers. When my family has a family argument, it stays in the family. My younger brother and I used to fight upon occasion. Those conflicts would sometimes get to the point where my parents would be called in as the arbitrator of a dispute. It would usually be over who got to play with a certain toy or who received the larger piece of cake.

Do you want to know something? My parents never took our problems before a judge or a lawyer or a court of law. Why not? Because this was a family matter. Whether big or small, family matters are generally settled within a family. When this stops

happening, the breakup of the family is imminent.

If you are a Christian, then you are a part of a family. This is God's family. One thing a healthy family doesn't do is to take its problems and disputes to outsiders. I am not saying that people should never go to counselors with their family problems, but when you come to the point of needing a counselor for a family issue, it is because things have reached a point of unhealthiness in the family dynamic.

Christians are not to be characterized by disputes. We are to be characterized by love. This quality of love overcomes a lot when it is faced by disputes and differences of opinion.

This brings us to a question. What about those instances when going to court with a believer is absolutely unavoidable? What about when some sort of irreconcilable difference that takes place that legally demands that the secular courts be involved? In cases of child abuse or neglect or abandonment or in other such criminal cases, Christians may be forced to turn to secular courts.

Let me suggest that, if this takes place, the Christian is to enter into the court system with the attitude that his desire is to glorify God rather than to seek material advantage for himself. He is to conduct himself as befits one who is a member of the family of God.

6. Because even when you Win, you Lose: *Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another* (6:7).

A final reason that Christians are not to take one another to court is because even when you win a financial or legal victory, you ultimately lose. You may win the legal award. The judge may award you the victory. But the Judge of the universe has judged it as a loss.

Paul asks the rhetorical questions: *Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?* (6:7). It is better to suffer wrong and to be cheated than to stoop to taking another Christian to court.

You might be inclined to argue and to disagree with such a statement, "How can I possibly survive in the world today if I try to operate by those rules? I could end up losing everything that I have!" Yet this is exactly what Jesus demands of us. He set forth this standard in His

Sermon on the Mount.

“But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.”
(Matthew 5:39-40).

The situation that Jesus describes is only slightly different than the one in Corinth. He pictures a believer who has been taken to court. He is being sued. Someone is attempting to take a portion of his material possessions from him. What is to be the Christian's attitude in this case? The Christian is not to be concerned with protecting his material wealth.

I do not think that this means the Christian is to act foolishly with his money. But it does mean that the protection of his material and financial wealth is to take second place to his spiritual wealth.

The wisdom of the world say to protect yourself from any kind of physical or financial harm. The wisdom of God says to protect yourself from any kind of spiritual fall. A Christian's primary concern should be that his attitude toward his circumstances is a mirror of the attitude of Jesus Christ. In the case at Corinth, this meant that it was better to suffer wrong than to take another Christian to court in an effort to sue him.

Now let's make this personal. Let's bring it into the 21st century. Let's apply it to your own situation. What is your first concern when you deal with other believers? Is it for their spiritual best? Or is it for the protection of your own material possessions? The Bible tells you to put your money where your mouth is. He tells you that, as goes your possessions, so will go your heart.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:19-21).

YOUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

One of the most colorful individuals in all of history was Alexander the Great. He only lived to be 32 years old, but within that short period, he completely changed the face of the world. He conquered races, built cities and created an empire. From his earliest childhood, Alexander seemed destined for greatness. He was imbued with a sense of purpose.

The story is told how, when he was only seven years old, a delegation of Persian envoys came to his father's palace in Macedonia. To everyone's surprise, the young Alexander met them and immediately began to cross-examine them about the size and morale of the Persian army, the distance to the capital city and the condition of the roads leading there.

From where did this sense of purpose come? I think that there can be no doubt that his parents bred within his young spirit this sense of purpose and this sense of heritage. They made him realize that he was not as other boys. He was different than they were. Therefore he must live in a way that a king ought to live.

Christians also have a heritage. It is a spiritual heritage. When we came to Christ, trusting in Him as our Lord and Savior, we became members of God's Forever Family. We are no longer ordinary people. We are now sons of the living God. We are the royalty of the universe. We have a great heritage. Because we have such a heritage, we ought to live accordingly.

6:1-8	6:9-11	6:12-20
Legal Lawsuits that called for church oversight	A reminder of how we were and how we are to be	Lustful temptations that called for a connective reminder

Notice that this section serves as a bridge between the previous verses and

those which are to follow.

THE WAY WE WERE

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Throughout this epistle, Paul has been contrasting two groups of people. Everyone who lives on planet earth comes under one of these two categories. You can be classified under one of these two groups.

Either you are a believer or else you are an unbeliever. Either you are a Christian or else you are not a Christian.

Unbeliever	Believer
Sees the message of the cross as foolishness.	Sees the message of the cross as the power of God.
<i>Those who are perishing</i> (1:18).	<i>Those who are being saved</i> (1:18).
Tried to come to know God through its wisdom (1:21).	Came to know God by the preaching of the cross (1:21).
The wisdom of men (2:5).	The wisdom of God (2:5).
The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God (2:14).	But he who is spiritual appraises all things (2:15).
Must have a diet of milk (3:2).	Able to receive solid food (3:2).
Produces wood, hay and straw (3:12).	Produces gold, silver, precious stones (3:12).

Now we see a return to that contrast. The contrast is still between believers and unbelievers. It is between those who shall inherit the kingdom of God

and those who will not be heirs of that kingdom.

Not everyone is going to be allowed to enter into the kingdom of God. Heaven is not for everyone. There are certain types of people who are not welcome there. Paul says this when he says, *Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?* (6:9).

There is one basic requirement for entrance into God's kingdom. It is the requirement of righteousness. You must be righteous.

This is not a new truth. This is not something that Paul dreamed up one day and decided to include in the Bible. This was clearly taught in the Old Testament.

*For the LORD is righteous;
He loves righteousness;
The upright will behold His face. (Psalm 11:7).*

*O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent?
Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?
He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart. (Psalm 15:1-2).*

The Jews understood this basic truth. They understood that righteousness was required to enter into God's kingdom. This would naturally bring them to the next question and they would ask, "How righteous do you have to be?"

This is where they often went wrong. They thought that they could be righteous enough through the keeping of the law. They had come to the point of building up a whole system of rules around the law to help them to keep it better. It wasn't enough for them to say, "Keep the Sabbath." They had drawn up a whole list of ways that the Sabbath could be broken and they figured out what you were allowed to do and what you were not allowed to do and they filled their traditions with legal loopholes.

They thought that they had righteousness down to a fine art. Chief among them were the scribes and the Pharisees, for these were the keepers and the guardians of the traditions. Jesus said that it wasn't enough. The standards that were raised by the scribes and the Pharisees were not high enough.

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness

surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20).

The righteousness that God demands of one who would enter into His kingdom is greater than that to which the Jews ascribed. Their standard was not enough. Their standard was too low. Jesus set the standard much higher. He said that the standard is perfection.

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

God is perfect. His righteousness is a perfect righteousness. He is satisfied with nothing less. If you are to enter the kingdom of God, then you must possess this perfect righteousness. This is why Jesus came to the earth. It was to die for our sins and to provide a perfect righteousness for us. He accomplished this by becoming a sacrifice for our sins. He died the death that we deserved and, when we believe in Him, His perfect righteousness is credited to us.

Paul repeats this basic principle that *the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (6:9). He states this for a reason. Rather than being a spiritual parenthesis, this is a major part of his argument. The reason that Paul makes this point is that there are members of the church at Corinth who have been living their lives in a way that can be characterized as unrighteous. This means there are one of two possibilities.

Either these people are not a part of God's family and are not going to enter into the kingdom of God, or else they are rebellious children who are acting in a manner that is inconsistent with who they really are.

Paul warns them -- *Do not be deceived* (1 Corinthians 6:9). He says this for a reason. Apparently there were some of the Corinthians who were in danger of being deceived. They were in danger of falling into the trap of thinking that God does not care if you sin. Perhaps they assumed that, since God forgives sin, it is okay to sin a lot. Such thinking is a deception.

It is true that God loves you just the way you are. But God also loves you too much to leave you the way you are. If you are one of His children, He will not leave you in your sin. The reverse is also true. If you have been left in your sin, perhaps it is because you are not one of His children.

R.C. Sproul suggests that there are four kinds of people in this world:

- ♦ There are the people who are saved and who know it. These are the ones who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and who have entered into God's family.
- ♦ There are people who are lost and they know it. These are the people who have never come to Christ and who are not interested in coming to Him.
- ♦ There are those who are saved but don't know it. They have come to Christ in faith, but have never completely realized that He has accepted them as they are. They lack an assurance of the free gift of salvation.
- ♦ The final group is made up of those who know they are saved but are not. These people have a false assurance of salvation. Perhaps they walked down the aisle of a church or repeated a prayer or had an emotional experience. But there has been no change in their lives. They think of their faith as a fire insurance ticket that will get them into heaven, but in the meantime there is no spiritual reality in their lives. One day they shall stand before the judgment seat of God and they shall hear the words, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23).

Sproul said that there are four kinds of people in the world, but really there are only two. There are those who are saved and there are those who are not. Paul describes one of these groups by giving a list of characteristics that we could title, "The Marks of the Unsaved Man." The list is given in verses 9-10.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

There are ten characteristics listed here. The striking thing about these ten characteristics is that they were all evident among the normal citizens of the city of Corinth. They are equally evident in our world today.

1. Fornicators (6:9).

This describes those who engage in sexual immorality in general. Paul is going to deal at length with this problem at the end of this chapter.

2. Idolaters (6:9).

This describes those who worship false gods. Perhaps today we should apply this to people who put material things on a higher priority than God. Anytime you consider something to be more important than God, you are guilty of idolatry.

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Do you see it? Paul says that greed is a form of idolatry. Greed is the consuming desire for that which you do not have. It involves putting something into the position of first place in your life. God wants to be first place in your life.

3. Adulterers (6:9).

This looks specifically to married people who engage in sexual activity outside the bonds of their marriage. Like our society today, the Greek society of that day thought that it was stylish to have an affair or two.

4. Effeminate (6:9).

The Greek word here is *μαλακος* and literally describes that which is “soft,” though in this case it seems to describe that which is feminine. There is nothing wrong with women being feminine, but men were not created to be that way. It is a blasphemy to try to reverse the sexual roles.

5. Homosexual (6:9).

There have been a number of interpreters of the Bible who have tried

to teach that the Greek αρσενοκοιτης (*arsenokoites*) is descriptive only of casual relationships between the same gender as opposed to more permanent commitments. But the Greek word does not allow for such an interpretation. Αρσενοκοιτης is a compound word coming from the joining of two Greek words:

- ♦ Ἄρσεν (*arsen*) is a “male.”
- ♦ Κοιτης (*koites*) is the Greek word for “bed.”

The resulting compound merely describes one who takes a male to bed. It is a euphemism for homosexuality. Paul speaks expressly against the homosexual lifestyle in Romans 1.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (Romans 1:26-27).

Homosexuality was rampant in the Greek and Roman world. Both Socrates and Plato are reported to have engaged in a homosexual lifestyle. This was also common among some of the Roman emperors. Nero, the emperor who would eventually condemn Paul to death, had a boy castrated so that he could become the emperor’s “wife.”

The Bible condemns homosexuality. But it also condemns a lot of other sins, too. Within this list of sins that are condemned, we will find at least some of which we all are guilty. Such an observation will keep us humble.

6. Thieves (6:10).

The thief is one who tries to take that which does not belong to him. You might say to yourself, “I would never do a thing like that!” But is the reason you do not steal because it is wrong or because you are afraid of being caught?

It is possible to be a thief at heart without being a thief in action. If you are not an outward thief, then perhaps you are one inwardly. That is the case if you are guilty of covetousness.

7. Covetousness (6:10).

While the thief takes that which belongs to another, the covetous man only wishes that he could take it. He has committed the same sin in his heart, but merely lacked the opportunity to carry it out.

8. Drunkards (6:10).

Alcoholism had reached epidemic proportions in Corinth. It is just as serious a problem today. Along with its modern counterpart, drug abuse, it involves an addiction to a substance that impairs your normal reasoning ability and that lowers your inhibitions.

You might think to yourself, “What’s wrong with that? It allows me to have a little fun and it doesn’t hurt anyone.” Let me tell you about yourself. You have inhibitions and those inhibitions are good. God gave you those inhibitions. They stop you from doing things that are harmful to yourself. One of the key problems of alcoholism and drug use is that it removes the protecting influence of your inhibitions. God wants you to be in control of yourself. If your life is to be filled with something, then He wants it to be filled with His Spirit.

9. Revilers (6:10).

There are people who attack others in a verbal manner. They speak with cutting words and they are always out to try to bring you down a notch.

God does not consider the sins of the tongue to be unimportant. He says that they characterize the unbeliever and His children ought not to be acting that way. We ought to speak in such a way as befits the kingdom.

10. Swindlers (6:10).

A swindler is someone who gains your assistance as he steals from you. You might think of him as a thief who doesn’t want to get his

hands dirty, so he uses yours to do his stealing.

As I have already noted, there are none who can read this list with complete immunity. We have all sinned and fall short of God's perfect standard of righteousness.

THE WAY WE ARE

And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Paul contrasts the characteristics of his list with the present condition of the Corinthians. He says, "That list describes the way you used to be. But then something happened. You heard the message of the gospel and you believed it and your life was changed."

Do you see what Paul has said? He says that if you are a Christian then you are not that way anymore. Now Paul has a new list. These are things that have happened to the Christian. They tell us WHY the Christian is different.

1. You were washed (6:11).

The old filth of your past life has been washed away. As a result, you have been made clean. You are no longer a dirty person.

2. You were sanctified (6:11).

What does it mean to be "sanctified?" The word comes from the same root in the Greek as the words for "holy" and "saint." It describes one who has been "set apart for a special use."

We have a small measuring cup in our kitchen that we use only for that purpose. It sits in the same cupboard with all of the other cups, but it has a special use that none of the other cups in the cabinet have. It has been set apart for measuring.

Do you remember when God completed His creation? He finished His work and then He took the seventh day and He set it apart. He made it special. He sanctified it.

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Genesis 2:3).

The seventh day did not become substantially different than the first six days. The sun does not shine any brighter on the seventh day and the hours are not any longer. Yet it has been set apart for a special purpose.

Our sanctification is much the same way. As such, it has both a negative as well as a positive aspect.

- ♦ Negative: We have been set apart from the world and from sin and from the dominion of Satan. We have been set apart from the sins of Corinth and from the sins of the society in which we live.
- ♦ Positive: We have been set apart to God and to His good works and to righteousness and to purity.

This brings us to a question. Who does this work of sanctification? Is it accomplished by our work? Is it brought about by our endurance? What does the Bible say about it?

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6).

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:25-26).

Notice who is pictured as doing the work of your sanctification. It is God who does the work. God saved you. He began doing the “good work in you.” He will also go on to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Just as God saved you apart from your works, so also He will set you apart and bring you to completion. It is God who works in you, both to work and to will. He says, “I now pronounce you to be sanctified.

Now go out and live like what you are.”

3. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (6:11).

What does it mean to be “justified”? Many well-meaning Christians have said that it means “just-as-if-I’d never sinned.” This may be a nice memory tool, but it isn’t completely accurate.

The word “justify” is taken from the Greek root word for “righteousness. This gives us a clue as to its meaning. It describes the act of declaring that a person or thing is righteous. There is an important distinction that must be made. The act of justification does not make a person righteous. It is merely a declaration that he is righteous. For example, the same word is used in a context describing God’s righteousness:

And when all the people and the tax-gatherers heard this, they ACKNOWLEDGED GOD’S JUSTICE, having been baptized with the baptism of John. (Luke 7:29).

This phrase should be literally translated, “They justified God.” They were not doing anything to make God more righteous than He already was. They were merely declaring that God was righteous.

This concept of justification was commonly used as a legal term in which a court of law might officially declare that a man was righteous; that he had not broken the law. This is different from being pardoned. A man who had been pardoned might be released even though he was a guilty criminal worthy of death. However a man who was justified was being declared innocent of any wrongdoing.

Paul says that the Corinthian believers have been justified. They have been declared to be righteous. How can this be? He has just pointed out that they used to live a lifestyle that was characterized by sin and disobedience. How can they now be declared to be righteous? How can God declare a man to be righteous when that man, in reality, is a guilty sinner? The answer can only be found in the imputation of righteousness.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This verse pictures two different aspects of the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

♦ The Imputation of our sins upon Christ.

Jesus became sin on our behalf. This does not mean that He actually became a sinner or that He began to sin. He has lived through all eternity without sin and He will always be perfect in His righteous character. How did He become sin on our behalf? What really happened at the cross?

Our sins were put to His account. He was credited with our sins. While He was on the cross, God the Father treated Him as though He were a guilty sinner. Jesus was judged in our place. The wrath of God was poured out on Him. In the midst of this condemnation, He cried out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”

The sinless Son of God was judged as though He had committed all of the sins that have ever taken place throughout the entire history of mankind. He was judged in our place. Our sins were imputed and credited to Him. But this is not all.

♦ The Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness toward us.

Just as our sins were put to His account while He was on the cross, so in the same way, the righteousness of Christ is put to our account when we believe in Him. We are credited with the righteousness of Christ. We are reckoned to be righteous. It is on this basis that we are justified -- declared to be righteous. For all eternity, God will treat us as though we were as righteous as Jesus Christ.

This does not mean I actually become experientially righteous when I believe in Christ. If that were true, then no believer would ever commit a single act of sin and this is not the case.

Rather it means that I am legally credited with the righteousness of Christ so that I can be legally declared to be righteous.

This brings us to a question. If justification merely points to a legal truth rather than to an experiential reality, then what is the significance of Christ's righteousness being credited to us? Is it merely another doctrine to be tucked into our spiritual notebook and quietly forgotten? Or does it have some practical value in how I am to live for today?

It certainly does.

- a. It means that God has accepted me.

We are living in a society where people want to be accepted. People are crying out for acceptance. There is good news for you. God has accepted all who have come to Him. No one who comes to Christ will ever be turned away.

- b. It means that my life now has purpose.

We have all heard of the "mid-life crisis." It is that time when a person's entire life seems to come under examination and question. Having gone through that stage of life, I have become convinced that what we call a mid-life crisis is actually a crisis of purpose. It comes when you reach the conclusion that everything you have been working toward isn't really all that important. It is the story of the man who climbed the ladder of success only to find that it was leaning against the wrong wall.

But if I have been declared to be a righteous son of God, then my life now has the most important purpose of all. I am in the service of the most important Being in the universe. He has a significant role for me to play in His plan. My life now has supreme purpose.

God tells me that, since I have been declared to be righteous, I am to live in accordance with that righteousness. I have a model. He is Jesus Christ. I am to be bringing my life into

conformity with His life. I am becoming like Jesus. I'm not there yet. But with God's grace, I'm closer than I was.

CLEAN LIVING IN AN UNCLEAN WORLD

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

We live in an era of sexual permissiveness. I have seen this era grow and develop throughout most of my life. I was a child of the 60's when what was termed as the sexual revolution came on the scene and promised to set people free to enjoy their sexuality. Instead it had just the opposite effect.

- ♦ Homosexuality and its resulting diseases have spread like wildfire. There are entire countries today in which the majority of the population are infected with HIV.
- ♦ Abortions and single mothers have become the accepted norm within our society.
- ♦ Pornography need not be sold on the street corner or at the local food mart; it is also freely available on the Internet and is delivered unsolicited to people's E-mail.
- ♦ Divorce has become a way of life while the exceptions to the rule have become those who remain faithfully married for life.

All too often, the church has stood silent on these issues, either pretending that they are not problems encountered by Christians, or else watering down the purity of the church and merely ignoring the issues. Yet the Bible is not silent on these subjects. God does not hide His head when talking about sexual relationships and the time has long past when the church ought to follow suit.

Christians live in a real world with real issues and they are tempted with real sins. We are called to be different. We are called to be clean in an unclean world.

We have already noted that chapters 5-6 deal with three specific problems

that were infecting the church:

5:1-13	6:1-11	6:12-20
Sexual Misconduct that called for church discipline	Legal Lawsuits that called for church oversight	Lustful temptations that called for a connective reminder
The corporate church is called to be a part of the solution		Our corporate identity in Christ is the solution

It is interesting that this one is sandwiched between two issues that deal with sexuality among Christians. While the first two problems called for the church to act corporately in coming to a solution, the solution in this section will be seen in an understanding of our identity in Christ.

LAWFUL LIBERTY

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. (1 Corinthians 6:12).

A “grace movement” had come to Corinth. There seem to have been those in the church who were teaching that, since Christ has paid for sins and set us free from the penalty of God’s law, it is okay to live as you please. They taught that, if you want to sin a little, it is okay because Jesus took your sins away. If you want to divorce your wife and trade her in on a younger model, it is okay because God wants you to be free. If you go up to the Temple of Aphrodite and engage in immoral acts, it is acceptable because you are not under the Law.

Paul is going to counter this sort of false teaching, but he does not do it by saying that there is no such thing as grace or that we do not have freedom in Christ Jesus. He teaches instead that grace and Christian living are mutually compatible.

1. The Problem of Profitability: *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable (6:12).*

Everything in this world that is not sin is lawful for me. God has

given me a wonderful freedom. I can do anything as long as it does not involve sinning. In this, I am much like Adam in the Garden of Eden who was told, “You can eat every tree of the Garden except one.” Just as he could eat of anything, so also, I can do anything. But there are some things that are without profit.

I can spend the rest of my life making paper airplanes. There is nothing sinful about paper airplanes. I am not breaking any of God’s laws by making a paper airplane. But it is a profitless way of spending my life.

2. The Problem of Possession: *All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything (6:12).*

All things are lawful for me. It is okay for me to have things. One of the problems with having things is that it is easy to be enslaved by them. It is an ancient truism that says, “Whatever you own owns you.”

The older we get, the more we tend to acquire stuff. Eventually, we get so much stuff that we have to rent a warehouse in which to store some of our stuff. We get very possessive of our stuff. We become upset if someone messes with our stuff. And we take more and more time to take care of our stuff. What is really happening is that we are becoming enslaved to our stuff.

That is what Paul is describing. He says that he will not allow stuff to enslave him. He has room for only one master in his life. His master is the Lord Jesus Christ.

DESIRES OF DESIGN

*Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food;
but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not
for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body.
(1 Corinthians 6:13).*

The Corinthians had a rebuttal to Paul’s call to holy living. They responded by saying, “We aren’t really living in sin. We are only filling the natural desires that God has given to us. If God didn’t want us to live this way, then

He wouldn't have given us these desires." Paul has an answer to such a statement.

1. *A Pagan Proverb: Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them (6:13).*

This was a Greek proverb. It points to the Greek way of thinking that you are made with certain desires and that your lot in life is to fulfill those desires. The Greeks applied this principle to the area of sex. They said that the body is for sex and sex is for the body. They reasoned that, since you have sexual desires, it must be so that you can fulfill them. This philosophy was the cornerstone of their sexual revolution. It was to this end that they erected their Temple to Aphrodite with its thousand temple prostitutes.

Paul quotes this proverb, but he does so with the balancing truth of temporality. The truth is that the body will one day come to an end. There is coming a day when there will be no more food and no more stomach and no more sexual pleasure.

2. *A Principle from Design: Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body (6:13).*

Paul has just noted that the body is temporary. That is not an excuse to indulge in the flesh while you are here on planet earth. To do so would be contrary to its design. The body was not made for immorality, but for the Lord.

What does this mean? In what way is the body for the Lord? I would like to suggest that the answer is to be found in the following verses. Paul is going to explain that the body has been fashioned to be a dwelling-place for the Lord.

There is a wonderful truth here. When you came to Jesus Christ in faith, God's Spirit took up residence inside your body. Your body became the dwelling-place of God. This is why it will be called the "temple of God" in verse 19.

The human body did not come about by chance. It was not the chance product of blind evolution. It was created. It was fashioned for a purpose. It was designed to be a temple for the God of the

universe.

BODIES BUILT TO LAST

Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. (1 Corinthians 6:14).

There was a false teaching going around Corinth that said there is no resurrection from the dead. This teaching had its roots in Greek philosophy. It stated that the body is evil while the spirit is good. Therefore it was reasoned that, if the body died, the spirit could be free to be good.

Paul is going to deal with this false teaching at length in chapter 15. But for now, he merely points out that God builds bodies to last. You see, it could be argued that, since our bodies are only temporary, it does not really matter what we do with them during this relatively short period we are here on earth. If I want to engage in immoral conduct with a temple prostitute, then it is only my body that is involved and my spirit remains without sin.

To combat such a suggestion, Paul has pointed out that my body is the dwelling place of God. It has been designed for a purpose. And now he goes on to show that this is an eternal purpose. It is an eternal purpose because I am going to have an eternal body. This body in which I currently reside is going to die one day, but God will raise me from the dead. I am going to have a new body and it will also be the temple of God.

JOINED WITH JESUS

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. (1 Corinthians 6:15-17).

We have been joined with Jesus. We have a new identity. We have become everything that He is with respect to His communicable attributes.

- ♦ He is the Son of God; we are sons of God.
- ♦ He has eternal life; we have eternal life.
- ♦ He is righteous; we have been declared to be righteous.
- ♦ He is the heir to the kingdom of God; we are co-heirs with Christ.

That is not all. Christ has also been identified with us. He became human and we are human. He was born as we are born. He lived as we live, yet without sin. He was tempted as we are tempted. He died as we die.

Just as we are in the body of Christ, so also He lives within our bodies. This is important. This is not mere Bible trivia. This is not meaningless theology. It has some very practical applications.

The fact that I am joined to Jesus means that for me to engage in sexual immorality is to identify the body of Jesus Christ with a sinful situation. For a Christian to commit adultery is to bring the body of Jesus Christ into an adulterous relationship. Paul sets this forth in the form of three rhetorical questions:

- ♦ *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? (6:15).*
- ♦ *Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? (6:15).*
- ♦ *Do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? (6:16).*

When you enter into a sexual union with someone, it is much more than two bodies rubbing together in the night. There is a bonding that takes place. Two people become one. This is the way your body was designed. It was designed to become one with another of the opposite gender. We call this bonding marriage. The first marriage was described in exactly this way.

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24).

God designed the first man and the first woman so that they could come together to become “one flesh.” This “one flesh” relationship is not to be taken lightly. It is only to be entered into with one who is also of one spirit.

This is why the believer is commanded not to be bonded together with an unbeliever. Believers should not marry unbelievers because they don't have

anything in common.

On the other hand, we are one spirit with other believers because we are one spirit with Christ.

Now let me issue a disclaimer. The fact that believers share the same spirit does not mean that it is okay for believers to engage in extra-marital relations. I often hear the argument that says, “The wedding license is just a piece of paper.” The problem with such a statement is that, if the wedding license is just a piece of paper now, then it will be just a piece of paper after you are married. People who see marriage as just a formality will consider it nothing but a formality when they see a prettier girl or a wealthier guy or someone who is better at flattering their ego. The importance of marriage is that it signifies commitment. If you have such a commitment, then you have determined at the outset to flee fornication.

A FLIGHT FROM FORNICATION

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Here is the message that Paul brings to the Corinthians who are having sexual problems. He says to flee immorality. He does not say to conquer immorality. He does not say to argue with immorality. If you begin to argue with immorality, then you will probably lose. The thing to do with temptation is not to stay and argue with it. Flee it!

Do you remember the example of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar? Joseph had been sold as a slave into the land of Egypt. He found himself in the house of the Egyptian captain of the guard, a position that was usually held by a eunuch. If this was the case with Potiphar, then we can understand some of his wife’s desire toward Joseph. She wanted to take him to bed.

I imagine that if Joseph had stopped to share in Christian counseling with this woman, he might have fallen prey to her temptation. He might have gotten emotionally involved and felt sorry for her and perhaps even rationalized their relationship. Instead, he ran.

There is a principle here. It is that continued exposure to a temptation to

which you are inclined will result in a weakening of your will. You need to cover your exposures. You need to flee temptation and then you need to stay away from places where temptation is likely to be.

For the Corinthians, this might have meant staying away from the Acrocorinth and the Temple of Aphrodite. Or it might have involved staying away from a certain purpose to whom one was attracted.

There is a story told about Augustine when he encountered a woman on the street with whom he had once had an affair before coming to Christ. As soon as he recognized her, he turned and began to run in the opposite direction. She called after him, “Augustine, it is I.” Without even turning, he called back, “But it is not I.”

There is a truth here. It is that we are no longer the people we once were. Our bodies are no longer only our bodies. They are now temples of God.

TEMPLES OF THE TRINITY

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Have you ever heard someone talk lightly about sin, commenting that certain sins between consenting adults are okay because they don't hurt anyone else? This isn't true. It is especially wrong for Christians because the Christian is always involving a third party. He is involving the holy God of the universe. If you are a Christian, then Paul has several truths that are directed toward you.

1. You are not alone: *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God (6:19).*

No matter where you go or what you do, God is with you. Your body has become the temple of the Holy Spirit. The word that Paul uses for “temple” in this passage is not the general word for temple. It is the special word that denoted only the innermost sanctuary. It was not the place where people gathered to worship. It was the holy place

into which only the priest was permitted to enter because it was holy ground.

You are not alone. Your body has become holy ground to the Holy God of the universe. That brings a great intrinsic value to your body.

An empty bottle is not worth much. But a bottle of costly perfume is another matter. Part of your value is based upon who resides within you. You have the Holy Spirit of God residing within you and that has a necessary impact upon how you view your body.

2. You are not your own person: *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price (6:19-20).*

You have been bought and paid for. The price of your payment was the blood of Christ that He shed upon the cross. You are now the special possession of God. He owns you. When you dishonor your body, you are dishonoring God's personal prized possession.

3. You have a new purpose: *For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (6:20).*

Your new purpose is to glorify God in your body. This is your new goal in life. It is to bring glory to God.

We usually want to glorify ourselves. We like to make ourselves look good. We like people to think good of us. If the truth were known, it is that we want to be worshiped. But we have a higher calling. Our calling is to worship the One who is worthy of our worship.

A CASE FOR CELIBACY

1 Corinthians 7:1-9

To marry or not to marry, that is the question. This is one of the major questions that has faced the Roman Catholic Church in my generation. Even today I continue to hear discussed among my Roman Catholic friends the question of whether or not priests ought to be permitted to marry. It is not a new issue. It was also an issue in Paul's day. It was an issue in the church at Corinth.

Corinth was known as the "sin city" of the ancient world. It had the low moral standards of a port city and the Temple of Aphrodite was known for its temple prostitutes that formed an integral part of the Greek worship. Divorce was also commonplace within the city as it was throughout the rest of the ancient world. But now Christianity had come to Corinth and the church was faced with new situations.

There is the case of a husband and wife who have both come to Christ in faith and they are now told that they are only to engage in sexual relations with each other and within the boundaries of their marriage. This has not been their previous practice. Their pagan religion called for them to engage in all sorts of promiscuity with other people and their society assumed that a man would have both a wife, a mistress and even a boyfriend.

Another couple come to Christ and they decided that they want to be especially spiritual. They are told that sex is of the flesh and so they begin to abstain completely from any sort of marital relations with one another. They aren't even holding hands any longer.

There are young people within the church who learn that sexual relations are to be limited to those who are married and so they rush out to marry the first person who comes along.

A wife hears the gospel in the marketplace one day and believes. She comes home to tell her husband of her newfound faith, but he doesn't want to hear about it. She wants to be both a good wife and a good

Christian, but she is uncertain whether both are possible.

In an effort to find answers for these and other problems within the church, the Corinthians had sent a letter to Paul, explaining their various situations and asking for his guidance. The questions can be summed up in this: How should we treat the institution of marriage now that we are Christians?

The question itself presupposes an important principle. It is that Christianity ought to make a difference in the way we live. Christianity is not a system of rules and regulations. It is a living relationship with a person. It is a living relationship with Jesus Christ. But if you have that relationship with Christ, then it will cause you to live differently. Jesus has that effect on people.

If you are claiming to be a Christian and yet your life is no different than when you first came to Christ, then maybe you have been fooling yourself. Perhaps you need to go back and check on the reality of your relationship with Jesus.

CELIBACY IS GOOD

Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. (1 Corinthians 7:1).

The church at Corinth was inter-racial. That is, it was composed of both Jews as well as Greeks. Each of these groups came into the church with their own preconceived notions. Nowhere was this more true than in the case of marriage.

To the Jewish way of thinking, celibacy was not only odd and unnatural, but it was considered to be in disobedience to God's command to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

On the other hand, many of the Greek Christians may have turned away from the sexual sins of their past and sought refuge in complete celibacy. At the very outset, Paul commends this action. He says, *It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

This was a common euphemism (that means it is a nicer way of saying it) for sexual intercourse. To touch a woman was to share in sexual relations with

her.

Paul says that it is good to abstain from sexual relations. The abstinence of the Greeks in this matter was commendable. It was good that they turn away from their illicit sexual practices. But this does not deny the strength of sexual urges. Paul knows that sexual temptations can be extreme. And so, he offers a solution. It is called marriage.

MARRIAGE IS ALSO GOOD

But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. (1 Corinthians 7:2).

As good as celibacy is, it has one major problem. It opens the door of temptation. There is no one who is so vulnerable to the temptations of immorality as the single person.

This is one of the problems facing the Corinthians Christians. Paul has already spent two chapters dealing with the problems of immorality in the Corinthian church.

This issue is just as relevant to the church today. Christians are in the midst of a spiritual war. In many cases, they are losing in the area of sexual morality. Living in the midst of a society that has gone absolutely crazy over sexuality, it is difficult not to be taken in by the fallen non-morality of the world in which we live.

At the same time, we have an absolute standard of righteousness. It is embodied in the law of God. We know what kind of behavior is proper because our Creator has told us how we ought to live. In this age of sex manuals and marriage manuals, we have the Manufacturer's Operating Booklet. It is the Bible.

Paul's instructions are to *let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband (7:2)*. One option that is open to the single Christian is marriage. This is a way out for those who are unable to stand up to the pressures of celibacy. But we ought also to point out several factors regarding this option.

1. Marriage is Permanent.

Marriages are not meant to be disposable. Oaths are taken at the marriage that bind the two parties and make them one. Because of this, marriage is to be “till death you do part.”

When Paula and I were first married, we determined that divorce would never be considered as an open option for us. We made a commitment to each other that, no matter what the situation, we would work it out.

I believe this to be the most important ingredient to a successful marriage. It is the ingredient of commitment. It involves the decision to make marriage work.

2. Marriage is not Polygamous.

Paul is very specific in describing Christian marriage. He says, *Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.* He does not say, “Let each man have his own wives and let each woman have her own husbands. There is only one wife indicated for each husband and only one husband indicated for each wife.

It is true that polygamy was practiced in Old Testament times, but this was not God’s original design. He did not create Adam, Eve and Jane. He created a single man and a single woman and then He brought them together into a new union.

3. Marriage is a Partnership.

Most men in the ancient world would have said, “Let each man have his own wife,” and left it at that. It was a male-dominated society. But Paul does not go along with the popular point of view. He instead describes marriage in terms of a partnership. The woman is more than just a possession of her husband. There is a mutual possessionship. There is mutual ownership. Each husband is to have his own wife and each wife is to have her own husband. Two separated people have become one. This extends even to their own bodies.

CELIBACY IS NOT FOR THE MARRIED

3 *Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*

5 *Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But this I say by way of concession, not of command. (1 Corinthians 7:3-6).*

One of the most striking movies I have ever seen is the award-winning film “Ghandi.” Although I do not agree with the Hindu philosophy that it teaches, I have found it to be a profoundly moving film. There is a scene in which Ghandi’s wife is asked about her marital relationship with her husband. She reveals that Ghandi believes that sexual intercourse is a deterrent to spiritual growth and so he practices abstinence.

There was a similar philosophy to be found in Corinth. It was called Epicureanism after the Greek philosopher Epicurius (341-270 B.C.). This philosophy taught that happiness lies in the quiet of the mind and that anything that disturbs the soul is bad.

Sexual intercourse has never done a man any good, and he is lucky if it has not harmed him. Nor will a wise man marry and rear a family. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers 10:118-119).

It is easy to see how believers might equate the Christian morality with the Epicurean abstinence. And so, Paul states his principle. It is that celibacy is not for married people.

1. **A Duty to be Fulfilled:** *Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband (7:3).*

Paul regards sexual relations between married partners as not only acceptable, but an obligation and a duty. I must admit that I find it a very pleasant duty. But even if it were not, it is a part of my job as a husband to physically satisfy my wife. It is written in the husband’s

job description.

There may have been husbands who lived in Corinth who had come to know the Lord but who were still married to unbelieving wives. They may have thought it to be wrong to continue to engage in marital relations with an unbelieving spouse.

Paul clears up any such misunderstanding. He does not say that it is okay to marry an unbeliever. But if such a marriage already exists, then the marital relationship between the partners should also continue.

Notice once again the equality with which this marital relationship is pictured. Paul does not give this command only to the wives. What he has to say to married people is said both to the husband as well as to the wife. They are each responsible for their partner.

2. A Temporary Deprivation: *Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control (7:5).*

The only case in which abstinence is permissible between married couples is when the following criteria are met:

- ♦ There must be mutual agreement.

Paul says that this abstinence can only take place *by agreement (7:5)*. In the case where one partner is an unbeliever, there is to be no abstinence where the unbelieving partner is not agreeable to it.

- ♦ It must be Temporary.

Paul says that such abstinence is only to be *for a time*. After the allotted time has been fulfilled, then the couple is to come back together and resume their marital relationship.

- ♦ It is to be for the Purpose of Prayer.

It is possible that the pressures of married life may be so

demanding that they interfere with the giving of sufficient time for prayer. Or there may be such a pressing need that the couple may feel compelled to set aside all normal activities and devote all of their time to prayer.

No matter what the reason, at the end of such a period, the couple is instructed to come back together.

3. *A Problem with Temptation: Come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control (7:5).*

When the temporary time of separation has been completed, the couple is to come back together and resume their relationship. The reason for this is plainly stated. It is because of the temptation of Satan.

Satan is smart. He will try to attack you when you are at your very weakest. He will strike you with temptation when you are the most vulnerable.

4. *Concession versus Command: But this I say by way of concession, not of command (7:6).*

Paul is not commanding believers that they should immediately begin instituting regular periods of abstinence for prayer purposes. He is merely allowing them this choice should the need arise and he is regulating that decision so that it does not turn to evil. Thus he speaks *by way of concession, not of command*.

CELIBACY IS NOT FOR EVERYONE

Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. (1 Corinthians 7:7).

Paul sees some very practical advantages in being single. Later in this chapter, he will list these advantages in detail.

- ♦ It is easier for the single believer to withstand persecution and hardship (7:26).

- ♦ The single believer does not have to deal with the stress of marital problems (7:28).
- ♦ The single believer does not have the distractions of married life. He can thus fully devote himself to the Lord (7:32-35).

Paul sees these practical advantages to being single. But he also realizes that being single is not for everyone. Thus he admits that *each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.*

There are some people that God has designed with the capacity to be single. This is a gift from God. Others have a capacity and even a need to be married -- to merge their lives with another person so that the two become one. This is also a gift from God.

Now you are going to ask, “Which gift has God given to me?” Are you happy being single? Then that is your gift. Are you married? Is there someone in your life with whom you have become one in mind and who is your counterpart? Then that is your gift.

You might answer, “I don’t fit into either one of those categories. I’m not happy being single and yet there is no one in my life who is my counterpart.” If that is the case, then I have a message for you. It is to wait.

God knows what He is doing. He doesn’t make any mistakes. If you are waiting for that special someone to come along, it might be because God wants to get you ready first. It could be that He wants to develop some spiritual quality in your life that will make you the right kind of marriage partner.

TO MARRY OR NOT TO MARRY

But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. 9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn. (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

Paul has been speaking to two groups up to this point. He has been speaking to those who are single and to those who are married. The single are to abstain from sexual relations while the married are not to abstain. Now Paul turns to a third group. It is those who were once married but who now are

not.

1. It is Good to remain Single: *But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I (7:8).*

In order to understand of whom Paul is speaking in this verse, we need to example all of the types of people mentioned in this chapter.

7:10	The Married	Even though there were different types of marriages within the ancient world, they are all lumped together and treated under this one general category.
7:25	The Virgins	These are single people who have never married
7:8, 7:39-40	The Widows	These are people who were once married, but whose mates have died.
7:15	The Divorced	These are people who are separated and divorced

I want to suggest that when Paul speaks *to the unmarried and to widows*, he is addressing those two groups who have already been married but who now are not. These are both the widows as well as the divorced.

This identification of “the unmarried” is seen in verse 34 where Paul speaks of two groups, “the woman who is unmarried and the virgin.” It seems to me that there is a distinction between these two groups. This means we can conclude that the virgin is the single person who has never been married, while the “unmarried” is that person who was once married.

Thus by speaking *to the unmarried and to widows*, Paul directs himself to the two groups who have been in a marriage relationship in the past but who are not now presently married. His advice to people in these two groups is that it is better for them if they do not marry.

Although remarriage in such a case is not necessarily forbidden, it

can still be difficult. When you remarry, there is the ever-present danger of comparing your present partner with the one from the former marriage.

2. Marriage is an Acceptable Alternative: *But if they do not have self-control, let them marry (7:9).*

Although it is good to remain single after having once been married, it is still better to remarry if you lack the self-control mandated by the single lifestyle. If you are now single and feel yourself to be under heavy sexual temptation, then perhaps you need to consider remarriage, although Paul is going to give some very specific stipulations regarding the taking of this option.

3. Marriage is Better than Immorality: *For it is better to marry than to burn (7:9).*

What does it mean to “burn?” We automatically conjure up visions of being cast into hell, but I do not think that this is what is in view. In the epistle to the Romans, Paul uses similar language to describe those who are inflamed with lust.

*...and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and **burned** in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (Romans 1:27).*

Rather than attempting to withstand the burning of unsatisfied lust, Paul says that it is better for the unmarried and the widow to remarry.

Paul admits to the reality of the physical and sensual desires that you feel. He gives you a way out. It is that you marry. Does this mean that if you are feeling these sorts of physical urges that you ought to run right out and get married? No. But it does mean that if you are in a situation in which those physical urges are threatening to overcome you, then the alternative to falling into a sinful relationship is to enter into the pure relationship of marriage.

FROM WEDLOCK TO DEADLOCK

1 Corinthians 7:10-16

The wedding was something out of a fairy tale. The beautiful bride walked down the aisle and was met by the young man who had won her heart. Before all of their friends and family, they exchanged their vows, pledging themselves to one another for life. The celebration that followed and was joyous and only ended when the newly married couple departed upon a romantic honeymoon.

As the months passed and the couple settled down in their new life together, the problems began. Little things about her began to annoy him and she began to complain that they didn't talk as much as they used to. She started sharing her problems with her best friend who listened sympathetically and he began going out with the boys on a regular basis. The evenings that they did have together were spent in front of the television set. Before long, the arguments began to escalate as their communication with each other grew correspondingly less and less. Finally one night during a particularly heated confrontation, he said that he wanted a divorce.

Different variations of this story have been repeated many thousands of times. Divorce has reached epidemic proportions in America today. Researchers tells us that fully half of all marriages end in divorce and that these numbers are virtually the same for those who claim to be Christians.

The problem of divorce is not unique to today. It was also a problem in the first century. Seneca, the Roman writer, said that women in the Empire counted their age, not by the number of consuls they had seen, but by how many husband they had been through.

The same thing was true for Jewish society. All that was required in Israel to divorce one's wife was to write on a sheet of papyrus the words, "I am no longer married," and hand it to the wife. From that moment on, they were legally considered to be divorced.

The Mosaic Law had provided for the possibility of divorce in Deuteronomy 24. It was a passage that regulated divorce and remarriage.

When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, ² and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, ³ and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

The Jews in Christ's day read this passage and came up with two possible interpretations.

- ♦ There were those who understood this passage to teach that it was acceptable to divorce your wife if she had committed some immoral act. This would be the "indecency in her" for which she could be divorced. This was the teaching of the Jewish teacher Shammai.
- ♦ The second interpretation, held by the followers of Hillel, said that anything of which a husband did not approve could constitute uncleanness. Therefore if your wife burnt the toast and you did not like it, you could divorce her. If your wife did not clean the house to your specifications, you could divorce her. If you found another woman to be more attractive than your wife, you could divorce her.

The interpretation of Hillel was much more popular, especially among those who wanted to get a divorce.

The gospels tell of how a group of Pharisees approached Jesus and asked Him which school of thought was the correct one.

And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any

cause at all?” (Matthew 19:3).

Do you see what they wanted? They wanted Jesus to choose sides. They wanted Him to say that either the school of Shammai was right or else the school of Hillel was right. They had already assumed that it was acceptable for a man to divorce his wife. The only question was which were the legitimate terms of such a divorce. Can you divorce for any cause at all? Or must immorality be involved before a divorce can take place? Let's look at the answer of Jesus.

And He answered and said, “Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6).

Jesus did not choose between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Instead He turned to a higher authority. He turned to the Bible. He quoted Genesis 2:24. This verse says that marriage involves two people becoming “one flesh.”

Do you see what Jesus is saying? He says that there is no place for divorce within God's pattern for marriage. He does not say that it is okay to divorce for any reason and He does not say that it is okay to divorce for immoral impurity. He simply says that there should be no divorce.

Marriage is two people becoming one. You cannot divide one. It is an indivisible number. You can only cut it up in pieces and thereby cause great harm.

If I walk up to you and say, “I'm going to cut you in half and make you into two people,” what would be your reaction? You would be horrified! And so also, you ought to be horrified by the very idea of divorce.

The Pharisees understood what Jesus was saying. They understood He was saying that divorce is not good for any reasons. They understood Him to be declaring that marriage is permanent.

They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to

give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?"
(Matthew 19:7).

Do you see the rebuttal of the Pharisees? If it is true that marriage is supposed to be permanent, then why did Moses tell people to get divorced?

The Pharisees had missed one major point. It is that Moses did not tell people to get divorced. The question of the Pharisees was a loaded question. It was like asking someone, "Do you still beat your wife?" They asked, "Why did Moses command people to be divorced?" But Moses did not command divorce. He did not advocate divorce. Instead he regulated remarriage after a divorce had taken place. He said, "If a divorce takes place and a remarriage follows, the original couple are never permitted to marry each other again. Jesus points this out in verses 8-9.

He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:8-9).

Jesus says that Moses allowed for divorce because of the hardness of men's hearts. When, because of such hardness, there is immorality, then Moses permitted a divorce to take place. Outside of such a case, there was to be no divorce.

As Paul writes his first epistle to the Corinthians, a number of years have passed since Jesus had that conversation with the Pharisees. Churches have been planted throughout the Roman Empire and Christianity has come to Corinth.

Within this new church are people from all sorts of social and moral backgrounds. There are Greeks who have previously worshiped at the Temple of Aphrodite atop the Acrocorinth. There are Jews who believed that it was alright to divorce one's wife at the drop of a hat. There are married people who are having problems and who are looking for a way out. There are those who are now Christians yet who are still married to pagans who aren't sure what they ought to do in this mixed marriage. Paul writes to set the record straight on the issue of marriage and divorce.

CASE #1 - TWO MARRIED BELIEVERS

But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹ (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

The first case with which Paul deals is that of two believers who are married and who are not getting along. This tells me something about Christians. It tells me that being a Christian is no guarantee that you won't have problems. Christians have problems just like anyone else. We do harm to one another when we pretend that this isn't so.

The church ought not to turn its back on the reality of marital problems. Rather the church ought to be a place of healing that can put broken people and broken marriages back together again.

Paul has some very real things to say about some very real people. He gives some very specific instructions:

1. Instructions from the Lord: *But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord (7:10).*

Paul does not have to give the instructions any new teachings about divorce. The Lord Jesus has already said all that needs be said on this subject. That teaching continues to stand firm. It is the simple statement that there is to be no divorce.

2. Commanded to Stay: *But to the married I give instructions... that the wife should not leave her husband (7:10).*

This is very clear. The wife is told that she is not to leave her husband. The word "leave" (χωρίζω) is the same word that Jesus used when He said, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man **separate**" (Matthew 19:6). This is a reference to divorce.

3. Commanded to Remain Unmarried: *But if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband (7:11).*

Paul realizes that divorce might be unavoidable for a Christian. We

are fallen people who live in a fallen world. This does not change just because we are Christians. There are instances in which a Christian might be married to another Christian and still be forced into a divorce. In such an instance, Paul has one command. It is that there be no remarriage unless it is a reunion of the broken marriage.

Do you see the principle? It is one of restoration. It is that the Christian woman is to do all in her power to rebuild the broken marriage. To this end, she is to do one of two things:

- ♦ Remain unmarried.
- ♦ Be reconciled to her husband.

Does that sound harsh? Does that sound as though Paul is being unreasonable to women? He isn't. To the husband of a Christian marriage, Paul has an even stricter injunction.

4. A Command to Husbands: *And that the husband should not send his wife away (7:11).*

The Christian husband is told in no uncertain terms, "Don't divorce your wife!" This flew in the teeth of all common practice. Secular society told people, "You don't need to stay married to your wife if you are incompatible. You owe it to yourself to find someone with whom you can be happy." Both Jews and Romans made a regular practice of divorce.

This tells me something about Biblical morality. We are to be unaffected by the moral standards of the world. What was true in Paul's day is also true today. Divorce is still as wrong today as it was then.

CASE #2 - MARRIAGE TO A SATISFIED UNBELIEVER

But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. ¹³ And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her

not send her husband away. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. (1 Corinthians 7:12-14).

The second case with which Paul deals is that of a mixed marriage. One of the partners is a believer and the other is not. The Bible warns against Christians marrying non-Christians.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (1 Corinthians 6:14-15).

We are not to marry unbelievers because we have nothing in common with them. We operate on a different frame of reference. It is unseemly that we should become one with someone who does not share our identity in Christ. However, there were those in Corinth who were already married to an unbeliever when they came to Christ.

A man goes to the marketplace and meets a Jew named Aquilla who shares with him the message that Jesus died and rose again from the dead. He hears the gospel and he believes its message. He comes home all excited and tells his wife of what he has done. She listens patiently and then replies that she isn't interested in fairytales.

What is to be his reaction? He is joined in marriage to an unbeliever. He is a child of God and he is united with one who is a child of Satan. Should he seek a divorce? He knows that Jesus spoke against divorce, but Jesus never dealt with the subject of a mixed marriage like his. Certainly these are different circumstances.

Back in Old Testament times, Ezra had commanded those who had married pagan wives to divorce those wives and abandon the children by those marriages (Ezra 10). Are believers today called to follow that same example?

1. A Command from Paul: *But to the rest I say, not the Lord (7:12).*

Some commentators have tried to take this to mean that Paul is now giving his own opinions instead of speaking to God's word. This is not the case. He makes the point that this is an addition to the teaching of Jesus. Jesus did not deal with the situation of the believer who is married to an unbeliever. Paul has already cited the teachings of Jesus and now he says, "Here is something that Jesus didn't cover, so I am giving you some further instructions."

Paul cannot quote the words of Jesus in dealing with this issue because Jesus had never given any teaching on this issue. Thus Paul gives new instructions that had not formerly been presented.

2. A Command to Remain: *If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. 13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away (7:12-13).*

To the man who has a wife who is an unbeliever and yet who desires to continue living with her husband, Paul's command is, "Do not seek to be divorced." What is true for the Christian man is also true for the Christian woman. The principle is clear. The Christian is not to initiate a divorce. This does not mean that there can never be a legitimate reason for a Christian to seek a divorce, but this ought not to be normative and such cases where this does take place ought to be for extreme situations.

3. Reason for the Command: *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband (7:14).*

Being a Christian who is married to an unbeliever is rough. But it need not make that Christian defiled. Quite to the contrary, the very opposite ought to be true. The unbelieving partner is sanctified by this union to a believer.

Does this mean that you can be saved by being married to a Christian? No. But it does mean that God has set apart the family of a Christian for some special blessings. This is not a new teaching. God has often blessed unbelievers because of their association with believers.

- ♦ The case of Joseph in the land of Egypt illustrates this point. Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar. As a result of this union, we read that *the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph* (Genesis 39:5).
- ♦ The same thing is seen in the relationship of Jacob with his uncle Laban. After Jacob had worked for Laban for 14 years, Laban bore witness, saying, "*The Lord has blessed me on your account*" (Genesis 30:25).
- ♦ God offered to reprieve the destruction of the wicked city of Sodom if there were only ten righteous people in the city. The presence of ten of God's people within the city would have saved it from destruction (Genesis 18:32).

In the same way, the presence of a believer within a marriage is able to bring God's blessings upon that union.

4. The Effect upon Children: *For otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy* (7:14).

A child is not saved just because he has a Christian parent. But he is set apart for some special blessings. He is set apart for prayer. He is set apart to witness a Christian life up close. He is set apart to hear the message of the gospel.

CASE #3 - MARRIAGE TO AN UNBELIEVER WHO WISHES TO DIVORCE

Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:15-16).

The third case with which Paul deals is also that of a mixed marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. This is the case in which the unbelieving partner initiates the divorce proceedings.

Case #1	Case #2	Case #3
Two married believers	A believer who is married to an unbeliever	
	The unbeliever remains	The unbeliever leaves
Stay Married!	Stay Married!	Allow them to leave!

1. The Principle of Peace: *Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace (7:15).*

I have seen situations where a person comes to Christ and the unbelieving partner is so antagonistic toward this conversion that he seeks a divorce. In such a case, the Christian is instructed not to fight it. The principle is that *God has called us to peace*. If we can peaceably live with that unbelieving partner, then we are to do so. But if that unbelieving partner wants to bail out of the marriage, we are to let him do so and we are not to fight him in his quest for a divorce.

2. The Principle of Freedom: *The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases (7:15).*

In such a case where the unbelieving partner has initiated the divorce, the believer is not under bondage to the marriage vows that were taken. I take this to mean that he or she is now free to remarry. If this were not the case, then it seems that Paul would have repeated his injunction that “if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband” (7:11).

Situation	Her desire	Action	Result
When a Christian has an unbelieving wife	She wants to go	Let her go	He is not bound
	She wants to stay	Let her stay	He is bound

3. The Possibility of Conversion: *For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O*

husband, whether you will save your wife? (7:16).

The Christian who has an unbelieving spouse who wants out of the marriage might be tempted to argue, “If I permit this divorce, then who will be there to witness to my partner and bring him to the Lord?” Such a question is valid, especially if the unbelieving spouse is inclined to be positive toward the situation.

On the other hand, this is not a reason to attempt to force an unbelieving partner to remain in a marriage for which they have no desire to continue. In such a case, that spouse’s evangelism and conversion might be out of your hands. It is now in God’s hands. It always way, whether you realized it or not.

These have been difficult teachings. It is one thing to say that marriage is to be permanent, but sometimes it is another thing to live up to such a standard when you are “in the trenches.” The world certainly does not live up to such stringent standards. But we are called to be different. We are to be like Jesus Christ. This includes the honoring of God’s institution of marriage.

CALLED TO REMAIN

1 Corinthians 7:17-28

Once upon a time there was a farmer. He was a poor man, struggling to work out a meager existence for himself and his family in the small field behind the old wooden shack in which they lived.

One day the farmer heard a story of a fabulous diamond. It was said that this diamond was the most valuable gem in the world. The farmer thought to himself that if only he could find this diamond, all of his troubles would be over. He left his farm and his family and set out in search of this treasure.

He searched high and low, traveling through many countries in search of the gem that could so change his lot in life. Years passed and his health deteriorated until, at last, he was forced to give up his quest. He returned home to his farm and his family in dejection.

A few days later, he was plowing in his field and the plow overturned a glittering rock. It was the fabled gem, the object of his search. He realized with a start that the treasure for which he had spent his life searching had been his possession all along.

We are often like that man. We look about us and we decide that our lot in life is too small. The swells of ambition roll over us and we set out to change our life. We climb the ladder of our imagined success only to find that it is leaning against the wrong wall.

THE PRINCIPLE STATED

Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And thus I direct in all the churches. (1 Corinthians 7:17).

Paul's principle is that the believer is to stay within the circumstances in

which he finds himself. If you are going to understand this principle, you have to first understand the basis upon which the principle is founded. It is founded upon the sovereignty of God.

1. The Basis of the Principle: *Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one (7:17).*

There is a great truth here that you can easily miss if you do not look closely. It is that whatever circumstances you find yourself in have been assigned by God.

This is a tremendous truth. God has planned everything that has ever come into your life. When you stop at a red light, it was a part of the plan of God and was decided before the foundation of the world. When your alarm clock fails to ring in the morning to that you are late for work, it was ordained by God. Nothing comes into your life that has not first passed across the desk of the Architect of the universe.

This is a great source of comfort. God isn't going to be taken by surprise by anything that comes along. He will never say, "I had some real nice blessings set aside for you, but something unexpected came up and now it is all ruined." When He says that He causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose, you can know that it is true. Because God has planned all things, He has also planned what the circumstances would be when you were saved. If you are single, it is because He planned it that way. If you are married, it is because He designed you to be married. Whatever are your circumstances, they were planned and designed by God.

Therefore it is okay to stay in the circumstances in which you were called. God designed those circumstances and He planned when you would be called. These things did not happen by chance. They were arranged by God. They came to pass according to His timetable.

2. The Principle in Action: *Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk (7:17).*

This seems to be clear enough. You are to remain in the condition in which you were saved.

This brings up a question. Does this mean that you should never allow your circumstances to change once you have become a Christian? If you are single when you are saved, do you have to stay single for the rest of your life? If you are a slave when you are saved, do you have to remain a slave as long as you live? If you work for a particular company when you first trust in Christ, do you have to remain with that company until retire? Is it against God's will for you to ever quit a job?

I do not think so. Instead, let me suggest that Paul is teaching that being a Christian should not make you immediately go out and change your social status. If you are single and you become a Christian, you do not have to run right out and get married. If you are a slave when you are saved, you do not have to try to escape from your slavery in order to begin serving Christ. If you work for a particular company when you first trust in Jesus Christ, you need not quit that job and go to work for a Christian in order to be more spiritual.

It is possible to be a Christian within any social strata. You do not have to be poor to be a Christian. You do not have to be rich to be a Christian. You do not have to be single or married, free or a slave to be a Christian. Having stated the principle, Paul will go on to apply it to three different areas of social life.

- ♦ The Principle related to Circumcision (7:18-20).
- ♦ The Principle related to Slavery (7:21-24).
- ♦ The Principle related to Marriage (7:25-28).

Paul begins with the principle as it relates to the two most basic divisions within the church, that of Jews and Gentiles.

THE PRINCIPLE RELATED TO CIRCUMCISION

Was any man called already circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters

is the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. (1 Corinthians 7:18-20).

The earliest doctrinal conflicts within the church were those that related to Jews and to Gentiles. When a Gentile turned to Christ in the days before Jesus, he was required to undergo the rite of circumcision. The foreskin of the man's penis was surgically removed in a painful operation.

This was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was the covenant that God made with Abraham when He promised him a nation and a people. The sign of the covenant pointed to the people that would spring from Abraham's descendants.

Now the question arises. Is a Gentile required to undergo this rite of circumcision and become Jewish and observe all of the Jewish rituals in order to become a Christian? Or was a Jew who came to Christ to give up all of his tradition and abandon the Temple and the sacrifices and the Old Testament Scriptures? Paul answers in the negative.

1. The Practice for Jews: *Was any man called already circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised (7:18).*

Here is Paul's principle. If a Jewish man comes to Christ, he is not to try to obliterate his Judaism. He can be both Jewish and Christian. The two are compatible. This is why we are able to read of Paul coming to Jerusalem and offering a sacrifice at the Temple. He was able to live as a Jew when He was ministering to Jews.

2. The Practice for Gentiles: *Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised (7:18).*

The reverse is also true. A Gentile who comes to Christ should not feel as though he must convert to Judaism and undergo the ritual of circumcision in order to be a real Christian.

3. The Principle behind the Practice: *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.*

The Jewish rite of circumcision is not spiritually significant. It does

not make you more spiritual to be circumcised. It does not make you less spiritual to be circumcised. It is not good or bad. It is indifferent. It is nothing.

What does matter is the principle behind the practice and the reality behind the ritual. This is not a new concept. Even in the Old Testament, the Lord told the prophets that He was much more interested in what went on inside a man than what his body looked like.

*Circumcise yourselves to the LORD
And remove the foreskins of your heart,
Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,
Lest My wrath go forth like fire
And burn with none to quench it,
Because of the evil of your deeds. (Jeremiah 4:4).*

God called people to have a circumcision that was internal. He called them to cut around their hearts -- to turn to Him in repentance. This is the same truth of which Paul spoke in his epistle to the Romans.

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly;
neither is circumcision that which is outward in the
flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and
circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the
Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from
men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29).*

Paul gives a lesson on what it really means to be Jewish. Being a Jew does not mean having a big nose. It does not mean having a surgical operation. It involves something on the inside. Being one of God's chosen people involves an inner operation by the Spirit of God. It involves a heart transplant as God takes away your heart of stone and replaces it with a pure heart. It involves a new birth by which you enter the family of God.

Now you are a Christian. Were you brought up in the tradition of Judaism? Did you observe the Passover each year? Did you celebrate the Feast of Hanukkah? Did you fast on Yom Kippur? Did you remember the Lord each Sabbath? You need not stop. These celebrations will now take on a much greater meaning for you, for

they are celebrations of the Messiah.

THE PRINCIPLE RELATED TO SLAVERY

21 *Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.* 22 *For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.* 23 *You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.*

24 *Brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he was called. (1 Corinthians 7:21-24).*

There was no more degrading social position within the ancient world than to be a slave. A slave had no rights at all. His entire life was in the hands of his master. He could legally be bought or sold at will. He could be beaten and he could be killed. He was considered to be a piece of property like a cow or a chariot or a sword.

What was to be the attitude of a slave if he became a Christian? How could he serve the Lord if he was enslaved to a pagan idol-worshiper?

1. A Freedom of Concern: *Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that (7:21)*

If you are a Christian and a slave, you are not to be concerned that you do not have your freedom. It is not a matter of great concern.

This does not mean that, if you are given your liberty, you are not allowed to take the opportunity to be free. If you are able to be free, then be free. But if you are not able to be free, do not let your lack of freedom bother you.

How is it possible for anyone to have such an attitude? It is only by realizing that God is in control. If I am a slave, then it is because the God who loves me and who gave Himself for me decided that I should be a slave. If I am in prison, then it is because Jesus wants me to be there and it is for my best and for His glory. If I am in the midst of a harsh situation, it is because God has designed that situation to

bring glory to His name through my circumstances.

2. A Freedom in Christ: *For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave (7:22).*

Being a slave or not being a slave is of no consequence in God's eyes. A slave who is a Christian is really more free than the mightiest emperor of Rome.

The Christian has been set free from the tremendous bondage of sin and of death. He is as free as a man can be. He will never die. On the other hand, the free man who is a Christian is a slave of the Almighty God. To be a Christian means that you have been redeemed. You have been purchased from the slave market of sin.

3. A Freeing Purchase: *You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men (7:23).*

When you were saved, God bought you. You stood on a slave block and were auctioned off to the highest bidder. God put in the highest bid. He bid the highest possible price. The purchase price was the blood of Jesus Christ. He paid for you with His life. His life was given for your life. Now you are God's special possession. You are bound to Him with cords that cannot be broken.

For this reason, you ought not to enter into slavery. If it is possible, you ought to try to remain free to serve your Lord and Master. If you are free, then remain free and do not be enslaved. And if you are a slave, then remain content in your slavery unless the opportunity comes to be released.

THE PRINCIPLE RELATED TO MARRIAGE

²⁵ *Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.*

²⁷ *Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released.*

Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. (1 Corinthians 7:25-28).

This same principle of remaining content within your present situation also applies to the area of marriage. Paul began this chapter by speaking of the issue of marriage and now he has come full circle.

If you are single, then you need to realize that God has ordained for you to be single at this time of your life. It is a part of His plan for you. If you are married, then God wants you to stay married and you need to see that marriage as having been designed by God for His glory and for your good.

1. The Silence of Jesus: *Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy (7:25).*

Paul has already quoted the words of Jesus as directed toward those who are married. Jesus had been very clear in teaching that married people are to stay married. But for what Paul has to say now, he will not quote Jesus. Jesus did not give any commands to single people as to whether or not they should marry. He did not tell everyone to marry and He did not tell everyone to remain single. Neither will Paul. What he will do is to apply the principle of remaining to the area of marriage.

2. The Present Distress: *I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is (7:26).*

Paul applies the principle of remaining to the area of marriage. It is good to remain in your present status.

Paul has made it very clear that this is not a command that means all single people must remain single. What Paul is saying is that being single is a good option.

Why is it good to remain single? Paul is going to give several reasons throughout the rest of this chapter, but for the moment he will center only upon one. It is good for a believer to remain single because of *the present distress*.

To what does this refer? Paul lived in a day when Christians were under the gun. He had been beaten and stoned and arrested and imprisoned for the faith. Others had already been put to death for proclaiming the name of Jesus. In a time of distress like this, a marriage can be a marked hindrance. It is one thing to face this kind of persecution as one who is single. It is quite another thing to face such persecution when you also have a wife and children for whom to care.

Many Christians would object, “That doesn’t apply to my situation today because we don’t live in a time when Christians are being persecuted.” That is not true. Christians are being persecuted today. Christians have been persecuted in every age. Jesus said that His people will always suffer persecution.

It is true that there is little or no persecution in the United States today, but this could easily change in the future. There may come a time when this principle will have profound implications.

3. The Principle of Remaining: *Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife (7:27).*

Here is the principle of remaining. We are called to remain within the situation in which we find ourselves.

If you are not happy being married, then you will not be happy being single. If you are not happy being single, then you will not be happy being married; you will merely make someone else unhappy with you. Happiness does not depend upon being married or being single. True happiness depends upon your relationship with Jesus Christ.

4. The Acceptability of Marriage: *But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned (7:28).*

Marriage may be difficult at times, but it is not wrong. It may have its own unique set of hardships, but it is not bad.

Here is the principle. Being single is not bad. Being married is not bad. Both are used by the Lord for His people. But single people often lose sight of the difficulties of marriage.

5. The Sparing of Trouble: *Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you (7:28).*

The single person will never experience marital problems. The single person will never suffer the pain of a divorce. The single person will never have to endure the death of a spouse. The single person will never have to watch a mate being persecuted for the faith.

It is hard enough to be a Christian by yourself, but it can become much more difficult when conflict is added to the picture. The union of two sinners in marriage can be like tying two porcupines together in close quarters. They keep getting pricked by the other partner's sinfulness. That is not to say that marriage means trouble with a capital "T." Marriage can be a wonderful experience. But the single person needs to be aware that marriage is not a cure to all unhappiness.

TO BE OF SINGLE MIND

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

In recent years a lot of books have been written on the subject of marriage; how to liven up your marriage, how to stay married, how to raise your children, how to be a spiritual leader in your family. These are all very good, but they often overlook another major option that believers have — to remain single.

In New Testament times, it was considered something of an oddity for a man or a woman to remain single. Among the Jews, a man who did not marry and raise children was thought to be in violation of the commandment of God to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28).

Singleness is no less an issue today. The church sometimes has a tendency to look with suspicion upon a man who is not married, as though something were wrong with him for having such a lifestyle.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul deals with this issue that is as relevant to us as it was to those first century Christians.

SINGLENESS IS GOOD

²⁵ *Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.*

²⁷ *Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. (1 Corinthians 7:25-28).*

If you are single, then you need to realize that being single has its good points. It can be very good to be single. Speaking from the point of view of one who has been married for a very long time, I suppose that I should not be proclaiming this principle with such vigor. Nevertheless, it is true that being single has some definite advantages. Paul will list six in this passage. Being single is good...

- ♦ Because of the present distress (7:26-27).
- ♦ Because of the trouble of this life (7:28).
- ♦ Because of the temporary nature of this age (7:29-31).
- ♦ Because of undivided devotion (7:32-35).
- ♦ Because it does not have to be permanent (7:36-38).
- ♦ Because marriage is permanent (7:39-40).

Are you single and straining at the bit, wishing more than anything else to be married? Paul has some principles that you need to hear.

He begins by admitting that, as to this subject, he has *no command of the Lord* (7:25). Paul has already quoted the words of Jesus directed toward those who are married. But for what he has to say now, he will not quote Jesus. Jesus did not give any commands directed specifically to single people as to whether or not they should marry. He did not tell everyone to marry and He did not tell everyone to remain single. Neither will Paul. But he will give us some principles to make us aware of the advantages of being single.

SINGLENES IS GOOD BECAUSE OF THE PRESENT DISTRESS

I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. (1 Corinthians 7:26-27).

What is this “present distress” to which Paul refers? Paul lived in a day when Christians were under persecution. He had been beaten and stoned and arrested for the faith. Others had been put to death and imprisoned for proclaiming the name of Jesus. In a time of distress like this, a marriage can

be a marked hindrance. It is one thing to face this kind of persecution as one who is single. It is quite another thing to face such persecution when you are caring for a wife and children.

Because of the hardships of persecution, Paul advised the Corinthian believers not to rush into marriage. He called them to remain within the situation in which they found themselves.

If you are married, then there is a message for you. It is that you stay married. Paul has already shown that marriage is to be permanent. To tear apart what God has joined together is wrong.

If you are single, then there is also a message for you. Be content in staying single. Don't go rushing into a marriage. That does not mean that marriage is sinful or that you should never get married. Paul anticipates the "what if" question that such a message implies.

SINGLENESS IS GOOD BECAUSE OF THE TROUBLE OF THIS LIFE

But if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. (1 Corinthians 7:28).

Marriage is not wrong, but it can be difficult. It is not bad, but it has its own unique set of hardships. Here is the principle. Being single is not bad. Being married is not bad. Both are used by the Lord for His people. But single people often lose sight of the difficulties of marriage. They lose sight of what Paul calls the *trouble in this life*.

There is a blessing here for the single believer. The single believer will never experience marital problems or the pain of a divorce or the death of a spouse. The single person does not have to take the feelings and welfare of a spouse into consideration in making every life decision, The single person is able to have a single-minded focus on all sorts of things.

SINGLENESS IS GOOD BECAUSE OF THE

TEMPORARY NATURE OF THIS AGE

But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; ³⁰ and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; ³¹ and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

We tend to have a very short view of life. We tend to be more interested in the immediate than in the future.

The story is told of a statesman who was engaged in a conversation with a young college student about his future. “What are your plans for the future?” asked the statesman. “I plan to continue in college until I graduate with a degree in law.”

“What then?”

“Then I shall seek employment with a legal firm and gain some practical experience.” The statesman asked again, “What then?”

“Then I shall open up my own law office with several other partners.”

“What then?”

“Then I will marry and raise a family.”

“What then?”

“Then I will retire and live out the rest of my life in a peaceful country cottage.”

“What then?”

“Well, I suppose that I will die.”

“What then?” The young man paused for a moment and then said, “I don’t know. I haven’t really thought about it.” To which the statesman replied, “Young man, you have not planned very well for your future.”

We tend to take only the short term approach to life. As we go through our busy day, we rarely stop and ask ourselves, “What are the long term effects of the way I am spending my day? How will this day affect eternity?” That is the point Paul makes here.

1. A Shortened Time: *But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened (7:29).*

Christians ought to have a longer view of life. We ought to be living with eternity in mind. We have the basis for a higher perspective. When you become aware of eternity, then this present time that you have on earth is shortened in perspective.

*Behold, Thou hast made my days as handbreadths,
And my lifetime as nothing in Thy sight,
Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah.
(Psalm 39:5).*

When you look at life from God's perspective, it becomes very short. You are here today and you are gone tomorrow. When you come to realize this truth, you will look at the details of life differently. Paul points out five areas where our perspective is changed.

- ♦ The area of marriage: *From now on those who have wives should be as though they had none (7:29).*
- ♦ The area of sorrow: *Those who weep, as though they did not weep (7:30).*
- ♦ The area of rejoicing: *Those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice (7:30).*
- ♦ The area of buying and selling: *Those who buy, as though they did not possess (7:30).*
- ♦ The area of secular concerns: *Those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it (7:31).*

Each of these areas involves a different aspect of living. They are things that are done by both Christians as well as by non-Christians. Yet there is both a Christian as well as a non-Christian view to these things. Each has its own unique perspective.

The believer gets married just like the unbeliever gets married. But they each view marriage differently, even if they both believe that marriage is "till death do us part." Death is the culmination point for the unbeliever. It is for him the time when everything will stop. But for the Christian, death is the starting point. He sees death as the first step to eternity.

This means the details of life are relatively unimportant. Whether you get married or do not get married doesn't really matter in the long run. The time you spend in sorrow or in rejoicing is insignificant when compared to eternity. What you bought or sold or the things you accomplished in this life will not be nearly so important as where you spend eternity.

2. A Temporary Form: *For the form of this world is passing away (7:31).*

This world is temporal. It is passing, never to return. It is a tiny island in the vast sea of God's eternity. The details of the world with which we are so preoccupied are relatively unimportant.

SINGLENESS IS GOOD BECAUSE OF THE ISSUE OF UNDIVIDED DEVOTION

But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; 33 but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. 35 And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

The one who is married is no longer free from responsibility. He now has a family about which to think. In everything he does, he must think ahead to how it will affect his family.

1. A Divided Concern: *One who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided (7:33-34).*

The person who is single really has only one person to think about

when it comes to making decisions.

- ♦ In which college will I enroll?
- ♦ What kind of job will I seek?
- ♦ What church will I attend?
- ♦ Where will I live?

These and many other decisions are vastly compounded when you bring an entire family into the equation.

2. An Undistracted Devotion: *And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord (7:35).*

The reason Paul encourages believers to remain single is not so that they can enjoy themselves in the Corinthian single scene or so that they can date around with a lot of different people. Neither is it so that they can avoid the responsibility of marriage.

The reason Paul gives for remaining single is to *secure undistracted devotion to the Lord*. This is what Christianity is all about. God wants us to be in the devotion business. He wants complete devotion from His people. This isn't just once a week on Sunday. You likely give more devotion than that to your favorite television show.

God wants devotion. This should temper any decision I make. It should determine how I spend my time. It should affect my personal relationships with others. It should affect my entire life.

Being single does not guarantee complete devotion to the Lord. And being married does not automatically mean that you cannot be devoted to God. But the single believer should recognize that marriage can be a hindrance to that all-out devotion.

SINGLENES IS GOOD BECAUSE IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE PERMANENT

36

But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she should be of full age, and

if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.

37 *But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well.*

38 *So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. (1 Corinthians 7:36-38).*

In the ancient world, parents had a much more active role in deciding who their children would marry, especially in the case of their daughters. For this reason, Paul addresses some of his remarks to the fathers of single women.

There were those fathers who, for reasons previously stated, had dedicated their daughters to a single life and who had determined that a marriage would not be arranged for them but that they would be permitted to remain single.

Imagine the situation. You are the father of a Christian family. Your young daughter, in dedicating her life to the service of the Lord, indicates her desire to remain single so that she can give herself fully to the Lord's work. Because of this desire, you determine not to arrange a marriage on her behalf, but to allow her to remain single.

Several years come and go and then one day a young Christian man comes to your home. He has seen your daughter in church and he wishes to marry her. At the same time, you learn that she has had a change of heart and that she also wishes to marry him.

What are you to do? Should you force her to remain single? Should you allow her to marry? Paul states that either option is open to you. You can allow her to enter into marriage or you can approve her continuing in a single lifestyle.

Do you see the implications of this? It is that being single does not have to be permanent. You can decide to remain single and then you can decide to marry. Just because you first decided to remain single does not mean that you have closed the doors on your options. But that is not the case with marriage. Marriage is meant to be permanent. This brings us to our last point.

SINGLENESS IS GOOD BECAUSE MARRIAGE IS PERMANENT

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 7:39-40).

The last reason that Paul gives for remaining single is the permanence of marriage. Marriage is permanent. It closes the door on your options. As long as you are single, you have the choice to either remain single or to get married. But as soon as you marry, you no longer have the option to be single. It is like the sign on the old dirt road that read, "Choose your rut carefully; you'll be in it for the next 20 miles."

The disciples recognized this principle when they first heard the teaching of Jesus on the permanent character of marriage. Jesus had been speaking to the Pharisees about marriage and its permanent nature when He said:

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." ¹⁰ The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." (Matthew 19:9-10).

The disciples saw immediately the principle that Paul states here to the Corinthians. It is that if marriage is really permanent, then entering into marriage is a very serious decision. For this reason, I usually give a word of warning to those who are considering marriage. It is that you pause and take a cold, hard look at your decision. Write down all the reasons why you want to marry that person and then write down the reasons you should never marry him or her. If you do go ahead and marry, save the list. One of these days you might need it to remind yourself of some of the things you have forgotten.

To marry or not to marry? If it is a question that is troubling you, then I have a message for you. Wait. Enjoy being single. Work on your devotion to the Lord. At the proper time, He will guide you in the decisions you need to make.

WHEN IT'S WRONG TO DO RIGHT

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

The church at Corinth was a house divided. A number of schisms had split the church into shattered factions that were now at virtual war with one another. Instead of a spirit of love and unity, there was now jealousy and strife. One of the issues that brought about this division was the problem of eating meat that had been offered to idols.

The city of Corinth was a Greek city. The Greeks did not worship one God. They worshiped many gods. They had gods and goddesses for war, for love, for wisdom, for the sun and moon and stars, for storms, for the land and for the sea. They had a god or goddess for nearly everything.

Not only were the Greeks polytheistic in that they worshiped many gods, they were also polydemonistic, believing that evil spirits were all wound them as a regular threat. Perhaps in this one aspect they were not too far from the truth.

Many of the Greeks believed that one way in which a person could become demon possessed was through the food that he ate. According to this theory, a demon could latch onto the food and be ingested into the person resulting in a case of spiritual heartburn that was untouched by Alka-Seltzer. They thought that the only way the spirits could be removed from the food was for it to be sacrificed to a god. Therefore these sacrifices served two purposes:

- ♦ They incurred the favor of the gods.
- ♦ They guaranteed that all evil spirits had been removed from the food. If this sounds a bit foreign to you, take another look at the kosher hot dogs the next time you go shopping at your local supermarket.

There still stands today the ruins of a temple to Apollo adjoining to the agora, the central marketplace in the ruins of Corinth. The offerings that were

brought to this temple were divided into two parts.

The first part was burned on the altar as a sacrifice to Apollo. The rest of the meat was given to the priests of Apollo to eat. The priests could only eat a very small part of the great quantities of meat that were brought to the temple. So they made a practice of taking the surplus across the street to the marketplace and selling it there.

In addition to this, the temple had set up a rather high-class restaurant. The temple restaurant served this meat as a part of its regular menu. Because the meat had been provided for free, it could be sold at a low price. This meat was highly valued because it had been given the blessing of Apollo and was therefore guaranteed to be free of evil spirits.

This situation gave rise to several questions.

- ♦ Is it permissible for a Christian to eat this food that has been offered to idols? Do you need to check on the pedigree of any food that you might happen to buy in the pagan marketplace?
- ♦ What should you do if you are invited into the home of a Greek unbeliever and he is serving meat? Should you ask before you eat whether it came from the temple and thereby risk offending your host?
- ♦ Many of the social functions of the Greeks were held in the temple and were catered by the servants of the priests. What should you do if you are invited to a wedding of an unbelieving friend or relative? Should you not go at all? Or should you attend but not eat anything at the reception?
- ♦ What should be your attitude toward those believers who are offended at the very idea that you might eat this sort of food?

These were not new issues. The church at Jerusalem had already dealt with some of these situations and had written a letter to the Gentile churches in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia in which they asked them to abstain from things sacrificed to idols.

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: 29 that you

abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell. (Acts 15:28-29).

Just as the people of Israel had been instructed to come out and to be separate from the heathen nations of the earth, so also these Gentiles who had become Christians were also to come out from the world system in which they had lived and to be separate from the heathen religious practices.

As Christianity had come to Corinth, the believers in Corinth came to know and believe certain key principles:

- ♦ They had learned that there is no such thing as an idol (8:4). They had come to know and to understand that the images that are worshiped by men are nothing more than lifeless images.
- ♦ They had learned that good will not commend us to God (8:8). It does not make you more spiritual to eat angel food cake.

Having come to understand these basic truths, some of the Corinthians decided that it was no longer necessary to continue abstaining from the eating of meats that had been offered to idols.

This decision caused a real storm within the church. Suddenly the Jewish element was parting company with the Gentile element so that you had the Kosher meeting of the church in one house and the carnivorous crowd gathering to worship in another place.

Certain concerned Corinthians had written a letter to Paul asking several questions that were at issue within the church (7:1). This question of meats being offered to idols seems to have been one of those issues.

WE KNOW THAT WE ALL HAVE KNOWLEDGE

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. ² If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he

has not yet known as he ought to know; 3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3).

Paul begins his treatment of this issue, not with whether we should eat or not eat certain foods, but with our own attitudes concerning the knowledge that we have.

There were certain among the Corinthian church who prized knowledge and academics above all else. They could cross their T's and dot their I's precisely when it came to matters of doctrine. Yet they had a serious problem. It was one of attitude. It was reflected in what they did with that knowledge.

1. The Result of Knowledge: *Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies (8:1).*

These knowledgeable Corinthian believers had become puffed up and arrogant in their knowledge. They were mature in their knowledge, but they were not mature in their love.

Knowledge	⇒	Makes Arrogant
Love	⇒	Edifies

Knowledge by itself is not enough. Even knowledge of the facts of God's word is not enough. There must also be love. If love is not present, then something else will grow in its place -- arrogance.

This is the principle. There is something that is more important than knowledge. It is love. Loving is superior to knowing. Of course, real love cannot exist without a certain level of knowing. But knowing is tested by loving.

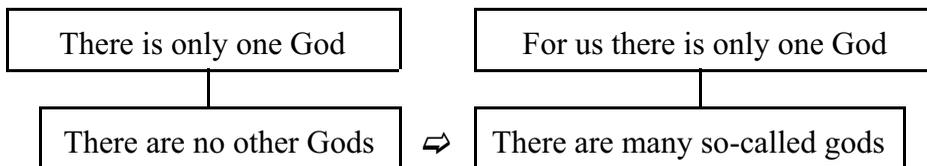
2. The Test of Knowledge

Here is the test of true knowledge. It is tested by our love for God. If we really know God and are known by God, then we will love Him. And if we truly love God, then we will also love those whom God loves.

WE KNOW THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN IDOL

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

Paul turns to the problem of eating of foods. He states his position on the subject. It is that idols are of no account. There is no such thing as an idol. This does not deny that there did exist graven images. Neither does it deny that they might be very real demonic forces at work in the world or even that they might not be impersonating the false gods of the Greeks. However, these are not really gods. There is only one God.



1. There is only One God: *There is no God but one (8:4).*

Although you might see a statue of Apollo and go into the temple of Apollo in Corinth, there is no such thing as Apollo. Though you might visit the temple of Aphrodite and see the priestess offer up a sacrifice to Aphrodite, there is no such person as Aphrodite.

There is but one God. He is identified in this verse. He is called “the Father.” This designation was foreign to the Greek mind. They believed in many gods. They never imagined that they could have this kind of relationship with God. They never thought of God as their father. Their gods were to be feared because they acted in a very non-fatherly way.

2. The One God is the Creator: *For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things (8:6).*

This was also foreign to Greek thought. The Greeks had a god for the sea and a god for the sky and a god for the sun and a god for the moon. They had never imagined a single God who created all things. Until they heard Paul's preaching of the gospel, He remained to them "the Unknown God."

3. There is One Lord Jesus Christ: *And one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him (8:6).*

This would have caught the eye of the Greeks. To the Greek mind, the title of "Lord" was one of deity. It refers to God. There is one Lord. He is Jesus Christ.

Notice that what Paul has done is to agree with those who stated that there is nothing specifically wrong with eating meat that has been offered to idols. There is no truth to the teaching that the idol has any spiritual or physical effect upon the meat. Therefore such meat can be eaten without harm.

This brings us to a real problem. Paul is directly contradicting the ordinance that had been set up by the Jerusalem church in Acts 15. On what basis can he do this?

I would like to suggest that the ordinance delivered in the Jerusalem letter reflected a temporary injunction during that transitional period when Gentiles were first being brought into what had previously been an exclusively Jewish church. There was no permanent moral foundation to the injunction not to eat meat offered to idols. It was given, not on the basis of a moral absolute, but on the basis of conscience.

The Gentile converts were to see in an outward form that they were making a complete break from their former manner of life.

Perhaps I can illustrate this from an incident in my own life. When I first committed my life to Christ, one of the things that marked that commitment was a decision to change the type and style of music with which I was involved. It happened to be rock music. That is not to say that rock music is inherently evil. A C-note in rock music is the same as a C-note in classical music or in the most heavenly hymn. I gave up rock music at that time, not because there is necessarily wrong with one style of music over another, but because of the associations that it had in my former manner of life.

By the same token, the eating of meat that has been through a pagan ritual is not in itself wrong because the ritual has no bearing on reality. Meat is still meat and its chemical makeup has not changed to turn it into something that is inherently sinful. But there is still a problem. The problem is that not all men have this knowledge and it causes some to stumble.

NOT ALL MEN HAVE THIS KNOWLEDGE

However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. (1 Corinthians 8:7-8).

There were both those among the Jews as well as those among the Greek Christians who had trouble divorcing the idol worship in the heathen temple from the sirloin steak that sat on the table before them. For those people to go and eat meat while thinking that it was wrong would be for them to commit sin.

There is a lesson here. Anytime you do something that you feel you should not be doing, you are in sin. You are saying in effect, “I think this is sinful and contrary to what God desires, but I am going to do it anyway.” In such a case, you are acting in open rebellion against God. It is not necessarily the act that is wrong, though there are some actions that are in themselves wrong, but it is also the attitude with which that action can accompany that can also be wrong.

There is a case in which it would be wrong for a believer to eat meat offered to idols. It is the case in which that believer thinks it is sinful. For him to do that which he feels to be sinful despite his misgivings is itself an act of overt sin. It is not that the action itself is necessarily sinful, but he is actively participating in what he assumes to be a wrong action.

There is also a second situation in which it would be wrong to eat meat offered to idols. This is the case in which it becomes a stumbling block to others. That is the situation to which Paul now speaks.

LIBERTY - A STUMBLING BLOCK TO THE WEAK

But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. ¹² And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble. (1 Corinthians 8:9-13).

Now we come to the question at hand. How can my eating meat in the temple cause my Christian brother to sin? How can my actions be a stumbling block to another? The answer is given in verses 10-12.

1. The Situation of Stumbling: *For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? (4:10).*

Here is the case of Mort the meat-eater going into the Apollo temple restaurant and ordering roast prime rib. He is doing it with a clear conscience because he knows that idols are nothing and meat is merely meat. But as he is partaking of his meal, who should pass by but Willie Weaker Brother. Willie is also a Christian, but he still has some major problems about the spiritual qualities of the temple meat and so he has determined to become a vegetarian.

Willie looks in and sees Mort getting started on the main course and says to himself, "I think that it is still morally wrong, but if Mort is going to eat that meat, then I will do it, too." He goes in and he uses the actions of Mort to sway his own actions, still believing them to be sinful. What he has done is to involve himself in that which he considers to be sinful. The result is that his Christian life is left a shambles.

2. The Ruining of the Weak: *For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died (8:11).*

The tragedy of allowing our actions to wreck havoc and ruin in the life of a weaker believer is made all the worse because this is one for whom Christ died.

There is a principle here. It is that there is no such thing as an insignificant believer. There are no unimportant people in God's family. If you are His, then you have great worth. You are highly valued. You were bought at the greatest possible expense. Your price tag was the life of the Son of God.

And yet, how often do we consider the less attractive believer with something less than honor, if not with downright scorn? There is a warning here. You are treading on God's most valued possessions. You are to handle other believers with the greatest of care. Jesus was so concerned about this problem of causing other believers to stumble that He gave the very strongest of warnings:

And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. (Mark 9:42).

To cause a baby believer to stumble and fall is serious business. It is not merely a sin against another believer. It is a sin against Christ Himself.

3. A Sin Against Christ: *By sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ (8:12).*

If you are guilty of not showing due concern over the spiritual life of another believer, then you are sinning against Christ since you are regarding the death of Christ on his behalf as being of no consequence. If the death of Christ was significant, then those who were purchased by that sacrificial death are also significant.

4. A Resolution to Refrain: *Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble (8:13).*

Here is the conclusion of the matter. Paul does not tell them to eat or not to eat; at least not yet. This will change when he comes to chapter 10. In fact, Paul does not now address the Corinthians directly or give any command to them. Instead he gives them a principle. He states this principle in the first person, describing how he will react in this situation. The principle is that I should limit my liberty so that it does not create a stumbling block for weaker Christians.

This brings us to a very practical question. How does this principle apply to the situations in which I find myself today? After all, no one in my culture has a problem with meats that have been offered to idols. Are there other problem areas to which this principle might be applied? I believe that there are.

Is it okay to play a game of poker? How about going into a pool hall to play a game of pool? Is it wrong to go into a bar and to order a beer? How should you dress when you go into church? Is it wrong to listen to certain types of music or to watch certain movies? Is it okay to go dancing at the local club?

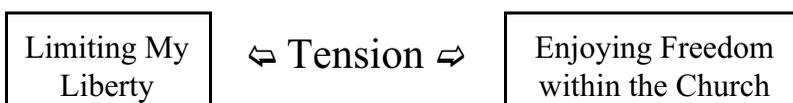
I believe that each of these can be classified as “grey areas,” that is, they are not necessarily wrong in themselves but I might consider avoiding them under certain circumstances because of a weaker brother.

Let’s suppose that Paula and I decide to go dancing at a local club. We have been married for over 35 years and there is nothing at all wrong with us dancing together. We are legal. Meanwhile another Christian happens to see us there and his first reaction is to laugh because we are not particularly good at dancing. But then he thinks to himself, “I don’t really think that it is okay for me to go to clubs and to be around that sort of element, but because John and Paula are here, I’m going to do it, too.” This Christian enters into something that he considers to be sinful and thus rebels in his heart against the Lord.

There is a two-edged warning here. On the one hand, I should take care against causing that weaker brother to stumble. But in my zeal to aid that weaker brother, I should also be careful not to destroy the liberty that we have in Christ Jesus. It is one thing to restrain myself

from eating meats that have been offered to idols; it is quite another thing to demand that everyone in the church also restrain themselves in the same manner. The first is a matter of exercising my love for another Christian. The second is putting Christians under bondage.

The church finds itself between two tensions. On the one hand of limiting individual liberties because of love and concern for the weaker brother; on the other hand being tempted to set as standards those things that should, at the most, be matters of conscience.



All too often, the church has gone to one extreme or the other, either allowing wrong actions in the name of liberty or else moving in the direction of legalism in the name of protecting the weaker brother.

For example, I know of a church that required all of its members to sign a covenant that stated that they would not go to movies. You could not be a member of that church and walk into a movie theater. I'm not advocating movie theaters. I know Christians who have made the decision not to go to movies and I respect that decision. But it is one thing to make that decision for yourself and even for your family, and it is another thing to demand that all Christians live by that personal standard.

When God has a moral standard, then I ought to hold up that moral standard for all to follow. But where an issue is a matter of liberty, then I need to walk very softly.

In summary, we need to point out that we don't become more spiritual merely by abstaining from certain things. There are a group of people in my town who don't smoke, don't drink, don't dance and who don't go to movies. In fact, they don't do much of anything. They are the residents of the local cemetery. The absence of activity does not equal spirituality. To be spiritual is to be in the midst of a vital and living relationship with the Holy Spirit. As we have already seen in this epistle, there are times when we are called to come out and be separate from certain things. But we should also take care not to make this a means of legalism.

THE RIGHTS OF A SPIRITUAL LEADER

1 Corinthians 9:1-14

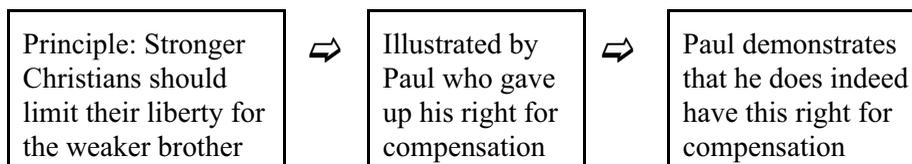
Beginning with chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians, Paul has been dealing with a problem situation. It was the problem of those who were eating meat that had been offered to idols.

When you went shopping in the marketplace at Corinth, you found yourself in close proximity to the heathen temples that stood alongside that marketplace. More often than not, the meat that was being sold in the marketplace has made its way there via the temple to Apollo or some other Greek god and had been stamped “kosher” with Apollo’s seal of approval.

Many of the Corinthians believers realized that this pagan ceremony did not affect the quality of the meat. They knew that eating angelfood cake doesn’t make you more spiritual and that eating “heathen hamburgers” doesn’t hurt you. They enjoyed their liberty in Christ and they freely ate of this food.

There were other Christians in Corinth who did not realize these basic truths. They had been indoctrinated into believing that the makeup of the food was actually changed by the pagan ceremony. They felt that to partake of such food would be to engage in idol worship. Paul presented the principle that sometimes it is better for the stronger Christian to limit his liberty rather than to cause his brother to stumble.

Now Paul turns to a personal illustration of this principle. The illustration will be taken from Paul’s own life. He is going to show how he has limited his own freedom and his own Christian liberty for the benefit of others. The liberty on which he will focus will be that of the spiritual leader who has the prerogative and the right to be compensated for his services. But before Paul can give the illustration, he must first establish the principle that a spiritual leader does have that right.



A lot of people seem to think that preachers and ministers ought to give up all their rights in order to become a preacher or a minister. They seem to think he ought to be poor and to drive an old car and to be on call for every minute of the day. His children are under constant inspection and his wife is expected to be the doormat of every angry housewife who comes along.

He is paid to be good and the rest of us are good for nothing. If something is to be done in the church, it is the preacher's job to do it. After all, that is his reason for being there.

This sort of thinking views the church as a theater, the pastor as an actor, and the congregation as the critics. In reality, the people are to be the actors while the pastor is holding the prompts and trying to get them to remember their forgotten lines.

The Corinthians were infected with this sort of thinking. They assumed that, if Paul was the servant of God, then he ought to be treated like a servant. They held to their own particular brand of doormat Christianity. They could walk all over others, but no one was permitted to offend them. It was okay for Paul to sacrifice his rights for their benefit, but don't let him suggest that they should ever do the same. It is for this reason that Paul presents a case for the rights of a spiritual leader.

THE STATUS OF A SPIRITUAL LEADER

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 9:1-2).

Paul is going to demonstrate the legitimacy of his spiritual leadership. He will do this by asking four questions. Each of these is a rhetorical question. The answer is not given because the answer is obvious.

1. *Am I not free? (9:1).*

The Corinthians had evidently been very quick to proclaim their own freedom in Christ, but they would not admit so easily that others were equally free. The fact that Paul is a spiritual leader does not mean that he does not have the spiritual freedoms that any other Christian enjoys.

We tend to lose sight of this principle. It is that spiritual leaders are people just like anyone else. In spite of the position they may hold, they are still real people with real problems and real needs. They are no different from anyone else. They are sinners who commit real sins and who have been forgiven and saved by the grace of God.

Paul is setting the stage for an issue that he will soon bring up. It is the issue of payment to spiritual leaders. The work of a free man demands wages. Not so with a slave. No one ever thought of the necessity of paying wages to a slave. A slave was merely an article of property and you did not have to pay him for his services. But when a free man worked for you, it was necessary to pay him wages. Paul is going to be establishing the principle that those who work in the ministry ought to be paid for their labors.

2. *Am I not an apostle? (9:1).*

There may have been those in Corinth who had suggested that Paul was only a “second-rate” apostle, that his leadership could be ignored because he was not one of the original Twelve.

Spiritual leaders today sometimes come under similar attacks. It might be an attack that is based on the lack of a degree from an accredited Bible College or Seminary. Or it might be an attack against the size of one’s church or ministry. Or it might be directed against one’s style of preaching.

3. *Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? (9:1).*

Paul was an apostle and it did not matter who did not agree because his apostleship was not from man. It was not from an accredited seminary. It was from God.

Jesus personally called Paul on the Damascus road. You can't get more personal than that. Paul was knocked to the ground by Jesus who then set him apart as a man with a mission. That mission was fulfilled whenever Paul preached the gospel. It was fulfilled when he came to Corinth.

4. *Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord (9:1b-2).*

God had sent Paul to the Corinthians. They had received his message as being a message that came from God. If anyone should have viewed Paul as an apostle sent from God, it should have been the Corinthians who had come to Christ as a direct result of Paul's preaching. Yet it was these same people who directed the most opposition to Paul and to his ministry.

THE QUESTION OF RIGHTS

My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? (1 Corinthians 9:3-6).

Paul comes to the immediate issue at hand. Does he have the rights of any other spiritual leader? Or has he become some sort of second class Christian just because he has limited his liberty for the sake of the Corinthians? He points out his liberty in three areas:

- ♦ The right to eat and drink.
 - ♦ The right to be accompanied by a wife.
 - ♦ The right to refrain from working.
1. The Right to Eat and Drink: *Do we not have a right to eat and drink? (9:4).*

The Corinthians had been arguing that they had the right to eat and

drink whatever they desired. They worked for their living and they earned the money and it was their right to spend it to feed themselves. If some weaker brother happened to stumble over their eating habits, it was just his tough luck.

Paul retorts that he has the same rights that they do. He is a Christian just as they are Christians. He is laboring just as they are laboring. He has the right to enjoy the material fruits of his labors.

2. The Right to Be Accompanied by a Wife: *Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? (9:5).*

Do you see what Paul is saying? He is saying that Christian leaders are permitted to be married. He also implies that the financial support given to a spiritual leader ought to be enough to support him and his family. I would suggest that this means the wife of a preacher ought not to have to work to support her husband in ministry.

Paul does not stop there. He points out that the other apostles made a regular use of these rights. They were married and their wives were supported with them by the work of their husbands.

There is a religious denomination today that teaching that those who labor in ministry are not permitted to marry. This is one of the least of their problems, but we should still note that Paul repudiates such a position regarding the mandatory celibacy of the clergy. They not only had the right to marry, but Paul lists examples of where they enjoyed this right within the context of the early church.

Cephas and the Brothers of the Lord and the rest of the Apostles	Myself and Barnabas
They take along a believing wife	They have chosen not to do so
They are supported by the work of the ministry	They have chosen not to take money from the church at Corinth

Paul's personal restriction of his own liberty is by no means to be considered as a justification of a mandatory celibacy of the clergy. His entire point is that he has the right to take along a believing wife.

THE PRINCIPLE OF DESERVED COMPENSATION

Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? (1 Corinthians 9:7).

Paul now asks three more questions in rapid succession. These three questions serve to set forth the principle upon which this chapter is based. It is the principle of deserved compensation. It is the principle that says the worker deserves to be compensated for his labors.

This is a principle that is fundamental to working. When you go to work, you expect to be paid for your labors. You expect to be compensated for the time and energy that you have extended. When you walk into a shopping center, you don't just pick up an item from the rack and walk out of the store without paying for it. You understand that the owners of the store want to be paid for that item.

There weren't any shopping centers in Corinth, so Paul gives three examples that were relevant to his day.

- ♦ The example of a soldier.
- ♦ The example of a farmer.
- ♦ The example of a shepherd.

In all three cases, the principle is the same. The worker expects to be rewarded from the fruit of his labors.

THE PRINCIPLE SEEN IN THE LAW

s I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?

9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. (1 Corinthians 9:8-10).

The Principle of Compensation that Paul teaches to the Corinthians is not a new teaching. It was seen all the way back in the Law of Moses. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 24:4 and then he applies it to this situation.

This tells me something about a proper understanding of the Old Testament. There are some people who want to tell you that the Old Testament has nothing of relevance to the believer today -- that it was written to the nation of Israel and that we ought not to pay any attention to it. But I want you to notice Paul's view of the Old Testament Scriptures. He quotes them to prove a principle that is true for Christians today. This means that the principles that were true in those days are just as true today. God doesn't change. He still tells His people how they ought to live.

Paul asks, *God is not concerned about oxen, is He?* This is another rhetorical question. The answer is obvious. God's main concern on planet earth is not oxen. His main concern is man. He did not send His Son to the earth to die for oxen. Because man are more important than oxen, the principle which is true of oxen is especially true of men.

In ancient times, a team of oxen would be tied to the axle of a heavy millstone and led round and round in a circle, causing this heavy millstone to roll continually on its path. Grain from the fields would be taken and laid in the path of the millstone so that its great weight would crack open the hard kernels of wheat. At a later time, the broken husks would be separated from the good kernels. This was the separating the wheat from the chaff.

While that team of oxen were marching round and round the threshing floor, they would often bend down and eat of the wheat. The enterprising farmer might see a portion of his profits being eaten up and be tempted to put a muzzle over the mouths of his oxen. God told him not to do it.

The principle is clear. The one who labors is to participate in the fruits of that labor. This is true whether the individual is an ox or a minister of the gospel. Those who work are to enjoy the results of that work.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED

If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? ¹² If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:11-12).

Paul now looks to the practical application of this principle of Deserved Compensation. It is never enough to have knowledge of godly principles. Those principles must be put into practice. They must be taken out of the notebook of the classroom and applied to the daily situations of life. Paul moves from the theoretical to the practical.

1. A Conditional Requirement: *If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? (9:11).*

There is a conditional requirement in this clause that must be true of any spiritual worker who expects to be compensated. He must be teaching spiritual things.

This is important. There are a lot of people these days who are asking for money for all sorts of reasons. The Christian is bombarded with requests for money from every area. Some of those who appeal for money do not deserve to be paid because they have not taught spiritual things. The entire ministry of some men seems to be a giant request for more money. But the Christian leader is called to feed the flock rather than to fleece the flock.

On the other hand, if the Christian leader has been faithful in teaching spiritual things, then that faithfulness is to be rewarded with material things.

2. A Well-Deserved Right: *If others share the right over you, do we not more? (9:12).*

Apparently the Corinthians did make a practice of paying some of their leaders. But they neglected to pay those who had brought Christianity to Corinth. Then neglected to take care of the needs of their spiritual father.

3. An Enduring Relinquishment: *Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ (9:12).*

Paul had the right to demand financial support from the church, but he did not. He gave up his rights for the sake of the gospel.

Paul didn't want anyone to be able to say, "Paul? He's only in the ministry for the money. He doesn't want to have to work for a living, so he preaches instead."

Does this mean that all Christian leaders ought to go out and to do likewise? Does this mean that Christian leaders should always refuse to be paid? Not at all. If God has called a man to devote himself fully to the preaching of the Word, then it might be wrong for him to divide his time and energy with a secular job. On the other hand, there may be times when a Christian worker might be led to work to support himself as Paul did, especially if he is in a small church that is financially unable to pay him a sufficient wage.

We never read of Paul soliciting financial support for himself or for his ministry. He did not offer a hand-autographed copy of 1 Corinthians for a donation of \$20 or more. He did not sell prayer cloths. Yet he did not hesitate to make known the material needs of others. In the last chapter of this epistle, he will give specific instructions regarding a collection of money for the needy church in Jerusalem. But he will not ask for money for himself, even though he had every right to do so.

THE PRINCIPLE SEEN IN THE PRIESTHOOD

Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? 14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:13-14).

In the temple at Jerusalem, the priests were paid from the sacrifices and offerings that were brought into the Temple. Likewise in the pagan temples of Corinth, the priests of those temples ate of the portions of meat that were

offered up in their temples.

So also, God has directed that those who labor in the Word are to be paid by those who benefit from the preaching of that Word.

There is a message of exhortation here for you. Are you working to meet the material needs of those men who are your spiritual leaders? Are you helping to provide the financial support to those who give you your spiritual support? Make no mistake about it. You have a responsibility. There is an action that you are called to take. You are called to take care of their physical necessities.

LIBERTY IN BONDS

1 Corinthians 9:15-23

The context for this section of Paul's epistle begins in chapter 8 where he began to deal with a problem that had arisen in Corinth. It was the problem of those who were eating meat that had been offered to idols. I have had opportunity to visit the ancient site of Corinth and I can attest that the pagan temple to Apollos in Corinth was located right next to the marketplace. It was customary for many of the sacrifices that were offered in the heathen temple to find their way into the marketplace butcher shop. In such a case, it would receive the official stamp of approval from the various pagan deities in question.

The church was divided in its understanding of the implications of this situation. There were those who realized that this pagan ceremony did not affect the quality of the meat. They knew that Christian cookies are no more spiritual than pagan peanuts. And so, they enjoyed their liberty in Christ and they freely ate of such food.

There were other Christians in Corinth who did not realize these basic truths. They had been indoctrinated into believing that the quality of the food was somehow changed by the pagan ceremony. They felt that to partake of such food would be to open one's self up to idolatry or worse. Paul presented the principle that sometimes it is better for the stronger Christian to limit his liberty rather than to cause his brother to stumble.

From there, he turns to a personal illustration of this principle. The illustration is taken from Paul's own life. He shows how he has limited his own freedom and his own Christian liberty for the benefit of others. The liberty on which he focuses is that of the spiritual leader who has the prerogative of being paid for his services.

Thus as we come to 1 Corinthians 9:15, Paul is still dealing with the same general theme. He is still showing how he has limited his own liberty for the same of the Corinthians.

8:1	9:1	9:15
A call to limit liberty for the sake of the weaker brother	An example of this type of limited liberty seen in Paul's limitation of his liberty to be paid in the ministry	
	Paul has the right to be paid in ministry	Paul has limited his liberty for the sake of the Corinthians

THE LIMITING OF PAUL'S LIBERTY

But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. (1 Corinthians 9:15).

One of the liberties that Paul has limited is the liberty to be financially compensated for his work in the gospel. He has spent the first part of this chapter establishing that a spiritual leader has the right to be paid for his work in preaching the gospel. Now he points out that he has not partaken of that right.

1. The Regularity of Paul's Practice: *But I have used none of these things (9:15).*

Paul's regular practice in ministry was that he generally did not take money from those to whom he was ministering.

For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; ⁹ not because

we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:34-35).

Paul worked as a tentmaker to support himself and his entire missionary team. This meant working long hours. He describes it in 2 Thessalonians 3:8 as being “night and day.” It was a labor of sacrifice.

2. The Reason for Paul’s Relating of the Practice: *And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one (9:15).*

Paul has just given a number of compelling reasons why the church should always be ready to pay its spiritual leaders, but he is not making this point so that he can drum up support for himself from the Corinthian church. This is not a subtle play to prick their consciences and get them to make a donation to the St Paul Missionary Fund. He has no desire for their money. Paul isn’t in the ministry for the money. He is in the ministry because he has no choice in the matter. He is in the ministry because God called him.

THE COMPULSION OF PAUL’S CALL

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. ¹⁷ For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:16-18).

Paul was not sitting around Jerusalem contemplating a career change when he got the idea that he would go into ministry. Going into the Christian ministry had been the furthest thing from Paul's mind.

Paul started out as the greatest enemy the early church had ever confronted. He made Caiaphas and Herod and Pontius Pilate look like pussycats. He seems to have been the primary witness against Stephen when he was sentenced to death. He chose as his calling in life the persecution of the infant church. He was so good at persecuting Christians that he finally ran out of Christians in Jerusalem. They had all left town and gone into hiding.

Paul received permission from the Jewish authorities to travel to Damascus and persecute the Christians there. It was while he was on the Damascus road that God knocked him to the ground and struck him blind and commissioned him to be an apostle.

With this commission, Paul was given a job to do. He was given a message to preach. This is what he means when he says that he is "under compulsion."

1. *A Need To Preach: For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the (9:16).*

Paul realized a basic truth. It is that when God tells you to do something, you had better do it. But obedience to a command is not in itself deserving of a reward. It is to be expected. The reward is to be determined by the attitude that accompanies such obedience.

2. *A Rewarded Attitude: For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward (9:17).*

Paul realized that it is only if his attitude toward his ministry is positive that he will be approved by God. The act of preaching does not make him more or less spiritual. Rather it is his attitude in his preaching that makes a difference.

I have a gift for teaching. I recognize this ability as a gift from God. I did not do anything to earn it. I did not do anything to deserve it. Before I was even born, God determined that he would give me a special gift of being able to communicate the Scriptures to people.

I have a responsibility to use that gift in building up the body of Christ.

The fact that I teach the Bible does not mean that I am deserving of rewards from God. On the contrary, if I ever stop teaching, then I am in trouble, for I would not be fulfilling the responsibilities that God has given to me. How then can I receive any reward? It is only by exercising the proper attitude toward my ministry of teaching.

Lest you think that I am the only one who has that kind of responsibility, the Bible teaches that every believer has a spiritual gift from God. The Lord has given you some special abilities. You are under a divine obligation to use those abilities for the building up of the body of Christ.

3. A Stewardship Entrusted: *For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me (9:17).*

Elsewhere in his epistles, we find that Paul sees himself as a soldier in the army of God. A soldier's job is to obey orders. If he obeys the orders given to him by his superior officer, then he doesn't land in the brig. On the other hand, he doesn't get a medal for simply obeying orders. Medals are only awarded for going above and beyond the call of duty.

Let's say a soldier is called by his platoon sergeant and told that today he has K.P. He is given his assignment. It is to peel a thousand potatoes. Does he get a medal for peeling those potatoes? Of course not! He is only doing that which is expected of him. It is only when he goes above and beyond the call of duty that he is awarded a medal.

Paul says the same is true in the Lord's army. Medals are only given to those who go "above and beyond."

4. A Basis of Reward: *What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel (9:18).*

How did Paul go "above and beyond" the call of duty? He did it by

refusing to charge for his services. He did it by not taking a salary for the preaching of the gospel. He had a right to be paid for his work in the ministry, but he chose not to be paid for that work.

THE SACRIFICE OF PAUL'S FREEDOM

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. 20 And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. 23 And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Paul has maintained from the outset that the Christian enjoys liberty. He is free. What do we mean by this? It means that the Christian is free to do whatever is not forbidden, as long as it does not go against his conscience.

As a Christian, you can eat what you want to eat, read what you want to read, marry whom you want to marry, and be what you want to be as long as it has not been forbidden by the Lord and as long as it does not go against your conscience.

However there are still times when it might be wrong to do what is right. There are times when the exercising of your liberty might hurt another person. It is with this in mind that Paul decided to limit his own liberty.

What do you call one who has no liberty? A prisoner. A slave. Paul points this out when he says, "*Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more*" (9:19).

Notice Paul's reasoning. Why did he give up his liberty. Was it because it is more spiritual to be under the Law? Was it because he enjoyed being a slave to others? Was it because he had masochistic tendencies? No. It was

so that he could win more to Christ.

Paul gives three examples of how he has sacrificed his freedom for the benefit of others:

- ♦ To the Jew he became as a Jew (9:20).
- ♦ To the Gentile he became as a Gentile (9:21).
- ♦ To the weak he became as weak (9:22).

In each case, Paul ends the example by giving the reason that he sacrificed his freedom. In each case, it is “*that I might win the more*”

1. A Jew to the Jews: *to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law (9:20).*

Paul realized that he was no longer bound by the legal ceremonies and customs of the Mosaic Law. He had been set free from that. Christ died to fulfill the requirements of the Law and we are no longer under its rule. Although he was free, Paul often limited his liberty by following the Jewish customs when he was dealing with the Jews.

For example, Paul circumcised Timothy, his young half-Jewish apprentice, when they were going to be working among the Jews of Galatia. The rite of circumcision was of no spiritual benefit. On a later date, Paul would refuse to have Titus circumcised because the issue had arisen as to whether circumcision was necessary for salvation and for Titus to submit to circumcision would have compromised the gospel.

This brings forth a principle. When the truth and clarity of the gospel are at issue, Paul refused to compromise. But when the gospel was not at issue, he would follow Jewish customs.

Another example is seen when Paul came to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey.

And after he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done

among the Gentiles through his ministry.

20 And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; 21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. 22 What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses in order that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law." (Acts 21:19-24).

As Paul comes to the Jerusalem church, there is a problem. Rumors have reached Jerusalem to the effect that Paul has been telling Jewish Christians not to follow the Mosaic Law. Has Paul been saying that? Not at all. He has been telling both Jews and Gentiles that they do not have to follow the Law in order to be saved, but he has not told Jews to turn from the Law. There is nothing wrong with a Jewish believer continuing to live in accordance with the traditions and the customs of his Judaism as long as he realizes that these traditions and customs cannot save him.

The elders of the Jerusalem church come to Paul with a plan. Their plan is that he partake in a Jewish ceremony. They want him to join several others in taking a Nazarite vow. This is a Jewish ritual. It will mark him as a Jew. What is Paul's reaction to their request? It is seen in verse 26.

Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them. (Acts 21:26).

Paul consented to partake of this ceremony because it did not involve compromising the gospel. To the Jews he became as Jews. To those under the Law, he became as under the Law, even though he himself was no longer under the Law.

2. *A Gentile to the Gentiles: To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law (9:21).*

When Paul was working and ministering among the Gentiles, he lived as a Gentile. He did not follow the Jewish dietary laws. He did not follow the distinctively Jewish dress code. He did not partake in the daily ceremonial purification. He did not insist that other Gentiles become circumcised.

This does not mean that he led a life of sin. Although he lived like the Gentiles, he also lived according to the “law of Christ.”

What is the law of Christ? It is the law that Jesus gave to His followers. It is the law that we are to love one another. Jesus gave this command to His disciples on the night that He was arrested.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35).

We are not subject to all of the Laws of the Mosaic Covenant. We are not under the sacrificial ordinances. We are not under the Mosaic dress code. We are not under the Jewish dietary laws. But we are under the Law of Christ -- the Law of love. This is the law of the kingdom. It is the royal law.

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. (James 2:8).

Does this mean that we have done away with the Law of Moses? Not at all. Christ did not come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it.

He fulfilled the righteousness of the Law by living a perfect life. He fulfilled the ceremonies of the Law by becoming Prophet, Priest and King to all who believe in Him. Most of all, He fulfilled the Law by his demonstration of His life. Love is the fulfillment of the Law.

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14).

The Law is God's perfect standard of righteousness. But love fulfills the Law. If you love your neighbor, then you do not need the Law to tell you not to murder him. If you love your neighbor, then you do not need the Law to tell you not to commit adultery with his wife. If you love your neighbor, then you do not need the Law to tell you not to steal from him or to bear false witness against him or to covet his possessions. When there is love, there is no need for the Law because love fulfills the Law.

When Paul was with Gentiles, he did not live according to the ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. He did live in accordance with the Law of Christ. That Law will penetrate any culture. Love has never gone out of style.

3. Weak to the Weak: *To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak (9:22).*

This takes us back to the concept of those who had an incomplete knowledge of their liberty in Christ. When Paul was with those who, in their weakness, did not realize that a Christian can eat any type of food, he limited his liberty for their sakes.

When Paul was with those who were uneducated, he knew how to make his message simple so that they could understand it.

4. All Things to All Men: *I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some (9:22).*

Paul was willing to go to any lengths short of compromising the truth of the gospel to win men to Christ. Notice that his goal was to "save some." He knew full well that he could not bring salvation to all men. He could reach out to all men, but only some would respond.

Paul would become anything to bring men to the gospel, but he would not say anything that would compromise the truth of that message. His pattern was Jesus, the One who became flesh for us. Jesus became as one of us, yet He did so without compromising the truth. He was willing to stoop to become a man to win men. Likewise, Paul was willing to become even as the Gentiles, eating with them and living among them, but there was no changing the message of the gospel.

There were many who were offended because of the message that he preached. Earlier in this epistle, Paul taught that the message of the gospel is offensive to those who do not believe. Paul did not mind that his message offended people. He was only concerned that they not be offended at him.

This brings us to a question. What is there in your life that is offensive to others? Is there something about you that rubs certain people the wrong way? You need to ask the Lord to take off those rough edges. You need to allow His love to mold you into “all things to all men.”

RUNNING THE RACE

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

When I was in high school. I signed up for the varsity track team. I was reasonably fast on my feet and I figured that it might be nice to win some races on the school team. I suppose that I entertained visions of becoming a school hero as I led my team to victory.

Once I had signed up and joined the team, I learned that there was more to it than just showing up for the race. First there were long hours of practice and practice and practice. While all of my friends were at the beach or going to the movies or otherwise relaxing, I was expected to be running around the track and subjecting my body to other indignities in preparation for a coming race. I came to discover that to be a winner takes dedication and discipline.

Paul uses the illustration of a race to portray the Christian life in several of his epistles, but none more vividly than here in this first epistle to the Corinthians.

THE ILLUSTRATION OF A RACE

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Paul begins by pointing out a common phenomena found in all races. It is so obvious that it is sometimes overlooked. Whenever you watch a race, all of the contestants who have entered the race go on to run the course of the race.

This was well known to the Corinthians. Every three years, their city hosted the famous Isthmus Games. Those who had signed their names to a particular race would be expected to run. This brings us to the point that Paul wants to make. Even though all of the contestants run, there is only one winner.

1. Running is not the same as Winning: *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? (9:24).*

What does Paul mean by this? Does he mean that there is only one winner in the Christian life? Does he mean that there is only one winner allowed per each local church? I do not believe so. Rather, I think that Paul wants to show that not everyone who runs in a race is going to win.

This is the point. In any race there are going to be those who win and those who lose. You don't get the prize just because you ran in the race. You only get the prize if you win.

Running is not the same thing as winning. While it is true that it takes some effort to run, it takes much more effort to run and win. For one thing, you have to finish the race in order to win. You can run the first part of the race in record time, but it doesn't mean a thing if you never cross the finish line.

It is on this basis that Paul gives the believers at Corinth an exhortation. It is not just an exhortation to run. It is an exhortation to run so that you will win.

2. Run To Win: *Run in such a way that you may win (9:24).*

Winning the spiritual race doesn't depend upon how fast you run. It is determined by how you run. You can run in such a way that you are certain to lose. I am reminded of a infamous college football player who intercepted a fumble and then ran the ball all the way across the field for a touchdown. There was only one problem. He ran toward the wrong goal.

There is a right way and a wrong way to run. It did not matter to that player/s team that he ran with speed or with style or that he was sincere. He was running the wrong way. He cost his team the game.

PRINCIPLES OF WINNING

And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a

perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:25-27).

In verse 24 Paul exhorted the Corinthians to win. Now he goes on to give them several principles of winning. He does not merely tell them what to do. He also tells them how to do it.

The Bible is very practical in that way. It never gives you a command without also giving you the instructions and the resources to fulfill that command. It is the Christian's training manual and it tells you how to win the race.

1. The Principle of Self-Control: *And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things (9:25).*

The first principles in winning races is the principle of self-control. This is the principle of discipline. You cannot eat everything you would like to eat if you are going to win races. You cannot drink all that you would like to drink. You cannot go everywhere you would like to go. This does not mean that any of these things are wrong. You have a perfect right to eat a hot fudge sundae. But this will not help you to win any races.

By the same token, Paul realizes that there are certain things he has to give up if he is going to win the race that God has set before him. Sometimes this means giving up liberties that he has a perfect right to enjoy. If it means the difference between winning and losing, then Paul is ready to give up anything that might stand in his way.

This principle extends to every area of life. An athlete is required to exercise control in all things. This means more than merely abstaining from certain things. I know people who have abstained from all sorts of things and yet who have never won a race. Winning a race takes a great deal of positive effort. It takes devotion. It is hard work. It is not always fun.

I know from experience that when you are out there running around the track and doing calisthenics while your friends are all relaxing

and enjoying themselves, you often find yourself wondering if it is worth all of the effort. Paul turns now to this problem of motivation. It is found in the prize.

2. The Principle of a Motivation: *They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (9:25).*

The winner of the Isthmus Games received an olive wreath that had been fashioned into the shape of a crown. This olive wreath was placed on his head. It declared him to be the winner.

This was the goal for which he strived. This was the motivation for all his training. He would wear the wreath and he would receive the acclaim from all the crowd. He was the winner. And then he would go home and place that wreath over the mantle of his fireplace. The years would pass and the wreath would fade. Its leaves would turn brown and brittle to the touch. Finally it would be thrown away.

Paul says that we have a much greater prize. We do not labor for a prize that will fall apart after a few years. We are striving for an eternal prize. What is the prize? At first glance, one is tempted to think that the eternal prize for which Paul is so laboriously striving is eternal life. The problem with such a view is that it completely ignores both what Paul has stated elsewhere as well as the context of this passage.

- ♦ Paul has elsewhere made it very clear that eternal life is the free gift of God and that it cannot be obtained by our own good works: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast (Galatians 2:8-9).*
- ♦ Paul has been writing at length about the issue of the weaker brother. He is concerned lest all of the labor of evangelizing and teaching such weaker believers shall have proved to be in vain.

This brings us to the identity of the prize. Paul asks the question in his first epistle to the Thessalonians: *For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy. (1*

Thessalonians 2:19-20). Who is Paul's prize? The prize is those believers to whom he has ministered.

This ought to be a great source of motivation. What you do today is going to count in the lives of others for all eternity. You say, "But I didn't do anything today!" That will also count for all eternity. It is for this reason that Paul calls his readers in Ephesians 5:16 to make the most of their time; literally, to "redeem the time."

3. The Principle of Efficiency: *Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air (9:28).*

The third principle of winning is the principle of efficiency. It says that races are not necessarily won by the one who runs the hardest, but by the one who runs the smartest. There is a strategy to running. It requires that you do not waste energy. It requires that all your energy be directed toward achieving the proper goal.

I am not a great football fan, but I have managed to watch a few games. Not once have I ever seen a player who, while he was running with the ball, stop to admire one of the cheerleaders. He would be clobbered. He cannot divide his attention and expect to win the game.

Paul uses two illustrations to make his point.

- ♦ There is the runner who runs in the right direction, staying on the track as he runs the race.
- ♦ There is the boxer who makes every punch count, rather than wasting his effort in swinging at empty space.

In each illustration, the point is the same. It is that the effort that is used must be effective in achieving the desired goal.

4. The Principle of Disqualification: *I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified (9:27).*

This is the final principle of winning. It is the principle that shall take us over into the message of the next chapter. It is the principle

of disqualification.

One of the saddest things about any race is that it is possible to persevere through all of the training, exert all of the energy to run the entire course, only to be disqualified because of an infringement of the rules. There are rules that must be followed in any race or else the race is forfeit. The spiritual race that we run is no exception.

What are the rules of the race? They are the commands that God has given to us. They are His instructions found in His Word. The temptation is always present to run in a haphazard direction, taking “short-cuts” and ignoring the rules. But to do so involves disaster. To do so will result in disqualification.

I have known a number of Christians who have been disqualified from the race. They had spiritual gifts. They sometimes even built up great ministries. They seemed to have an exciting relationship with God. Then sin crept in. Sin is always a disqualifier.

How about you? Are you running the race? Are you doing so with motivated efficiency as you lead a disciplined life? There is still a warning. It is that it is possible for one to run the entire race and even come across the finished line, only to find that you have been disqualified because you did not run according to the rules.

Remember that these principles are given in the context of the issue of the weaker brother. The question was whether Christians would see fit to limit their own liberty in order to build up the body of Christ. Building up the body of Christ involves...

- ♦ Self control.
- ♦ Motivation.
- ♦ Efficiency.
- ♦ Approaching ministry in accordance with God’s principles -- “playing by the rules.”

You have a race to run. You have a ministry to fulfill. It has been given to you by the Lord of all the earth. It is your life’s calling and was given to you by your Creator. There is a prize that is worth winning. It isn’t easy. But it is worth the effort. Fulfill your ministry.

AN EXAMPLE OF SPIRITUAL FAILURE

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

In 1980, Ronald and Nancy Reagan were in Virginia prior to coming to the White House. The story is told that, although they had belonged to a Presbyterian church back home in California, they decided to visit an Episcopal church in their new community.

Upon arriving at the church service, they found that the Lord's Supper was to be observed and it was here that the problem arose. They were familiar with the Presbyterian practice of passing around a tray of bread pieces and a tray of small individual cups. However, within the Episcopal Church it was the practice for everyone to come forward and kneel down before the priest who would dispense the small wafers and who would pass around a single cup from which everyone would drink.

The Reagans were disturbed by what they regarded as an unsanitary practice until an aide leaned over and whispered that it was acceptable to take the wafer and to dip it into the cup instead of drinking from it. Ronald Reagan was already a bit hard of hearing and could not make out the instructions, so his wife Nancy said to him, "Don't worry about it. Just do what I do and follow my example."

At the proper time, they came down the aisle and kneeled before the priest. Nancy took the wafer from him and went to dip it into the cup, but in her nervousness, she dropped the wafer and it sank to the bottom of the cup. With regal bearing, Ronald Reagan took his own wafer from the priest and dropped it into the cup. The priest went on his way, shaking his head.

This was an instance in which a man followed an improper example. The Bible is full of such examples. It presents, not only the victories of its heroes, but also their failures. Just as we can learn a great deal about how to win by watching their victories, so also we can learn from what not to do to avoid losing.

As we come to this chapter, Paul has been speaking of the danger of being disqualified from the spiritual race. He now moves to a specific example. It is an example of failure. It is an example of what not to do.

9:24-27	10:1-5	10:6-10
Run the Race	Portrait of Failure	Purpose for the Portrait

When he completed the portrait, he will then go back and tell us the purpose of the portrait. It will be that we might learn from past failures.

A PORTRAIT OF FAILURE

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. (1 Corinthians 10:1-5).

In our last chapter we saw the danger of disqualification. Paul told how it is possible to put all of the effort in training to run the race and to cross the finish line, only to find that you have been disqualified. Now he turns to an example of such a disqualification. It is the example of Israel in the wilderness.

9:24-27	10:1-4	10:5-10
A call to run the Spiritual Race in order to win	The Example of Israel' Spiritual Journey	
	One united beginning	The failure of most to finish

Here is the point. All of Israel was in the race. Notice the repeated use of the word "all." It resounds again and again throughout this passage.

- ♦ All were under the cloud.
- ♦ All passed through the sea.
- ♦ All were baptized into Moses.
- ♦ All ate the same spiritual food.
- ♦ All drank the same spiritual drink.

Everyone who came out of Egypt was in the race. But not everyone was a winner. Not everyone won the prize. Not everyone was permitted to enter into the Promised Land. This is seen in verse 5: *Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness* (10:5).

Most of the Israelites who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness. Why? Because they were disqualified. Even though they entered the race, even though they exercised a certain level of self-discipline, even though they were headed toward the right goal, they still fell short. They were disqualified. They died in the wilderness.

The Old Testament account leads us to believe that nearly two million people went out of Egypt in the Exodus. Out of that number, only two entered into the Promised Land. Only two men won the race. Only Joshua and Caleb entered into the land of Canaan. The rest died in the wilderness.

PURPOSE OF THE PORTRAIT

6 Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. 7 And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. (1 Corinthians 10:6-10).

Why were so many of the Israelites disqualified in the wilderness? Paul lists several reasons.

- ♦ Some of them craved evil things (10:6).

- ♦ Some of them worshiped false gods and became idolaters (10:7).
- ♦ Some of them acted immorally (10:8).
- ♦ Some of them tried to test the Lord (10:9).
- ♦ Some of them grumbled (10:10).

In each case, they fell into temptation. In each case, they sinned. As a result, they were disqualified from the race. The fact that Israel fell is a warning to us. Paul says that *these things happened as examples for us* (10:6). It is given that it might teach us a lesson. The lesson we need to learn is that it is possible for us to be disqualified in each one of these areas. It is possible for us to be tempted in these areas and to fall into sin.

This illustration of Israel in the wilderness is more than a mere sad story. It is not given for our intellectual enjoyment. It is given to teach us something. It is to teach us how we ought to live. It is not just for Sunday morning. It gives us a lesson that we need to take to work with us and to utilize on Monday and keep throughout the week.

Why is this so important? Because temptation is going to come on Monday and on Tuesday and throughout the rest of the week. It is important that we understand the consequences of sin. It will only be then that we will be able to use God's provision against its lure.

Israel is a type of the Christian. The exodus from Egypt is a picture of the conversion experience of the Christian. Just as all of Israel were under the cloud, so we have all come under God's protection. Just as all of Israel passed through the sea, so we have all passed from the bondage of sin to freedom in Christ. Just as all of Israel were baptized into Moses, so we have all been baptized into Christ. Just as all of Israel ate the same spiritual food, so we have all been made partakers with the body of Christ. Just as Moses struck the rock so that all of Israel could drink from it, Christ was stricken and died for us so that we can partake of the benefits of His death.

The goal of the Christian life is to win the race -- to enter into the Promised Land. But some are disqualified. Some do not enter in. The reason for this is sin.

A lot of books have been written on what is wrong with the church today. We are told that if only we will have better music, more prayer, more powerful preaching, greater giving, better outreach ministries, motivated missions, better body life or updated Sunday School programs, that all of the

problems of the church will be solved. One thing is usually neglected from these discussions -- the presence of sin. Paul lists this one factor as the reason why churches fall and why Christians are disqualified.

The sin that Paul describes takes a number of forms. He presents five ways in which sin is manifested. These manifestations of sin are especially significant to the Corinthians.

1. Craving Evil Things: *We should not crave evil things, as they also craved (10:6).*

Sin always begins with a mental attitude. Whenever you move into the realm of sin, your mind always moves ahead of you. Sin always begins with a desire. It begins with a desire for something that is contrary to the will of God. It begins with a craving for that which is wrong.

2. Idolatry: *And do not be idolaters, as some of them were (10:7).*

The issue with which Paul has been dealing in the last three chapters has involved the eating of meats that have been offered to idols. Many of the Corinthians took a very flippant attitude toward such idol worship. They realized that meat that had been offered to idols is not in itself bad, so they was a tendency to conclude that there was nothing wrong with a little idol worship, either. They concluded that they could associate with pagan rituals and pagan worship without being affected.

There is an important principle here. It is that you are affected by those with whom you associate. What kind of people do you make your close friends? Who are the people with whom you surround yourself? Don't think that you can join yourself to worldly people without their attitudes rubbing off on you.

3. Immorality: *Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did (10:8).*

Paul has already spent three chapters (5-7) dealing with the problem of sexual immorality within the church. It is an issue that was relevant in that day and it is an issue that is relevant in the church today.

There is a line of thought today that says anything that two consenting adults do in the privacy of their own home is okay. Nothing could be further from the truth. God wants His people to be sexually pure. He has called His people to live a life that is set apart from the world. He takes sin very seriously.

4. Tempting God: *Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did (10:9).*

The Corinthians had been guilty of tempting God. They had reasoned that they had liberty and they sought to push their liberty to the maximum limits. They wanted to see how much of the flesh they could enjoy without stepping over the line into the judgment of God. Their reasoning was that, since they were saved by grace, they could live as they pleased. They needed to learn that being a Christian means that you are to live as God pleases.

There is a disturbing teaching going around today that says this is the age of grace and that we don't have to worry about the judgment of God if we have believed in Christ. Paul counters such a teaching by showing how those who were identified with Moses and the rock who is Christ were judged by God and died in the wilderness. The Christian is not one who can ignore sin. To the contrary, a Christian is one who has seen his sin for what it is and who now seeks to live a holy life.

5. Discontentment: *Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer (10:10).*

The Israelites in the wilderness reached the point where they became dissatisfied with their circumstances. They complained about the taste of the manna and they complained about their lack of comforts and they complained about their lot in life. As a result, they were judged.

Why is it wrong for God's people to complain? Why is it wrong for us to be dissatisfied with our lot in life? Because when we complain, we are expressing dissatisfaction with God's plan.

If there is a problem in your life, God has allowed it to be there. If there is an uncomfortable situation, then God has brought it to pass. If you are facing some unpleasant circumstances, it is because God

has put you there. Nothing comes into your life until it has first come across the drawing board of the Architect of the universe and He has affixed His signature to it. Therefore, to be discontent with your circumstances is to be discontent with the wisdom of God.

Paul has mentioned five sins that were evident among the Israelites and which led to their disqualification from entering into the promised land. Notice that not everyone in the entire group committed every possible sin. We do not read that they all craved evil things or that all of them worshiped false gods or that they all acted immorally or that they all tried to test the Lord or even that all of them grumbled. They each had their areas of weakness and each of those areas was the sin of some of them.

Why is this important? Because you might have seen several of these areas and thought to yourself, “I’m not so bad. I’m not even tempted to do any of those things.” If that is what you have been thinking, then you are no different than most of the Israelites. You are in danger of overconfidence.

THE PERIL OF OVERCONFIDENCE

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

Paul now turns from the theoretical to the practical. He takes the illustration of Israel’s failure and he applies it to the believer today.

1. **The Value of an Old Testament Example:** *Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (10:11).*

The fact that these things happened as an example for us tells me something about the Old Testament. It tells me that the Old Testament was written for my benefit. It was written for my instruction. It contains lessons that I need to learn.

There are some who want to suggest that the Old Testament is not for the Christian today. They would have you believe that the Old Testament was written to the Jews who lived before Christ and that

it has nothing of practical value for the Christian in the 21st century. This is not true. All of the Scriptures are inspired by God and all of the Scriptures are profitable to me in the areas of doctrine and for reproof and for instruction in how to be righteous.

2. The Warning from the Old Testament Example: *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (10:12).*

Paul gives a warning. It is a warning against overconfidence. It is a warning given to the man who sees the example of Israel in the wilderness and who says, “That could never happen to me.”

Those are the famous last words of Peter as he stood in the Upper Room and proclaimed that he would follow Jesus to the death. Jesus said that all would forsake Him and Peter retorted, “Those other disciples might do that, but I certainly will not!” His overconfidence is all too apparent. It is seen in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was sleeping when he ought to have been praying. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, he was ready to jump into their midst and begin defending Jesus with his little sword. But when he was caught unaware by the question of a lowly slave girl, he panicked and he denied Christ.

Our failures follow a similar pattern. We are ready to make a great show of following Christ. We put on our Sunday best and we show up in church and we proclaim our faithfulness to the Lord. We experience a temporary confidence. But when an unexpected time of crisis arises to threaten us, how often do we hit the panic button? Be warned! Let him who think that he stands secure from temptation take heed lest he fall.

*Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before stumbling. (Proverbs 16:18).*

One of the most fascinating battles of the American War between the States is the Battle of Chancellorsville. The Confederate forces had been outmaneuvered and were now almost completely surrounded. On the morning of the battle, Union General Joseph Hooker called his subordinates together for a staff meeting. He was confident of a sure victory and, as the meeting drew to a close, he commented, “Not even God can take this victory from me.” Whereupon he went out

and lost the battle.

It is when you are your most confident that you are in danger of your greatest defeat. It is at this point that you tend to become careless because you begin to substitute confidence in the Lord for confidence in your own ability.

PROVISION FOR TEMPTATION

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Though we are warned against being overconfident, this does not mean that we should have an attitude of defeatism. We have a strong word of encouragement. It is that God has made provision for us in our hour of temptation. God will never taken you into a tunnel that does not have a light at the end of it. He will never take you into the valley of the shadow of death without being with you.

1. The Commonality of Temptation: *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man (10:13).*

You won't necessarily believe this when you are in the midst of temptation, so I want you to learn this principle now. It is that your temptations are not unique. Whatever you are going through has been experienced by millions of other people just like you. You are not alone. Even Jesus experienced those same temptations.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus was tempted *in all things as we are*. Everything that you go through, He went through. He understands your problems because He experienced them. This means He is qualified to help you.

2. The Faithfulness of God in Temptation: *God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able (10:13).*

The reason you do not need to fear temptation is because God is faithful. Even when you are faithless, God is still faithful. He designed you. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your stress limit. He knows exactly how much you can take and He has promised not to exceed that limit.

*God does not give masters level exams to kindergartners.
- Norm Wise*

This means you have no excuse to sin. You can't say, "The devil made me do it." Satan cannot make you sin. If you sin, then it is because you decided to sin. Don't ever try to blame God because of your sin. He has made a way of escape.

3. The Way of Escape from Temptation: *God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it (10:13).*

I spent many years as a fire fighter, rising through the ranks and facing a lot of emergency situations. It was my job to put out fires. One of the things that I learned was never to go into a burning building unless there is a way out of that building. Years later, as I rose to the rank of battalion chief, my job changed. It was now to stand outside the fire zone and to tell other fire fighters what to do. One of my major responsibilities was to make certain my crews always had a way out. God makes the same provision for me. In the heat of the battle and when the smoke is all around us, He says, "Don't worry, I've put you here and I've got your escape route open."

WHAT DO YOU WORSHIP?

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

The nomadic tribes known as the children of Israel had camped at the foot of the craggy peaks of Mount Sinai. They had come here through the waters of the Red Sea, leaving behind forever their former slavery in Egypt. The hand of the Lord had guided them here, feeding them each day with miraculous food.

They had come now to this lonely windswept mountain. It was known to them as the mountain of God. It was here that they would be given the Law of God. The people of Israel were warned to keep off the mountain. To touch it would mean death at the hand of God.

A month earlier, Moses had gone up into the mountain to meet the Lord. No one had seen or heard from him in all that time. No one knew whether he lived or died. As far as the people knew, God was silent. In their impatience, the people turned to Aaron, the older brother of Moses.

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

2 And Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron.

4 And he took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." (Exodus 32:1-4).

These people who had pledged themselves to follow the Lord now turned aside to worship the statue of a calf, declaring that it was this image who had delivered them from their slavery in Egypt.

These were people who had witnessed the mighty hand of God. They had seen the plagues of God bring destruction upon the mighty nation of Egypt. They had seen the parting of the Red Sea and had walked through on dry land. They had seen the armies of Pharaoh drowned as they tried to follow and destroy the Israelites. They had been guided each day by a giant pillar of smoke. A great pillar of fire had brought light to their encampment each night. But now within a short time of their deliverance, they had turned aside to idolatry.

God hates idolatry. It strikes at His very character. It seeks to take something from His own creation and to seat it on His throne and in place of Him.

Corinth was a city that was overrun by idolatry. As you first approached the city, the first thing that you would see would be the Acrocorinth, a great mesa rising hundreds of feet above the surrounding countryside. At its peak was a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and erotica. Upon entering the city, you would find temples and idols of every kind. At the edge of the city marketplace stood a temple to Apollo, the pillars of which still stand to this day.

It was into this culture that Christianity had now come. People had been called out of their former life of idolatry to come and to serve the Living God. The only problem was that they still lived in Corinth.

A number of years ago, I met a young believer who was attending a church belonging to a denomination that taught salvation is not by faith alone but that certain rituals are necessary for a person to undergo in order to be saved. When I talked to this believer about that church, he said, "I know that what they teach is wrong, but they are such nice people."

There were those within the Corinthian church who took a similar attitude toward the heathen temples. Some of the believers in Corinth were continuing to go to the temples. There were a number of reasons for this.

- ♦ Some may have thought that this would be a good opportunity to witness from within and perhaps change the teachings of the temple.

- ♦ Others regarded the temple as the focus of their social lives. All of their friends came to the temple and this was the place to come and see them. Marriage ceremonies and other family affairs were commonly held within the temple.
- ♦ There may have been those Christians who continued to go to the temple out of habit. They had not stopped to analyze their practice. They simply went because “we’ve always gone there.”

At the heart of this problem was the problem of idolatry. This is the problem that Paul now addresses.

FLEE IDOLATRY

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. (1 Corinthians 10:14).

Paul is going to give several reasons why it is important and necessary to stay away from idolatry, but he first begins with the command to get out of it.

There is a reason for this. If you are in the midst of idolatry, then you will be deaf to the teachings of God until you get out of it. If you are listening to false teachings and accepting them as the truth of God, then you will not be able to listen to proper teaching until you have first come out of that false teaching and have seen that it is false. This is not a matter of Christian liberty. If you are in idolatry, then you need to leave it right now.

Idolatry is the worship of something other than the true God in the correct way. To partake of idolatry is to say that God is not God. It tries to take God off His throne. It is no accident that the first two of the Ten Commandments deal with the issue of idolatry.

You might be thinking to yourself at this point, “I don’t need to hear what is in this passage because I’ve never been tempted to bow down before any idols of wood or of stone.” You need to know that there are other forms of idolatry. Colossians 3:5 says that greed amounts to idolatry. Now that Paul has told us to flee idolatry, he proceeds to give us three reasons why we ought to flee idolatry:

- ♦ Because we are identified by a ceremony (10:15-18).

- ♦ Because idolatry is demonic (10:19-21).
- ♦ Because idolatry makes God jealous (10:22).

BECAUSE WE ARE IDENTIFIED BY A CEREMONY

15 I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. 16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.

18 Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? (1 Corinthians 10:15-18).

Paul says that we ought not to engage in idolatry because we are identified by the ceremonies in which we partake. This is graphically illustrated in the Lord's Supper. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are being identified with the body and blood of the Lord.

1. The Ceremony of the Lord's Supper Identifies us with the Body and Blood of Christ: *Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? (10:16).*

The cup of wine and the loaf of bread were used by Jesus on the night of the Last Supper to illustrate His coming death. The cup of wine represented His blood that was about to be poured out for our redemption. The loaf of bread represented His body that was about to be broken for our sins.

When the disciples drank of the wine and ate of the bread, they were identifying themselves with the shed blood and the broken body of Jesus. It was that shed blood and that broken body that brought about our salvation.

Here is a great truth. When Jesus died on the cross, you were considered to have died with Him. When His blood was poured out, it was evidence that you had legally died. When His body was broken, it was by His stripes that your spiritual condition was healed.

2. The Ceremony of the Lord's Supper Demonstrates a Common Unity: *Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread (10:17).*

When the church sits down to observe the Lord's Supper, all of the various members eat of that one loaf of bread. Not only does this identify us with Jesus Christ, but it also identifies us with one another. Christians have a bond of unity with one another. It is a bond of unity based on the fact that we have all been identified together with Christ.

Here is the point of the passage. If we are identified with Christ by means of a ceremony, then we should not be partaking in ceremonies that are meant to identify us with false gods.

3. People who Ate the Sacrifices in the Old Testament were Identified with the Altar on which it was Offered: *at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? (10:18).*

This principle is seen in the sacrifices of Israel at the temple in Jerusalem. When the Jews brought their sacrifices to the altar, portions of those sacrifices were eaten by the priest and portions of the sacrifice were eaten by the one who brought the sacrifice. By their eating of the sacrifice, both parties were identifying themselves with the Lord of the sacrifice. The principle is clear. When you partake in a ceremony, you are identified with that group that conducts the ceremony.

Now let's make this practical. How do people identify you? If your coworkers and your neighbors were asked about you, how would they identify you? For what are you known? If it is for anything other than being a Christian, then you need to ask yourself whether you are guilty of idolatry.

BECAUSE IDOLATRY IS DEMONIC

19 What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?

20 No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do

not want you to become sharers in demons.

21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. (1 Corinthians 10:19-21).

Idolatry is not wrong because there is something inherently evil about a rock or a statue or an image. If this were the case, then it would be wrong to take a photograph or to hang a painting in your house or to go to the museum and look at a statue.

Paul has already shown that idolatry is wrong because it takes the glory that is due for God and gives it to another. Now he shows that idolatry is wrong because it is demonic in nature.

1. *A Demonic Identity: The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons (10:20).*

Even though the false gods of the pagans are not really gods at all, there is a real spiritual force at work behind them. That spiritual force is an evil force. It is demonic.

The Bible has quite a bit to say about demons. It tells us that they are powerful spirit creatures and that they are servants of Satan. They are apparently the angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God. This means that they are the army of the prince of darkness.

We, on the other hand, are soldiers in the army of light. We ought not to partake of anything that would put us in the position of consorting with the enemy.

2. *An Inconsistent Service: You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons (10:21).*

Paul is still using the analogy of the Lord's Supper. He says that you cannot partake of the Lord's Supper along with Satan's supper. You cannot be identified with both God and Satan. You cannot serve both God and mammon.

No one can serve two masters; for either he

will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24).

There are a lot of people who are trying to serve two masters. We try to do it every time we sin. But it cannot be done. God will not share loyalties. He will not act as your master unless He can be your only master.

An idolater is like a wife who expresses her love for her husband but then goes out with other men. Her words are inconsistent with her actions. The natural reaction of the husband is jealousy. This is God's reaction, too.

BECAUSE IDOLATRY MAKES GOD JEALOUS

Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we? (1 Corinthians 10:22).

God is a jealous God. He will not stand for competition. It is not a petty jealousy. He is jealous for that which is the most holy and upright and worthy to be esteemed and worshiped. He refuses to allow His people to settle for anything less and He will now allow them to play the part of an unfaithful wife.

You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, ¹⁵ for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 6:14-15).

The story of Israel's rise and fall is a story of the jealousy of God. When Israel was faithful in worshiping God, then the nation prospered. When the people turned away to worship false gods, the enemies of Israel were victorious over her.

Paul alludes to this principle with two rhetorical questions:

- ♦ *Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?*
- ♦ *We are not stronger than He, are we?*

These two questions are a warning to the Corinthians. It would be one thing to provoke God to jealousy if He were merely a little god with not too much power. It would be one thing to provoke God to jealousy if He did not meddle in human affairs.

But the God we worship is the God of creation. He is El Shaddai, the Almighty God. He is the God who parted the Red Sea, who made the sun to stand still, and who destroyed the Assyrian army. He is the God who stopped the waters of the Jordan River, who brought down fire from heaven and who struck down Ananias and Sapphira. He is the God who destroyed the world with a flood and who will one day burn the earth with fire. It is not smart to mess with this God. You may be able to bully a lesser god, but don't try it with the God of the Bible, because He just might push back.

There is a danger in taking God lightly. We are going to see in the next chapters that there were some in Corinth who had tried to push God around and now they were suffering for it.

*For this reason many among you are weak and sick,
and a number sleep. (1 Corinthians 11:30).*

There were people in Corinth who were having health problems that were a direct result of their disrespectful attitude toward God. This makes me a little uncomfortable. It ought to. That doesn't mean I need to be terrified of God, but it does mean that I need to take God seriously.

IN SEARCH OF A CHRISTIAN ETHIC

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

The question of ethics arises whenever people come together. Every argument anticipates them. The way in which we live indicates that we have definite opinions on them. Even in this age where situation ethics is the norm and when relativism is assumed, we continue to operate on the basis that there is such a thing as right and wrong.

The Christian has different ideas of right and wrong than those of the world. This is becoming increasingly clear as our society moves into a post-Christian era. As western society moves further and further from its Christian roots, the gap between Christian ethics versus the ethics of our society also has widened.

Here lies a danger. It is that, as we are complacent about this widening gap, our ethics will follow in the wake of the world's ethics. This is the problem we have seen in Corinth. The believers had begun to focus on living a lifestyle that was somewhat better than that of the society around them. They had ignored the fact that Christianity is not merely a cut above the ethics of the local community. Christianity has its own set of ethical principles that operate independently of local ethics.

Another problem is that many times Christians cannot come to an agreement on what constitutes a proper Christian ethic. How are we to live? How are we to determine the standard of our lives? How are we to find the proper ethic?

Any ethic that is adopted will have one of three factors as its base:

- ♦ Law.

This ethical basis reached its epitome in Judaism as seen in the

legalism of the Pharisees. Their entire lives were structured around a rigid code of conduct. The problem was that they came to the point where they began to worship the code instead the God behind the code.

- ◆ Liberty.

We do indeed have liberty in Christ; but that liberty is not a license to loose living. It is not a license to sin. Rather it is a freedom to serve Christ.

- ◆ Love.

When we think of love, we are bound to think of the example of Jesus. The question is often asked, “What would Jesus do?” That is a good question. Yet there is also a problem with seeing only love as the basis for the Christian ethic. It is that this opens the door for a “situation ethic” in which anything is considered to be okay as long as it achieves a loving result. Under this philosophy the end justifies the means. It is okay to partake in immorality if it will show love to someone. It is acceptable to steal if it will produce a good result. Lying and cheating are not wrong if they are done to achieve and honorable end.

What approach is taught in the Bible? I would like to suggest that the Biblical approach includes all three of these factors.

1. A Christian Ethic is Legal.

There are certain things that God’s people do or don’t do simply because we have been told to do or not to do them. This does not mean that God is a legalist. It does not mean that He deals with us only on the basis of how we measure up to certain rules. But He IS a God of law.

- ◆ God has placed parents in authority over their children.
- ◆ He has placed schools in authority over the students.
- ◆ He has placed government agencies in authority over nations.
- ◆ He has placed elders in authority over churches.

This does not mean that God is legalistic. Legalism has a wrong

attitude toward law. It involves self-glorification on the basis of keeping laws. It involves self righteousness.

2. A Christian Ethic involves Liberty.

There are certain areas of liberty in the Christian life. We have been set free from the Old Testament ceremonies and customs. More than that, we are free to do all things that fall between that which is commanded and that which is forbidden.

This means we can eat anything that is not absolutely harmful. It means we can wear anything that does not involve immodesty. It gives us freedom in grooming. It gives us freedom in the observing of days. However, liberty without corresponding responsibility can be dangerous. This brings us to the third point.

3. A Christian Ethic must include Love.

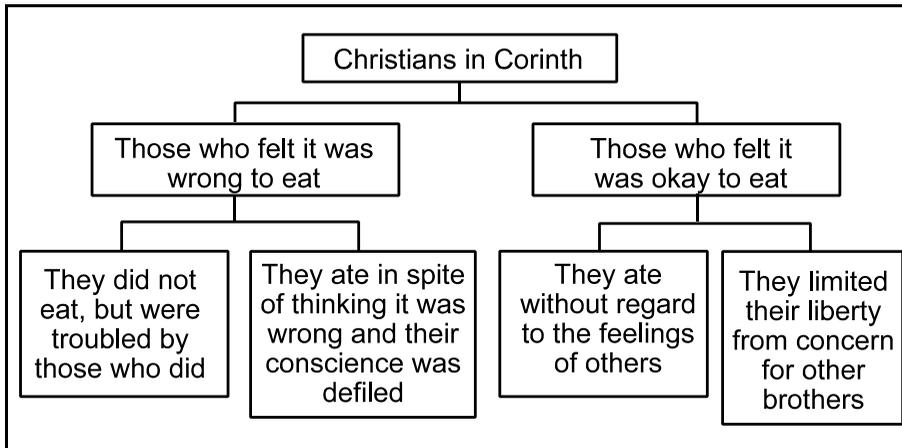
When Jesus sat with His disciples in the Upper Room, He gave them a new commandment. It was a command to love.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35).

We are to love one another. The measure of this love is the love that Jesus had for us. He says to us, “*Love one another, even as I have loved you.*” That is the kind of love we are to have for one another.

At this point, you might be thinking, “That is all very nice, but what does it have to do with the epistle to the Corinthians?” It has everything to do with it. Paul has been dealing with an ethical problem in Corinth. It is the problem of eating meat that had been offered to idols.

When you went to the marketplace in Corinth, the best slice of sirloin that you could buy had Apollo’s stamp of approval. This made it “kosher” in Greek society. Some Christians saw no problem with eating such meat and exercised their liberty accordingly. Other Christians views the eating of such meat as sinful participation in idolatry.



As Paul has dealt with this problem, he has already given the law of God concerning idolatry. He has shown the Corinthians the liberty that they have in Christ to eat or not to eat. And now he comes to the responsibility of love.

THE PRINCIPLE OF EDIFICATION

*All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable.
All things are lawful, but not all things edify. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).*

Paul's desire is to go beyond the law. He will not do this the way the Pharisees did it. The Pharisees wanted to go beyond the law, so they made up a whole bunch of other laws. They thought that the more laws they had, the closer to God they would be. They missed the point. The way you go beyond the law is not by making up more laws. The way you go beyond the law is by love. More accurately, love is the fulfillment of the law.

Love is always action oriented. If I love someone, then I will seek what is profitable for him. If I love someone, then I will try to edify him and build him up. If I love someone, then I will seek what is good for him. I don't need a law to tell me not to murder him or not to steal from him or not to commit adultery with his wife or to refrain from bearing false testimony against him. If I love someone, I will not covet his possessions.

This same love fulfills the law when it is directed toward God. If I love God,

I will not seek to replace him with the worship of other gods. If I love God, I will view it as improper to attempt to make an idol or other physical representation of Him. If I love God then I will want to take a day apart to devote to Him. Indeed, if I really love God and am resting upon Him, then every day becomes a Sabbath rest.

1. Edification is Rooted in Liberty: *All things are lawful (10:23).*

The Pharisees used the law to try to bind people, restricting their liberty. Paul counters by saying that all things are lawful. If it is not forbidden, then it is lawful.

This goes against the grain of a lot of Christian thinking today. Some preachers seem to teach that if it's fun then it must be wrong. It is no wonder that Christians walk around with such long faces.

Paul presents a very different picture of Christianity. We are free! We can do anything that isn't forbidden. We are a lot like Adam in the garden of Eden who was told, "You can do anything you want except to eat of that tree over there." We are also like Adam in that we find our attention continually drawn back to that forbidden tree.

We have great liberty that has been awarded us. But with that liberty comes responsibility.

2. Edification looks to the Good of Others: *Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor (10:24).*

This involves every area of life. It involves a totally new way of thinking. It applies when you are wronged. It applies when a brother sins. It applies when you see someone in need. It applies in the marriage and in the family and in the work situation.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4).

This is not natural. The natural man does everything from selfishness and empty conceit. We live in the "me first" generation. But this is

not the example that Jesus gave us. He did not think of Himself first. He put aside His own desire in order to serve us. We are to do the same for others.

SITUATION #1 - SHOPPING IN CORINTH

Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience ' sake; 26 for the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains. (1 Corinthians 10:25-26).

Paul proceeds to put into practice what he has already stated in theory. He does this by citing three illustrations.

Situation #1	Situation #2	Situation #3
Shopping in the marketplace in Corinth	Eating with an Unbeliever	
	Eating meat without knowing its history	Eating Labeled Meat
Eat and don't ask about the pedigree of the meat	Don't eat	

The first illustration is that of a Christian housewife who wants to go grocery shopping. She is faced with a problem. Much of the meat that is sold in the marketplace has been offered to idols. It is Hellenistically “kosher.” It has been identified with idolatry. If she buys the meat from the marketplace, she will not know whether or not it has been a part of this ceremony. What is she to do?

1. Permission to Eat: *Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience ' sake (10:25).*

Paul says to go ahead and buy the meat from the marketplace and eat it. You do not have to quiz the butcher on the pedigree of the meat.

On the one hand, Christians have no business going into a heathen temple to buy meat. That is not because there is anything wrong with the meat, but because something is wrong with the temple. On the other hand, if the meat has been brought into the marketplace, then there is nothing to prevent a Christian from buying it and eating it.

2. Reason behind the Permission: *For the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains (10:26).*

To prove his point, Paul quotes from Psalm 24:1. This passage teaches that everything is God's. It means that things in themselves cannot be considered to be bad. Only the way in which they are used is bad.

- ♦ Sex is not bad unless it is used for immorality.
- ♦ Food is not bad unless it is used as a part of idolatry.
- ♦ Drink is not bad unless it is used for drunkenness.
- ♦ Television and movies are not bad unless they are used to dishonor God.

Being a Christian means that you can enjoy God's creation. Everything that God has made is good if it is used properly. The world is God's gift to you.

SITUATION #2 - EATING WITH AN UNBELIEVER

If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience' sake. (1 Corinthians 10:27).

The second illustration is that of a Christian who has been invited to the home of an unbeliever for dinner. Should he accept the invitation? After all, it is possible that the unbeliever will have brought meat that has been offered to idols.

Paul says that it is permissible to go. He adds, if you do go, don't ask about the food that is set before you. Just eat it and enjoy it. Don't make an issue of it.

This is important. When we are with unbelievers, we should not be making issues over minor matters. An unbeliever does not need to be lectured on the evils of rock music or the importance of being morally pure or how bad it is to smoke or drink or gamble. There is one thing he does need to hear. He needs to hear the gospel. He needs to hear that Jesus died for us, bringing us

repentance and forgiveness of sins. He needs to hear that Jesus rose from the dead to give us eternal life. When we speak to him, we need to make sure that we make the main thing the main thing.

The world will always try to change the issue. Do you remember Jesus and the Samaritan woman? She said to Jesus, "Let's enter into a religious argument about whether men ought to worship in Jerusalem or in Samaria. Let's debate the ramifications of the regulative principle." Jesus refused to allow her to change the subject. He brought her back to the point of her need of salvation. We ought to do the same.

SITUATION #3 - EATING LABELED MEAT

But if anyone should say to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; 29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? (1 Corinthians 10:28-30).

The third situation is also assumedly that of a Christian who has been invited to the home of an unbeliever. In this instance, the host makes an issue of the fact that the meat was blessed by one of the false gods of the Greeks. In this instance you are not to eat of it.

Why? What made the difference? The meat did not change between the two instances. In each case, there was the possibility of eating meat that had been offered to idols. Now you are to restrain from eating it. What makes it wrong to eat now?

It is because now the idolatrous aspect of the meat has become an issue. Now the meat has become a religious symbol and to eat of it will seem as though you are identifying yourself with the heathen false god. To eat such meat after it has been pointed out as such would look as though you were giving approval to the heathen religion. It would offend the conscience of your host.

Paul explains this when he says: *I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's (10:29)*. You might know full well that meat does not make you

more or less spiritual. Meat is God's creation and is not bad in itself. But not all men know this. That unbeliever who invited you to dinner views that meat as having special properties. He thinks that anyone who knowingly eats of that meat is identifying himself with the god to whom that meat was offered. If he sees you eat that meat, then he will think that you look with favor on his religious system. Thus it is not because of your conscience that you did not eat, but because of his.

THE PRINCIPLE OF GLORIFICATION

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31).

In verse 24 Paul gave the principle of edification, that we are to seek to build others up in all that we do. Now he gives us the principle of glorification, that we are to seek to glorify God in all that we do.

What are you to do? Are you a fire fighter? Fight fires for the glory of God. Are you a postal worker? Deliver those letters to the glory of God. Are you a housewife? Work in your home and in your family to the glory of God.

There are not some occupations that are spiritual in nature and others that are merely secular. There are not some men who are paid to be good while the rest of us are good for nothing. When it comes to professional occupations, one can do anything that is not sin to the glory of God.

This tells me something about Christianity. It is a full-time occupation. You are not just a Christian on Sunday morning when you come to church. If you really are a Christian, then you are a Christian when you go to work on Monday morning and that fact should make you work differently. You are not merely working for a paycheck. You are working for the glory of God. If you are a Christian, then you are a Christian when you go out on a date on Friday night. God is with you on that date and you are to conduct yourself in that dating in a way that glorifies God. What kind of difference has Jesus Christ made in your life? He ought to make all the difference in the world. Your faith in Him should make a difference in how you work and how you play and how you act in all the times between.

THE PRINCIPLE OF WINSOMENESS

Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved. (1 Corinthians 10:32-33).

We have seen the principle of edification in verse 24 and the principle of glorification in verse 30. The first was directed toward other believers while the second was directed toward the Lord. Now we come to a third principle. It is the principle of winsomeness. It is directed, not merely toward other believers, but to all mankind. We can see the movement of this passage illustrated in the following chart.

10:23-24	10:25-30	10:31	10:32-33
Principle of Edification	Illustrated by three Situations ♦ Shopping in Corinth ♦ Eating with an unbeliever ♦ Eating unknown meat	Principle of Glorification	Principle of Winsomeness
We are to do that which edifies others		Do all to the glory of God	Please all men that they may be saved

This third principle is that the Christian is to be winsome. He is to live in such a way that his life does not offend others and he is to live in such a way that others are attracted to the faith.

Jesus was like that. He lived in such a way that people were attracted to Him. That is not to say that He never offended anyone. But those who were offended were offended by what He taught, not by His manner of life.

Paul says that we should *give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God (10:32)*. There are three groups mentioned by Paul. They are the groups that were present within Corinth. If we were to apply this to today's society, we might see them as the secular, the religious and Christians.

No action that I take should ever cause someone from one of these groups to be offended. They may be offended at my message. The message of the

cross has a way of doing that. But that is okay because then they are being offended with Jesus.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

One of the pressing issues that was seen in the 20th century was the role of women in society. With the advent of the Women's Rights movement, women were bombarded with all sorts of propaganda that did away with the old stereotypes of women who were happy to have a husband to care for her and her children. She was told instead that she needed to get a career if she was to have any worth. Years have come and gone and women who bought into that propaganda are today disillusioned.

The issue was not unique to the 20th century. It has existed through all the ages and it existed in ancient Corinth. Plato, the famous Greek philosopher, had been a major proponent of women's rights. He maintained that there should be an absolute equality of the sexes. But most people did not agree with that stance. Throughout most of the ancient world, women held something of a second class position.

The debate for women's liberation took a drastic turn in 180 B.C. when there was a mass poisoning of husbands in Rome. From that time on, women in the Roman Empire began to enjoy more and more freedom. By the time of the first century, women had the right to own property, to engage in business and to marry and to divorce whom they wished. However, they still could not hold public office and they were still not considered to be the equal of men.

It was in this setting that Christianity came to Corinth. Paul taught that in Christ there is *neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28). Whereas in Judaism only men were permitted to partake of circumcision, the sign of God's Old Testament covenant, in Christianity both men and women were baptized into the church.

For this reason, Christianity had become very popular among the women of

Corinth. Before long, there may have been women's Bible studies springing up around the city, teaching the equality of women.

It would not have been long before this new teaching began to be reflected in the service of the church. Women began to change their style of dress. Instead of wearing the traditional veil over their head, they began coming to church with unveiled heads. Paul addresses this situation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITIONS

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. 2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. (1 Corinthians 11:1-2).

Traditions are good. Our family has some traditions. There are certain things that we do every Thanksgiving and every Christmas. These things have become a tradition.

The church also contains a number of traditions. When we sing the Gloria Patri after collecting an offering or when we affirm the Apostles Creed or when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are observing traditions.

When I was younger, I used to think that we Christians ought to get rid of all of the traditions in the church and go back to only those things that are specifically mentioned in the Bible. But I'm older now and I have learned something of the importance of traditions.

Traditions are good because they give us a sense of continuity and a sense of unity. They bind us together with our past. They let us know that we are members of a spiritual heritage going back thousands of years.

When we affirm the Apostles Creed, we are reminded that Christians have been affirming those same words for generation after generation. We are reminded of the lineage in which we share. Our religion is not one that has only recently been conceived. It has stood the test of time.

At the same time, we ought to note that there is a danger to traditions. It is that we lose sight of the meaning behind our traditions. That is what happened to the Pharisees. Over hundreds of years, they had built up a series of traditions. But they had begun to focus on the tradition and to forget about

the truth behind the tradition. They faithfully kept the Sabbath but, instead of using it to benefit man, they turned it into a burden for man. They observed the ceremonial washing of their hands, but ignored their spiritual pollution.

It is for this reason that, as Paul prepares to discuss the tradition of the veiled woman, he does not begin with the tradition, but with the Scriptural truth behind the tradition.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBORDINATION

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:3).

I want you to notice right at the outset that Paul does not merely say that “man is the head of the woman” and leave it at that. This passage and others have been used in the past as a club to beat down Christian women and to say that they are second class citizens.

Does this passage teach that women have an unworthy role in the church? Does it imply that they lose privileges by becoming Christians? Not at all. I think it is for this reason that Paul presents three distinct areas of subordination within God’s kingdom.

- ♦ Man is subordinate to Christ.
- ♦ Woman is subordinate to man.
- ♦ Christ is subordinate to God.

We can see from this that the principle of subordination is a universal principle. Everything that exists in the universe is subordinate to someone. Even Jesus became subordinate to the Father.

1. Man’s Subordination to Christ: *But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every (11:3).*

Jesus is the head of the church. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is the ruler of all men. He is either your Savior or He is your Judge, but in either case, He will be Lord of all.

There is coming a day when every knee shall bow to Him and when all men will recognize His lordship.

2. Woman's Subordination to Man: *The man is the head of a woman (11:3).*

Just as the first aspect of the principle of subordination applies universally to all men, so also this second aspect of the principle of subordination applies universally to all women. Just as men are ultimately subordinate to Christ, so also women are ultimately subordinate to men.

This principle can be observed all throughout history. Despite repeated attempts to "liberate women" and to make them equal, they have always been ultimately subordinate to men.

Paul does not argue why this is the case. He simply states it as an observable principle of fact.

3. Christ's Subordination to the Father: *God is the head of Christ (11:3).*

Jesus made it very clear that He was in submission to the Father: *For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me (John 6:38).*

The entire life of Jesus was characterized by submission to the Father. This is the divine example we are to follow. If you are a Christian, then you are here to do the will of Him who called you and who saved you.

This brings us to a question. Is Jesus Christ any less fulfilled because He has submitted Himself to the Father? Did He lose anything by accepting this subordination? Not at all. He has gained by it a position of authority and power. Is a man any less fulfilled because he has submitted himself to the lordship of Jesus? In no way. The way to fulfillment is through the recognition that Jesus is Lord and through subordination to His authority.

By the same token, the way a woman is fulfilled is not by rejecting and fighting against this principle of subordination, but by accepting

it as the divine design for her life. She will find her greatest possible fulfillment in this relationship to her husband.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED

4 Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head. 5 But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved.

6 For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. (1 Corinthians 11:4-6).

Paul now moves from the principle to the application of that principle within the church. It is never enough merely to be aware of godly principles. They must also be applied in your life. Knowledge without application is worse than ignorance.

1. The Principle Applied for Men: *Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head (11:4).*

The setting for this application seems to be the meeting of the church. Notice that there are two activities that are described:

1st Activity	Praying	Directed from man to God
2nd Activity	Prophesying	Directed from God to man

The Jewish practice of having men cover their heads while praying would not begin until the 4th century. At this time, it was the practice for men to have their heads uncovered when praying or prophesying.

In Corinth, it would have appeared to be completely ridiculous for a man to pray or to prophesy with his head covered. It would be like a preacher standing in a local church with ribbons in his hair or clothed in a dress. Such apparel that is perfectly acceptable on a

woman is silly when worn by a man.

2. The Principle Applied for Women: *But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head (11:4).*

The women's liberation movement had come to Corinth and it was rearing its head in the meeting of the church. There were women in the church at Corinth who were praying and prophesying in the meeting of the church. There was nothing wrong with this. What was wrong was that they were engaging in these activities with their heads uncovered. Contrary to the accepted practice, they were participating in the service of the church without wearing the traditional veil.

There is a lesson here. It is that you can be doing good things in a bad way. It is good to pray. It is good to prophesy. But it is not good to engage in these activities in a way that brings dishonor to the Lord.

It is good to teach a Bible study. It is good to give money to the church. It is good to share the gospel. But even these things can be done in a wrong way. The point is that you need to do the right thing in the right way.

The problem with a woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered is that *she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved (11:6)*. The shaving of a woman's head was a sign of disgrace. Within the Roman society, it was done to the unfaithful wife. A woman whose head had been shaved bore a mark of disfavor. Her hair, the mark of her beauty, had been shorn from her head.

Paul is going to give five reasons why it is so important that a woman demonstrate her subordination through the wearing of a veil on her head.

- ♦ Because of creation and its order (11:7-9).
- ♦ Because of the angels (11:10).
- ♦ Because of the arrangement of life (11:11-12).
- ♦ Because of propriety (11:13-15).
- ♦ Because it is the practice of the churches (11:16).

Notice that these principles run from the general to the specific. They begin with all of creation and then move to angels before coming to the way life and propriety perceive things and finally they conclude with the practice of the churches.

BECAUSE OF CREATION AND ITS ORDER

For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. (1 Corinthians 11:7-9).

The first reason that women ought to cover their heads when praying or prophesying is because of the order and plan of creation. Woman did not become subordinate to man as a result of sin. She was originally created to be subordinate to man. This is very clear from the creation account.

1. Man was Created in the Image of God: *For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God (11:7).*

Man was made in the image and glory of God. There is a sense in which he was made as a scale model of God. There is a divine aspect to man. We must immediately point out that this aspect is limited. It is finite whereas God is infinite. Furthermore, that image has been dirtied by sin. But it is still there.

For a man to cover his head when he prays or prophesies is to cover the head of one who in an image of God.

2. Woman was Made as the Glory of Man: *But the woman is the glory of man (11:7).*

There is a contrast when we see the woman. On the one hand, Genesis 1:26-27 tell us that both the man and woman were made in the image of God. On the other hand, there is a sense in which the woman was not made in the image of God.

Man	Woman
The image and glory of God	The glory of man
Does not originate from the woman	From the man
Not created for the woman's sake	Created for the man's sake

The woman was not the original pattern. While the man was made in the image of God, the woman was made in the image of the man. She was made to be the counterpart of man.

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18).

The woman was made to be a helper for man. She was taken from the flesh of man. A part of man was taken and from that part God made woman.

This means that woman glorifies man. If a woman is praying or prophesying, if she is talking to God or about God, then she ought to cover her head so that she will glorify God instead of glorifying man.

BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS

Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. (1 Corinthians 11:10).

The Bible has quite a bit to say about angels. They are magnificent creatures from God. They are His spiritual messengers. As such, they are involved in the transmission of our prayers and our worship.

Do you remember the vision experienced by Jacob? It was a vision of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. On this great bridge were angels going and coming between earth and heaven.

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John describes an angel of God bringing the prayers of believers to the Lord.

And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. (Revelation 8:3-4).

The symbol reminds us of the priest who stood in the temple and offered incense upon the altar. As the incense filled the temple, it would represent the prayers of God's people coming before His throne.

Angels are also involved in the revelation of God's truths that we proclaim. Moses met with an angel when he received the law from God.

This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you (Acts 7:38).

...you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it (Acts 7:53).

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. (Galatians 3:19).

Angels have had a tremendous involvement in bringing God's truth to men. They were seen in the transmission of the law and they were seen at all sorts of times in ministering to men.

- Two angels were involved in the transmission of the law to Moses.
- Two angels accompanied the Lord when He came and spoke to Abraham.
- Two angels met Lot in the city of Sodom and warned of the coming judgment.
- An angel wrestled with Jacob in the night and blessed him and changed his name to Israel.

- An angel spoke to Joshua and gave him instructions on how God would take the city of Jericho.
- An angel spoke to Gideon and commissioned him to drive the enemies of Israel from the land.
- An angel shut the mouths of the lions when Daniel was cast into the lion's den.
- An angel came to Mary and told her that she would give birth to the Messiah.
- Angels appeared to the shepherds and announced the birth of Christ.

If the things of which we prophecy were brought to us through the ministry of angels who are now present in our midst, then we need to take special care in how we prophesy and speak of the Lord. If the angels are watching our prayers and are involved in their transmission, then perhaps we ought to take special care how we pray.

BECAUSE OF THE ARRANGEMENT OF LIFE

However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. (1 Corinthians 11:11-12).

There was a women's liberation movement going on in Corinth and it was moving in the wrong direction. This movement failed to recognize that women cannot normally be fulfilled apart from man and more than man can normally be fulfilled apart from woman. God created two separate and distinct genders because one was not enough.

This means that a man is not more important than a woman. One gender cannot think of itself as more important than another. Understanding this principle sets a woman free to be a woman. She does not have to be independent from man and she does not have to do the identical work of a man in order to be significant. She does not become significant by denying her sexuality. Indeed, her significance is seen in her relationship with man. It is in the midst of her subordination to man that man becomes dependent upon her.

BECAUSE OF PROPRIETY

Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (1 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Paul now makes an appeal to that which is proper. He says that a woman should wear a veil because it is considered acceptable in that society that she should be thus adorned.

Many women today think that it does not matter what they wear or how they fix their hair. But the way you adorn yourself on the outside is a reflection of your attitudes on the inside. What sort of image do you portray in the way you groom yourself? What sort of picture do you present in the clothes that you wear? These outward signs are a reflection of some inner attitudes.

Paul asks two rhetorical questions in verses 14-15: *Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her?*

This brings us to a question. Does nature teach you that long hair on a man is a dishonor? How does nature teach that a woman's long hair is a glory to here? I have come to the conclusion that this is not referring to the animal kingdom when it speaks of "nature." It is not looking at nature in the biological sense. Rather, it describes the nature of society.

Women in almost all cultures have worn their hair longer than men. The styles in which women have traditionally worn their hair have been distinctly feminine.

In Greek philosophy, cultural customs were perceived as extensions of natural law. Similarly, Paul sees these cultural customs as an extension of God's created order of things. This means that a man praying or prophesying with a covering on his head is against God's purposes. For a man to wear ribbons in his hair is a dishonor. For a woman to cut her hair so that she looks like a man is a dishonor and a denial of the role that God has given to her.

THE PRINCIPLE ACCEPTED

But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:16).

Have you ever met a Christian who always resisted the norm? Have you ever known someone who always wanted to change the established pattern merely for the sake of change?

People like this usually thrive on argument and dissension. That is not God's way. God is a God of tradition. He is the same God yesterday, today and forever. This is not to say that there should never be any change within the church. I am not an advocate of the old poem that says:

*Like a mighty turtle moves the church of God,
Brothers, we are treading where we've always trod.*

However, change is not good if it is change just for the sake of change. Neither is argument merely for the sake of argument beneficial.

This brings us to a question. Does this mean that all of the women in the church today ought to try to follow the principles set forth in this passage? Absolutely. This is not a matter of liberty. It is a matter of command.

However, that does not necessarily mean that we must return to the first century practice of wearing veils. We can apply the same principle in other ways today. There are other ways in which a woman can demonstrate her subordination within the church. She can demonstrate her attitudes by what she wears, by how she grooms herself and by how she talks and carries herself. Does she appear to be rebellious? She probably is.

How do you present yourself to others? How do you present yourself to the angels who partake in your activities of worship? How are you presenting yourself toward God?

UNITY AT THE LORD'S TABLE

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

It was the night of the Passover. In a thousand homes throughout the moon-swept city of Jerusalem, Jewish families gathered around a table to remember the time when God had stretched out His mighty hand to deliver His people.

In an upper room on the edge of the city sat twelve men. Jesus and eleven disciples reclined around the table. Judas had already left the room, bent on his dark deed. As they ate together, Jesus did something new.

And while they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it; and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." ²³ And when He had taken a cup, and given thanks, He gave it to them; and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." (Mark 14:22-24).

It was no mistake that the Lord's Supper was instituted on the eve of the Passover. The Passover was a memorial of the mighty work of God in delivering His people from their slavery in Egypt. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of the mighty work of Jesus Christ in delivering His people from their slavery to sin.

Passover	Lord's Supper
Commemorates deliverance from Egypt	Commemorates deliverance from sin
A lamb was slain for each family	The Lamb of God was slain for the world
Blood applied to the doorposts and lintel	Blood applied to us when we believe

A meal was to be eaten in memory of the salvation from Egypt	A meal is taken in memory of our salvation in Christ
Observed once a year	Observed regularly

Just as the Passover was observed year after year, so also the Lord's Supper is to be regularly observed by His people. Within the church at Corinth, this was evidently a weekly observance. The people would gather together for a time of prayer and teaching and fellowship. During this time they would eat a meal together. The central part of this meeting would be the Lord's Supper. In the midst of this meal, some problems had arisen. At the root of it was the problem of divisions.

THE PROBLEM OF DIVISIONS

17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.

18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it.

19 For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you. (1 Corinthians 11:17-19).

In the beginning of this chapter, Paul praised the Corinthians for following the traditions that he had given. But now, he does not praise them. They were still holding to the traditions, but they were doing it in the wrong way.

Paul had established the tradition of the Lord's Supper as a part of the meeting of the church. The Corinthians had been following this tradition ever since. But they had neglected the meaning behind the tradition. They held to the tradition, but they ignored the truth that was taught by the tradition.

This is always a danger for Christians. We have traditions in our church. We have certain things that we do that we have always done. There is nothing wrong with traditions unless they become meaningless rote. When our

traditions lose their meaning, there is a danger that we might continue in the ritual without the reality and think that we are still pleasing God. The result is that, instead of moving closer to God, we move further away from Him. This is what happened to the Corinthians.

1. **Worship Woes:** *I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse (11:17).*

When the Corinthians came together to worship, they did not come closer to God. They drew further away from Him. Their worship was having exactly the opposite effect that was intended. The meeting of the church was designed to accomplish three specific purposes:

- ♦ To Worship the Lord
- ♦ To Edify the Body
- ♦ To manifest faith and love and hope

The Corinthian believers were coming away with less than they came with. They were coming together for the worse instead of for the better.

Is church boring to you? That isn't its purpose. God didn't say, "I think that My people ought to be bored once a week." Yet the church service in Corinth had turned into a time that people began to dread.

2. **The Meeting of the Church:** *In the first place, when you come together as a church (11:18).*

I have said it before, but I will say it again, the church is not a building. It is not a denomination. It is not an institution. The church is the body of gathered believers. When you come together, you become the church.

3. **The Problem of Divisions:** *I hear that divisions exist among you (11:18).*

Paul has already spoken extensively about the problem of divisions within the church. The meeting of the church in Corinth was marked with dissention and petty jealousy. At the very time when the church should have been recognizing its unity in Christ, the people were

divided.

4. The Necessity of Divisions: *For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you (11:19).*

Paul recognizes that there are times when division cannot be avoided. When there is sin in the church, those who are righteous need to separate from those who refused to repent. This separation will result in division. If there is sin in the church and there is no division, then it means that sin is being accepted and condoned within the church.

THE PERVERSION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).

Paul proceeds to describe the Corinthian worship service. The service was much different than what we have come to expect in church. The church would come together to pray, to sing praises, to hear exhortations and teachings, and to eat a meal together. This meal had come to be known as the "love feast" (Jude 1:14).

Breakfast and lunch were usually very brief affairs in the ancient world, if they existed at all. By contrast, the supper was usually a formal affair. The family would sit together without the "benefit" of television or radio and they would talk.

As the church observed such a corporate supper, it was a time of close fellowship. The central part of this feast was when bread would be broken and a cup passed around in observance of the Lord's Supper. This should have been a time of great unity and holiness. Quite a different picture is painted for us.

In your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and

another is drunk (11:21).

Instead of coming together in an orderly manner to worship and to fellowship together, the Corinthians had turned the meeting of the church into a fast food lunch break. One member would walk it with his Big Mac and fries and begin to eat. Another wealthier member would have his servants lay out for him a full course. A poorer member would come with nothing and would sit in the corner watching everyone else eat while he went hungry. Down at the end of the table, one fellow was tying one on, getting drunk on the communion wine.

It should be noted that this sort of inequality at the table was a reflection of the culture of that day. Pliny the Younger describes his own experience in dining with a wealthy acquaintance.

Some very elegant dishes were served up to himself and a few more of us, whilst those placed before the rest of the company consisted simply of cheap dishes and scraps. There were, in small bottles, three different kinds of wine; not that the guests might take their choice, but that they might not have any option in their power; one kind being for himself, and for us; another sort for his lesser friends (for it seems he has degrees of friends), and the third for his own freedmen and ours. (Letters 2:6).

Do you see what has happened? The church was copying the world. As a result, the time that should have been a manifestation of the unity of the church was instead a time of division.

What is the solution? Paul does not say that believers ought to stay home. He does not tell them to kick out the pastor or to find a different church. Instead he offers a solution. The solution involves remembering the purpose of the Lord's Supper.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 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.”

25 In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Paul now turns to the true meaning behind the Lord’s Supper. This is the truth behind the tradition. Traditions are good as long as we remember the truth behind the traditions. It is when we ignore the truth and continue holding only to an empty tradition that the tradition becomes a bad thing.

For example, Christmas is good. I think it is good to stop once a year and to remember the birth of Christ and the great gift that God has given to man. But if you leave Christ out of Christmas, if you continue in the rituals of caroling and Christmas trees and giving presents and enjoying togetherness without remembering Christ, then Christmas becomes a bad thing.

Rituals are good, but rituals without reality are bad. It is for this reason the Paul brings us back to the reality.

1. The Bread: *The Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 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” (11:23-24).*

The bread that once was eaten as a reminder of the Passover and the Exodus from Egypt now represents the body of Jesus. We have all partaken of His body. This is why we call ourselves the body of Christ.

Instead of a Passover lamb, the body of Jesus body was given as a sacrifice for us. He died in our place as a payment for sins. He is our substitute. By our identification with His body, God sees our sins as having been judged at the cross.

Jesus pointed out that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it cannot grow into a plant that bears fruit (John 12:24). In the same way, the product of that wheat is now taken as a symbol of His sacrifice.

2. The Cup: *In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." (11:25).*

There were several different cups of wine that were served at the Jewish Passover table. They were thought to represent the blessings of God for His people. They were said to represent the provisions and the promises of God.

Jesus gave to the cup a new meaning. Now the cup represents the blood of Christ that was shed on our behalf. This is appropriate because, even in the Old Testament, wine was known as "the blood of grapes" (Genesis 49:11; Deuteronomy 32:14).

In the Old Testament sacrifices, the shedding of blood always pointed to the death of the animal being sacrificed. When the priest took blood and sprinkled it upon the altar, that blood represented the death of an animal substitute. Shed blood represented death because the life of the flesh was in the blood (Leviticus 17:11).

This was seen in the daily sacrifices and it was seen in the annual sacrifices at the Day of Atonement. But the problem with these sacrifices is that they were never completed. Each year there was another slaughter. Each day another lamb had to die. Year after year and day after day with dreary monotony.

Then came Jesus. He is the final sacrifice. His blood was shed as the seal of God's New Covenant with His people. It is not like the old covenant that was made at Sinai. It does not involve the yearly sacrifice of bulls and goats at Yom Kippur. It does not involve the daily sacrifice of a lamb. It involves a once and for all sacrifice. It involves the ultimate sacrifice. It is perfect and never need be repeated. It needs only to be remembered.

3. The Remembrance: *"Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (11:25).*

The Lord's Supper is not a repeated sacrifice. That is one of the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. Paul does not say that you are to do this as an ongoing and unbloody sacrifice. Rather, it is a remembrance. It is a time when God's redeemed people come

together and pause and remember what God has done.

The problem with Christians is not that we don't know enough doctrine. Our problem isn't that we haven't been to enough Bible studies or listened to enough sermons. The problem with Christians is that we forget. Because we forget, sometimes we need to be still and be reminded that God is good and that He has done mighty things for us.

Our reminders are in the bread and the wine. These are the same elements with which Melchizedek met Abraham in Genesis 14. They serve as the reminder of what our Priest-King has done for us.

Bread	Wine
Grain falls to the ground and "dies" in order to be made into bread	Grapes must be crushed in order to make wine
Jesus had to die and be buried to nourish us spiritually	Jesus was crushed for our iniquities
Bread represents the body that was broken	Wine represents the blood that was shed

THE PRICE OF DISOBEDIENCE

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.

30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).

Having described what the Corinthians should have been doing, Paul now

proceeds to show the consequences they will incur if they don't start doing it. It is a reflection of the price of disobedience. The flow of thought is seen in the following chart:

11:20-22	11:23-26	11:27-32
This is what you have been doing	This is what you should have been doing	This is what will happen if you don't start doing it
Perversion of the Lord's Supper	Purpose of the Lord's Supper	Price of Disobedience

We could call this section, "The Importance of Taking God Seriously." We need to be reminded that the God whom we worship is the God of universe. He is not Santa Claus. He is not a sweet old man with whiskers. Neither is He an impersonal force. He is not a gene in a bottle. He is not a short order cook to whom you can say, "I'll have a couple of answered prayers and a big blessing to go."

He is the God who struck down His people for complaining. He is the God who killed Ananias and Saphira for lying about their offering. He is the God who inflicted Miriam with leprosy for bad-mouthing her brother. He is the God who sent two bears to gobble up a band of kids for mocking His holy prophet. He is the God of judgment and He is not to be trifled with.

1. The Description of Disobedience: *Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner... (11:27).*

Paul has just described what is an "unworthy manner." It is eating the Lord's Supper in a way that denies the unity of the body. It is eating the Lord's Supper in a way that ignores the meaning behind the ritual. It is eating the Lord's Supper while not recognizing that Christ is present.

If we partake of the Lord's Supper in a mere rote manner, counting it as merely another religious activity, we bring judgment upon ourselves. We side with the unbelievers when they say that the death of Christ had no effect.

2. The Guilt of Disobedience: *Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body*

and the blood of the Lord (11:27).

We have all seen photos and pictures of men of other nationalities burning the American flag and stepping on it and in other ways dishonoring it. They are not dishonoring a piece of cloth. They are dishonoring the country for which it stands.

By the same token, the dishonoring of the Lord's Supper is not merely the dishonoring of a potluck supper. It is the dishonoring of the Lord Himself. It is saying that Jesus died for no reason. It is making a mockery of the cross. That is dangerous. It is dangerous because God will hold such a man guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus.

I don't say this to keep you from partaking in the Lord's Supper. It is not as though only perfect people can safely partake. If that were the case, then no one would ever partake. Rather, I say this to bring you back into a right attitude. This calls for an attitude of self-examination.

3. The Escape from Disobedience: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup (11:28).*

Paul calls for self-examination. Sometimes it is good to stop for a minute and to take a cold, hard look inside. Pull out your motives and give them a thorough going-over. What are your attitudes toward the Lord and toward His table and toward the other believers who are seated around it?

It is by means of such self-examination that you can come to the table in faith and repentance. This will result in the Lord's Table being a time of purification for the church.

4. The Punishment for Disobedience: *For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep (11:30).*

This isn't speaking of Christians who were snoring through the sermon. This reference to sleeping is a description of those who have died. There were people who were going through hard times and some who were sick and some who had even died because of their blatant disrespect for the Lord's Supper.

Have you been going through hard times lately? Have you been fighting illness? It isn't necessarily because of some persistent sin in your life, but it could be. Perhaps you need to examine yourself. Perhaps you need to judge yourself.

5. The Alternative to Punishment: *But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged (11:31).*

God wants you to confront your sin and to deal with it. If you will do this on your own, then He will not have to do it for you. If you will correct yourself in repentance, then He will not have to correct you. Paul calls us, not only to judge ourselves, but to judge ourselves rightly. Why does he say this? It is because we have a tendency to judge ourselves wrongly. We tend to see ourselves in a way that is not in accord with reality.

The Lord's Supper can be a means of grace or it can be a means of judgment. Why is this? Because it is the gospel in physical form. It is the gospel being acted out in a visible manner. You can either partake of the Lord's Supper in faith, or else you can experience the judgment of God. That is what the gospel is all about. In the gospel, Jesus took the judgment of God upon Himself and suffered the death we deserved. But if we reject that which Jesus provided for us, then we take that judgment upon ourselves.

6. The Grace of Disciple: *But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world. (11:32).*

Notice that there is a measure of grace amidst the threat of judgment. Paul says that the very fact that you might undergo discipline today is so that you will not undergo condemnation tomorrow. Discipline is God's means of moving you to the cross. God spans in order to save. His discipline is to drive you to repentance so that you might be saved from His ultimate wrath.

A PLEA FOR ORDER

So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at

home, so that you may not come together for judgment. And the remaining matters I shall arrange when I come. (1 Corinthians 11:33-34).

There were other things that were also wrong with the meeting of the church in Corinth, but Paul is not going to deal with them here. This tells me something about Paul. He had a sense of priorities. He knew not to make mountains out of molehills when there were still mountains to be conquered. He deals with the major problems now and he leaves the minor problems for later. He does not say that the minor problems will be ignored. He will eventually deal with them. But now is not the time.

This is a lesson that we need to learn. We who are older in the Lord often come across an immature believer who has quite a bit that is wrong with him. Instead of recognizing the principle of priorities, we want to straighten everything that is wrong with him right now. Instead of helping him, we overwhelm him and leave him lying dazed in the dust as we go off to “help” some other poor unsuspecting believer.

We can learn a lesson from Paul’s example. He dealt with the major issues and left the minor issues for later. Make certain that you make the main thing the main thing. What is the main thing? It is the gospel. It is in the death and the burial and the resurrection of the Son of God. It is the work of Christ that was done on your behalf. Do not neglect the cross.

DIFFERENT AND THE SAME

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

When you trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, believing the work that He accomplished on the cross and accepting His perfect sacrifice on your behalf, you received a new identity. You have become a new person. You are not the old person you used to be. You have a new identity. This new identity is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ.

Because He is the Son of God, you are also a child of God. Because He has eternal life, you also have eternal life. Because He is righteous, you have also been declared to be righteous. Because He was crucified, you are considered to have been crucified with Christ in the eyes of the law. Because He rose from the dead, you will also rise from the dead and are even today considered to be risen with Christ. Because He is the Heir to the kingdom, you are also a co-heir with Christ.

That is not all. Christ has also given you a spiritual gift. This is a special supernatural ability that is designed for service to the Lord.

Most Christians today believe that spiritual gifts exist, but do not act as though they exist. We do not usually act as though God has equipped us with something special. If anything, we tend to act as though we were completely unequipped for any kind of service.

Paul sets out to teach the Christians at Corinth about spiritual gifts. He does this, not as an end in itself, but to show how there is to be unity within the church, even when we are gifted in different sorts of ways.

THE BASIS FOR OUR UNITY

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. 2 You know that when you were

pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led.

³ Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:1-3).

People often get the idea that the Bible is supposed to be deep and mysterious and that no one can really understand what it is talking about. Notice what Paul says. He does not want you to be unaware. He does not want to keep you in the dark about spiritual matters.

The purpose of the Bible is to reveal truth, not to hide truth. But there is a modifier here. The Bible only reveals truth to those to whom it is written. It only reveals truth to those who are “brethren.”

1. The Problem of a Past Ignorance: *You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led (12:2).*

This verse introduces a contrast. Paul is going to contrast the Corinthian pagans of yesterday with the Corinthians Christians of today. He contrasts what they used to be with what they have become.

What You Were	What You Are
Pagans (“nations”)	Believers
Led astray to dumb idols	Brought to Jesus
You used to say, “Jesus is accursed.”	Now you say, “Jesus is Lord.”

This is the same contrast that was seen in the early chapters of this epistle. It was a contrast between the people of the world and the people of God. It was a contrast between those who are of the flesh and those who are of the Spirit. It is a contrast between those who try to come to know God by their own wisdom and those who come to know God through the preaching of the cross.

2. The Partnership in a Present Declaration: *Therefore I make known*

to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (12:3).

There is no middle ground between these two positions. You are in one of these two camps. You are saying one of these two things. The entire human race fits into one of these two categories.

At this point, I can hear you objecting, "Wait just a minute! I may not have accepted Jesus as Lord, but I am not cursing Him, either." I have news for you. You cannot be neutral when it comes to Jesus. He will not allow neutrality. You are either on His side or else you are against Him.

"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters" (Luke 11:23).

If someone is not a Christian, then he is an enemy of Christ. He is ultimately against Christ. He is, in effect, an antichrist.

At this point, there is a temptation to become very exclusive. You may be thinking, "This means that anyone who doesn't belong to my particular denomination can be used for target practice." And so, I want to point out the rest of the story.

And John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to hinder him because he does not follow along with us." 50 But Jesus said to him, "Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:49-50).

One day, the apostle John comes to Jesus with some disturbing news. He and the other disciples had seen a man who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus. To make matters worse, this man was not one of the twelve apostles. Who gave him the right to go around casting out demons in the name of Jesus? He hadn't been to seminary. He didn't even have a Bible college education. He didn't have the approval of the Twelve. He didn't belong to their denomination.

John concludes, “Don’t you worry, Jesus. We fixed his wagon. Yes sir, we told him to cut that out.”

What is the response of Jesus? He says not to stop the man. Why not? Because he who is not against you is for you. If someone is not fighting you, then it is because he is really on your side.

This is an important lesson. Just because someone does not talk like you and walk like you and dress like you and part his hair the way you do does not necessarily mean that he is a pagan. Just because someone does not hold to your prophetic views or does not belong to your particular denomination or worship in your preferred style does not mean that he is not a Christian.

Christians come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. They come from all sorts of customs and social backgrounds. If that is true, then how can you tell whether or not a man is a Christian? Look at what he says about Jesus. Is he for Jesus or is he against Jesus? Does he try to obey Jesus or is he interested only in doing his own thing? Does he talk like Jesus is his Lord or does he talk as though Jesus is just another man?

This is the basis for our unity. It is that we say the same thing about Jesus Christ. We may do everything else differently. We may come from different cultures and different times; we may have different political ideologies and different philosophical beliefs, but we agree that Jesus is Lord.

THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5
And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6
And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who
works all things in all persons. (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).*

Paul now proceeds to mention three areas in which Christians are different. He does this to show that there is unity even with variety. Some of my closest Christian friends are people who are completely different from one another. Some are people with whom I would have absolutely nothing in common if it were not for Christ. But when we are bound together in Christ,

it is enough.

1. Unity in the Midst of Different Gifts: *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit (12:4).*

When I was a lot younger, I came under the ministry of a man who had the gift of evangelism. This man had a special gift for explaining the gospel and for drawing people to Christ. He personally led thousands to belief in Jesus and he taught others to do the same.

There was only one problem. He did not seem to recognize that there are varieties of gifts. He believe that, since he led thousands to Christ, that everyone else ought also to lead thousands to Christ. He taught that if a day went by and you didn't lead someone to Christ, then you were in sin.

Do you see what he was doing? He was demanding that everyone have the same gift that he had. He did not seem to realize that there are varieties of gifts.

2. Unity in the Midst of Different Ministries: *And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord (12:5).*

Just as all gifts are not the same, so also all ministries are not the same and all churches are not the same.

- Some churches have a plurality of elders while other churches have deacons who elect a single man to be pastor.
- Some churches observe the Lord's supper four times a year while other churches observe the Lord's supper every Sunday.
- Some churches baptize by emersion while other churches baptize by sprinkling.

Even when two believers have the same gift, it is often manifested in a variety of different ministries. In spite of all these differences, we still have a point of unity. It is that we have the same Lord.

3. Unity in the Midst of Different Effects: *And there are varieties of*

effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. (12:6).

Even when there are two different ministries that are similar in style and content, they still can experience different effects. One ministry may explode like wildfire, bringing in thousands of people. Another ministry may see a very gradual growth of only a few people a year.

Is one ministry of God and the other not? Is bigger better? Is smaller better? No. They are both God's ministry. He is at work in the big and He is at work in the small and He is the same God who works all things in all people.

THE PRINCIPLE OF VARIETY

7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

We usually think of this passage as one that describes some of the spiritual gifts. After all, nice specific gifts are listed. I've read countless books that cite this passage and then go on to do a thorough study of each of the gifts that are listed. One can even take a test that will tell you in which of these areas you might be gifted. While there can certainly be some value in such exercises, we ought to note that this passage does not describe these gifts at all. It does not tell us any identifying features of any of the gifts that are listed. It isn't meant to.

Don't miss this! Paul's purpose is not to tell us all there is to know about spiritual gifts. His purpose is to tell us that there is variety within the unity of God's people.

I think there is a reason for this. If Paul had given us a detailed description of these various gifts, then we would tend to be very restrictive in their manifestation. We might come up with a regulative principle of spiritual gifts that said we can only use the gifts in the way in which the Bible specifically tells us we can use them.

For example, let us imagine that Paul had related a vivid description of the gift of wisdom. We would then have a tendency to take anyone who did not match up to our expectation of that description and say to that person, “If you want to exercise the gift of wisdom, then you have to look like this and talk like that and dress a certain way and move your hands in a certain way.”

Instead, he makes the point that the gifts are manifested in many different ways. I happen to have a gift for teaching. But I have met others who also have a gift of teaching who are completely different than me and who utilize a completely different style in teaching. The manifestation of that gift in their lives and ministries are completely different from the way that gift has been manifested in my life. Is that bad? No, that is good because God has made us to be different.

1. Variety is Given by the Spirit: *But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit (12:7).*

Here is one definition of a spiritual gift. A spiritual gift is a manifestation of the Spirit. When you see a spiritual gift in action, you are seeing the Holy Spirit at work.

The Holy Spirit is invisible. You cannot see Him. You can only see where He is at work. Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to the wind. You can see the effects of the wind. You can see leaves and clouds and sand being blown along. You can see flags flapping and you can see tree branches bending, but you are not actually seeing the wind. You are only seeing the effects of the wind.

By the same token, when you see someone using a spiritual gift in a spiritual manner, you are seeing the physical effects of the working of the Holy Spirit.

2. Variety is Given for the Common Good: *But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (12:7).*

The word “for” introduces a purpose clause. Here is the reason that spiritual gifts are given. This is the purpose for spiritual gifts. They are for the common good. They are for the good of those who are a part of the body of Christ.

This means that the way you use your spiritual gift is very important to me. Your spiritual gift has been given to you for my benefit and my spiritual gift has been given to me for your benefit.

To use a spiritual gift for your own benefit and for your own self-interest is contrary to the very purpose and nature of spiritual gifts. They are not designed to be pointed inward. They are designed to be directed outward. They are designed to benefit others.

I personally believe that a lot of the confusion that is evidenced in the modern Charismatic and Pentecostal community could be cleared up by an understanding of this basic purpose of spiritual gifts.

This brings us to a principle. It is that Christianity is a team effort. Have you ever watched a football team? I am not a sports fan, but I have watched a few games in my time and I have observed the various members of a football team are different. Not everyone is a quarterback. If everyone tried to be exactly like the quarterback, the entire team would lose. Neither are they all tackles. You can't win a football game if everyone on the team is a tackle.

Everyone on the team has his own position and each position is important. If the left guard suddenly decides that he is going to take a nap, how is the rest of the team going to function? They will all lose because of the lack of one of the members.

The same is true within the church. When one of the members is letting a spiritual gift lie dormant, the entire body is going to suffer.

3. Variety is Given in the ways in which the Gifts are Described: *For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues*

(12:8-10).

There are nine gifts mentioned here. They are all different. Some of these are dramatic and some are quiet. I believe that some of them may have been present only in the days of the early church and some are still with us today.

What is interesting is that there are several other places in the New Testament where spiritual gifts are listed and those lists are different from the list that is found here. To be sure, there are some overlaps, but there is no passage to which we can turn that gives an exhaustive list of all of the spiritual gifts.

From that observation, I believe that we can deduce that all such lists in the New Testament are merely representative. Each is only a partial listing of the spiritual gifts and even if we took all of the lists and combined them, we would still have only a partial listing of the different ways in which God has gifted His church.

4. Variety is Given according to God's Will: *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills*

The spiritual gifts are given according to the will of God, not according to your will or my will. That means you cannot choose which spiritual gift you will have. You cannot say, "I'll have one of those and one of these and a little bit of that one over there." You don't get to decide which spiritual gift you have. That is God's decision and He distributes them as He wills.

God has made each of us differently. No two believers are totally alike. That does not mean we cannot have unity. Even though God has given many different types of gifts, we are the same because our gifts have come from the same source and for the same purpose. Even though we are different, we are one.

WE ARE ONE

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

One of the greatest desires that people have is to belong. It is seen in every area of life. I have only to remember what it was like when I was a child. The most important thing in my life was to fit in and to belong.

I don't think it is something that you ever outgrow. Look at the single scene, look at grandparents, look at the aged and the ancient, and you will see in all of them this same desire to belong. The reason it is possible to be lonely in a crowd is because, although there may be others around, you do not belong to them and they do not belong to you.

This deep need drives people to join fraternities, bowling leagues, lodges and even churches. I think that this is one of the key attractions to Christianity. It is a place where you can truly belong.

When you come to Christ, you get much more than a ticket to heaven. When you come to Christ, you enter into His family. You become a child of God. God becomes your heavenly Father. He loves you like a father and sometimes He chastens you like a father. You are now one of His kids. You belong.

That is not all. There is another side to belonging to the family of God. The family of God is not just made up of the Father. It is also made up of a lot of other children. These are now your brothers and sisters. You have been united with them. You belong to them and they belong to you. You are joined to them in a way that transcends every other bonding known to humanity. It is much closer than a marriage because a marriage is only "till death do you part." This relationship will not be sundered by death. It is an eternal relationship. It is a relationship that binds us in the closest possible manner. It is likened to a body.

THE BODY IS ONE

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

There is nothing more united than a body. I don't think of my body in terms of its parts. When I get up in the morning, I don't say to myself, "Self, you had better remember to take your arm with you when you go to work today." My arm is a part of me. I would sincerely hate to lose it. It is united to me and I am going to protect it at all costs. In the same way, believers are a part of a body. Because we are all parts of a body, we should not think of one another as parts, but as one.

1. United by a Spiritual Baptism: *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (12:13).*

To what kind of baptism does this refer? When we say the word "baptism," most people tend to think of a church ceremony in which someone who is dry gets wet. Baptism is much more than this. There are a number of different sorts of Baptism to be found in the Bible.

Baptism of John	Matthew 3:1-6	John baptized people to identify them with the coming kingdom
Baptism of Jesus	Matthew 3:13-15	Jesus was baptized by John to identify Himself with the kingdom of which John was preaching
Christian Baptism	Acts 3:38-41	Believers and their households were baptized to identify themselves with Jesus Christ and the cleansing power of His death, burial and resurrection

Baptism of Jesus' Death	Mark 10:38-39; Luke 12:50	Jesus was identified with our sins upon the cross
Baptism in the Holy Spirit	Acts 1:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13	All believers have been identified with Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit
Baptism into Moses	1 Corinthians 10:2	The Israelites coming out of Egypt were identified with Moses and the God whom he followed

Each of these verses makes mention of a baptism. But only in a few of them is the idea of water to be seen. The one idea that is always present in each of these cases is the idea of identification. When you are baptized, you are being identified with something. This is seen in every baptism within the New Testament.

Neither is this idea of baptism and identification found only in the New Testament. It is vividly seen in the writings of Xenophon, the Greek mercenary-general. He tells of soldiers who baptized their swords and spears in blood to seal a military alliance (The Persian Expedition 2:2:4). The idea was that they were identifying their weapons with blood so that they would be allied together against all enemies.

In the same way, Paul tells us that *by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*. When you came to Jesus Christ and trusted Him as your Lord and Savior, you were given a place in His body. You were placed into the body of Christ and you were identified with Him.

You now have a new identity. You have become a new person. You are not the old person you used to be. You have a new identity. This new identity is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ.

Because He is the Son of God, you are also a child of God. Because He has eternal life, you also have eternal life. Because He is righteous, you have also been declared to be righteous. Because He was crucified, you are considered to have been crucified with Christ. Because He rose from the dead, you will also rise from the dead. Because He is the heir to the kingdom, you are a co-heir with Christ.

This baptism of the Spirit should not be confused with the filling of the Spirit. They are two separate and distinct phenomenon.

	Baptism of the Spirit	Filling of the Spirit
Scripture	1 Corinthians 12:13	Ephesians 5:18
Person	1st person plural: “You were all baptized”	2nd person singular: “Let each of you be filled”
Mood	Indicative: It is an established fact	Imperative: Do it now!
Tense	Aorist: A once and for all action	Present: It must be done continually
Duration	A once and for all event that continues throughout eternity	A temporal event that takes place intermittently
Purpose	Places the believer into union with Christ	Empowers the believer for service

The baptism of the Spirit of which Paul speaks is a once and for all event in the life of a Christian. It took place at the time of conversion.

2. United in a Unity that Transcends all Boundaries: *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (12:13).*

The prejudices that existed between Jew and Gentile is unrivaled in all of history. The Jew would not even eat at the same table with a Gentile.

Likewise, the barrier between those who were slaves and those who were free was so great that one group were considered to be property while the other group were considered to be people.

Do you see what Paul is saying? There is not to be one church for Jews and another for Gentiles. There is not to be one church for slaves and another for free people. There is not one church for upper

middle class and another for street people. There is not to be one church for whites and another for blacks and Hispanics and Haitians.

We have all been baptized into the same body. We are all one in Christ. This is the only place of true equality. This is the only place where all men are created equal.

THE NECESSITY OF BEING DIFFERENT

14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? (1 Corinthians 12:14-19).

Have you ever stopped to think that it is good that you are different? Most people like to be the same. We buy fashion magazines so that we can all buy the clothes that are in style so that we can be the same. When you say about someone, "He is different," you usually think of someone who doesn't quite measure up.

God says that His people are different and distinct from one another and that it is good that they are different.

1. The Many Membered Body: *For the body is not one member, but many (12:14).*

Just as my body is made up of the sum total of its parts, so also the body of Christ is made up of many different members that are very different from one another. That is not a bad thing. That is a good thing. We are all different as members of the body and God has designed us to be different.

Have you ever been around someone who insisted that you have to fit into their mold? Some churches are like that. They want you to dress like them and talk like them and bomb your hair like them and use the spiritual gift that they use and, if you don't, then they say that something is wrong.

2. The Equality of Belonging: *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body (12:15-16).*

There were Corinthian believers who had bought into this line of thinking. They thought that, because they did not possess certain spiritual gifts, they were not a part of the body of Christ.

Can you imagine how silly this would be on a football team? The players would enter their huddle to plan their next play. Suddenly the two guards say, "Wait a minute. If we can't be the quarterback, then we will go and sit in the bleachers because we really are not a part of the team."

This brings up another point that we ought to mention. Christianity is not a spectator sport. You know all about spectator sports. We have become a people who are involved as spectators. A football game has been defined as 22 men who desperately need rest being watched by 50,000 people who desperately need exercise. Christianity is not like that. At least, it is not supposed to be. Christianity is a religion of involvement.

The illustration that Paul uses is a humorous one. Imagine the idea of a foot saying, "I've been watching the hand up there and he does all sorts of things that I have never done. He plays the piano and writes letters and pats babies on the head and presses buttons. I never do any of those thing. If that is what it means to be a part of the body, then I must have lost out. I guess that I'm not really a part of the body after all."

3. The Imbalance of Uniformity: *If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? (12:17).*

A healthy body has many different parts of the body to support many different functions. It is not enough for the church to support one function and to ignore the rest. To do that would be to cripple the church.

I believe this to be one of the dangers of the “one man ministry” -- a ministry that is led exclusively by a single man rather than by a plurality of elders. The leader of such a ministry has a tendency to push only his own spiritual gift and to ignore all of the others. Thus, teaching might become important but evangelism and the helping of others and faith are all left by the wayside. The result is a church that is crippled. God has not created a crippled church. He has given to the church an entire body with all of its members in working order.

3. We are Different by Design: *But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired (12:18).*

God has made the body as a corporate group of many working parts. He is the one who has assigned the various functions to the different parts of the body. This means when you take people who are different and try to make them the same, you are fighting against God’s design.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE PARTS UPON EACH OTHER

20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, 24 whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Corinthians 12:20-26).

We live in an age of independence. We are bombarded with a philosophy of standing alone and doing your own thing and being your own man. By contrast, Christianity is not a religion of independence. It is a relationship of interdependence. You enter that relationship through the door of dependence -- through dependence upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Once you have become a part of the body of Christ, you begin to experience an interdependence with other members of the body.

1. Interdependence Illustrated: *But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (12:20-21).*

In the illustration that we saw back in verse 15, the part of the body was saying, "Because I'm not like them, they don't need me." Now we see the member of the body saying just the opposite: "I don't need them."

Verse 15	Verses 20-21
"Because I'm not like them, they don't need me"	"Because they're not like me, I don't need them"

Independence is not a part of God's plan for His people. Neither does He have two alternate plans. He doesn't say, "Oh, you don't want to interact with other Christians? That's okay, we have this 'Go It Alone' plan that allows you to walk only with me." There are no self-sufficient Christians. I cannot do it without you. And you cannot do it without me.

2. No Unimportant Parts: *On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary (12:22).*

There are some members of the body which, at first glance, seem unimportant. When you first see a body, you tend to look at the face -- the eyes and the ears and the nose. You may never get around to noticing the feet or the knees or the spleen. But that does not mean

that these are unimportant.

The same is true of the body of Christ. There are no unimportant parts. God has no unimportant people in His church. They are all necessary.

Furthermore, it is often the most neglected or dishonored portion of the body that would be the most hurtful to the body if it ceased to function. These can turn out to be the most necessary.

3. A Relationship of Suffering: *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it (12:26).*

I hurt when you hurt, even if I do not realize it. When someone in the church is hurting, everyone ought to be saying, “Ouch.”

One of the things I hate to do is any kind of construction work. It isn't that I am adverse to manual labor, but it is because of my awareness of my own lack of ability in the realm of construction. I have to admit that I am not at my spiritual best when I am so engaged, especially when something goes amiss. Something always goes amiss.

When I am hammering a nail and I miss and hit my finger, I want you to know that my whole body responds. My feet begin to jump up and down and my eyes water and bug out and my mouth makes known the pain that is communicated to it. The same ought to be true when someone hurts in the church. Everyone ought to respond.

4. A Relationship of Honor: *If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (12:26).*

The unity of the body is also to be seen in good times. When something good happens to one member, then it ought to make us all happy. We are called to be cheerleaders for one another. We are here to cheer one another on in the Christian life.

THE PROVISION FOR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually

members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

31 But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:27-31).

Paul now gives us a list of spiritual gifts. It is not an exhaustive list. It is not meant to be. We saw another such list at the beginning of this chapter. It contained different gifts from the one on this list.

Paul is not trying to teach us everything there is to know about spiritual gifts. He does not tell us anything about how to recognize a spiritual gift. He does not explain what the gifts are. He isn't focusing upon the specifics of any one gift. Instead, he wants to teach us that God has made us different and that He has provided these differences for our benefit.

1. Gifts are God's Appointment: *And God has appointed in the church (12:28).*

God is sovereign over His church. He is the one who has made us what we are and He is the one who has made us to be different. He decided what those differences would be.

2. A Divine Order to the Gifts: *And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues (12:28).*

There are eight gifts that are mentioned here. As we have noted, they are representative and are not meant to be an exhaustive listing of the gifts. At the same time, they are given in a very specific order.

- First apostles.
- Second prophets
- Third teachers

- Then miracles
- Then gifts of healings
- Helps
- Administrations
- Various kinds of tongues

Paul seems to go out of his way to emphasize an order to these gifts by the use of the terms “first, second and third.” Why is this order important? Why is it even mentioned? Paul does not say, but I think it is because the first gifts that are mentioned are foundational gifts.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone (Ephesians 2:19-20).

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Notice the purpose of these foundational gifts. They were to get the saints ready for the work of service. They were to prepare believers to do the work of the ministry.

We often speak of those who “go into the ministry” as some special class of believer who is paid to be good while the rest of us are good for nothing. That is wrong. All believers are to be in the ministry. All believers have been equipped for the ministry. They have been equipped with spiritual gifts from God and they have been given a firm foundation.

3. Desiring Greater Gifts: *But earnestly desire the greater gifts (12:31).*

How are we to understand this passage? Is Paul telling the Corinthians that they ought to covet the foundational gifts? Such a command would be inconsistent with what Paul has been saying throughout this chapter. He has just finished explaining how all the gifts are necessary and how the one that tends to get the least honor

might indeed be that much more important. How then can he say that believers ought to desire one gift over another.

Furthermore, God is the one who gives gifts and He has appointed them according to His own will. Is Paul teaching that you ought not to be satisfied with your own particular gift? I do not believe so. There are several interpretations that have been suggested to answer this quandary:

- View #1: This is speaking of desiring the greater gifts for the benefit of the corporate church.

This view sees this as a call to desire that the church be gifted with those who possess greater gifts. It would be like saying, “I desire for my church to have a gifted pastor and a gifted evangelist.” The problem is that some of the gifts that Paul put in the first place were temporary by nature. Most Christians today agree that there are no apostles as there were in the New Testament age.

This view also has a problem with Paul’s earlier words that emphasize how all of the gifts are important to the health of the body. For Paul to now speak of the desirability of certain “greater gifts” would undermine everything he has said in the previous verses regarding the equal importance of all the gifts.

- View #2: Paul’s words are to be interpreted as an indicative rather than as an imperative. Instead of Paul telling the Corinthians, “You are to earnestly desire the greater gifts,” he is describing their ongoing actions as he says, “You are earnestly desiring the greater gifts.” The difference is between the imperative and the indicative and the Greek can be translated either way depending upon the context.

Imperative Mood	“I command you to desire the greater gifts”
Indicative Mood	“I know that you have been desiring the greater gifts”

Do you see the difference? Instead of telling them to do something, Paul would be rebuking them for what they have been doing.

This view sees the Corinthians as having picked out certain gifts as the best ones. They were attracted to those gifts that made them look more spiritual and that centered people's attention on themselves. They played a game called, "King of the gifts." They got into arguments over who had the best gift.

- View #3: The greater gifts are described in the next chapter and are exemplified by love.

This view suggests that Paul explains what he means by desiring the greater gifts by pointing to "a more excellent way," the way of love. It is not that this gift or that gift is particularly important. The important thing is not the various gifts. The important thing is love.

All of the spiritual gifts are temporary except for this one. There will come a day when preachers and evangelists are unnecessary. There will be a day when gifts of prophecy and of knowledge and of tongues will be no more. But love will never go out of style. Love lasts.

4. A Better Way: *And I show you a still more excellent way (12:31).*

In contrast to a focus upon what might be the greatest gifts, Paul proposes a better way. It is the way of love. This was the root problem facing the Corinthians.

The reason there were divisions in the church is that there was no love to hold them together. The reason there was pride in the church is that they loved themselves and their own reputations rather than each other. The reason there was a lack of church discipline is because there was no "tough love." The reason for immorality in the church went back to a false concept of love. The reason there were problems at the Lord's Supper was because they had no love.

If you come to this chapter looking for which gift might be held up

to a place of preeminence over other gifts, then you are in danger of missing the point. It is that the gifts are only a means to demonstrating our love for one another and for the Lord. It is not the gift that is important. It is our love that is important.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING OF ALL

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If ever there was a study in contrasts and comparisons, it was in seeing Jesus in the temple. A humble carpenter-turned-rabbi standing in the most beautiful structure in the ancient world. The One who was God incarnate coming to the place that God had established for meeting with mankind. The lamb of God standing by the place where lambs were daily sacrificed.

The people in the Temple knew that something special was afoot. The leaders and the laity had gathered to see Jesus. For a time, they listened to Him and then the questions began. One in particular was noteworthy.

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

37 And He said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:34-40).

Notice the question: Which is the great commandment of the law? Of all of the ten commandments and of all the other commandments that make up the Mosaic law, which is the most important one? The answer is very simple. It can be summed up in one word. Love. Love is the central core of the law. It is the center of the New Testament and it is also at the center of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 13 is known for being the chapter that deals with the subject of love. It is one of the best known chapters of the Bible. It has been called

a hymn of love, a lyrical interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount and an example of New Testament poetry.

Yet the first question that arises as we approach this chapter is to ask what it is doing here in the middle of First Corinthians. After all, 1 Corinthians is full of rebukes and exhortations. It is a book that deals with the messiness of the Christian life. It is shirt-sleeve Christianity. It looks at the spiritual life from a nuts and bolts perspective. We have read through issues of division and divorce and decadence and disgraceful behavior in the church and suddenly we turn the page and find ourselves drinking from an oasis in the desert of problems that make up this book.

Why is this chapter here? Did Paul feel as though he needed a break? Was he getting depressed by all of the problems with which he was dealing? Or did he merely need some good filler between chapter 12 and chapter 14 and he had this great paper on hand that he could cut & paste here?

I do not think so. I believe this chapter is central to the message and theme of 1 Corinthians. Indeed, the powerful message of this chapter is lost to us if we neglect the context in which it is given.

Everything that Paul has said up to now in this epistle has been leading up to this point. Love was the missing ingredient in the church at Corinth. They had a growing church. They had spiritual gifts. They spoke in tongues. They demonstrated the gift of prophecy. They prided themselves on their knowledge. They even had faith. But there was no love. This led to an emptiness in their Christianity.

All of the problems that have been described up to this point in the first epistle to the Corinthians had this as their root cause. There was a lack of love.

There were divisions in the church because there was no love. There was an aura of pride because there was no love. There was immorality among believers because there was no true love. There were lawsuits among Christians because there was no love. There were problems in marriage and there were divorces because there was no love. There were misuses of Christian liberty and there was inequality at the Lord's Supper because there was no love. Even the misuse of their spiritual gifts could be traced back to a problem in their lack of love.

Paul has examined each of these problems in detail. Now he finally comes to the root cause of all of these problems. It is a problem with their love.

THE NEED FOR LOVE

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Paul begins by showing to the Corinthians the importance of having love. To do this, he will employ a literary technique known as hyperbole. This involves an exaggeration or overstatement that is used to make a point without the necessity of being taken literally.

If we wanted to put this into the language of when I was a boy, we might say, “Though I was faster than a speeding bullet and more powerful than a locomotive and able to leap tall buildings with a single bound, yet if I do not have love, I am nothing.”

To present this hyperbole, Paul lists a number of feats.

- Speaking with the tongues of men and of angels.
- Having the gift of prophecy.
- Knowing all mysteries.
- Having all knowledge.
- Having all faith, so as to remove mountains.
- Giving all his possessions to feed the poor.
- Delivering his body to be burned.

All of these things sounded impressive to the Corinthians. They sound pretty impressive to me, too. They were meant to. You would impress me to no end if you had even one of these qualities. That is because I am too easily impressed.

God is harder to impress. The point that Paul wants to make is that these

things are all absolutely worthless without love. God is not impressed by any of these things. He is only impressed by love.

1. Tongues in Context: *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels (13:1).*

Before we go too far, we ought to ask a question. Is Paul trying to tell us that he speaks in tongues? Is he teaching us something about angelic languages?

No!!! He only brings this up to compare it to love and to show that love is more important. Yet I have had dear Christian brothers turn time and time again to this passage to try to prove a point about how to speak in tongues. “See, it says right here that Paul spoke in the tongues of angels and that is what I have to do if I want to be spiritual like Paul.”

Let me say something for the record. That isn’t what this passage is talking about. Paul isn’t telling people how to speak in tongues. He is telling people that love is more important than trying to speak in tongues.

2. Tongues are Useless without Love: *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (13:1).*

When we were a lot younger, Paula and I served as the youth directors for a small church. One of the things we did while we were there was to start a Christian music group. To this end, I wrote out the music for the trumpet and the flute and the two trombones that were to be playing. On the appointed day, we all got together in the church sanctuary to practice. I handed out the music to everyone and we began to rehearse the first song. It was complete and utter pandemonium. What I had not known was that each of those instruments plays in a different key. Instead of harmony, there was great disharmony.

That is what happens in the church where there is no love. You might have a group of really talented people and they might be completely equipped to do the job at hand, and they might even have a burning desire to accomplish their task, but if there is no love, then

it will fall flat. It is no wonder that the world often looks at the church and hears the clamor and bickering and disharmony and then turns a deaf ear to our message.

3. Prophecy is Useless without Love: *And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing (13:2).*

With these words, Paul hits a little closer to home. He goes from preaching to meddling. He points his finger at Bible teachers and preachers and evangelists and every other man or woman who gets up and teaches the word of God. To be quite honest, he points to me.

I find this more than a little convicting. You see, I am often tempted to look at my ministry of teaching the Bible and say to myself, “John, you’re hot stuff. You have a good grasp of the Scriptures and you find it easy to communicate and to open and to expound the word of God.” I am tempted to view my worth in terms of my Bible teaching ability.

This is dangerous. It is dangerous because, if I do not have the love of God in my life, then all of my Bible teaching and discipling and preaching is completely worthless.

Don’t miss this! The most gifted preacher in the world is not exempt from needing love as his motivation. If he is not careful, then his motive in teaching can become self-gratification rather than love. It doesn’t matter if he has the gift of prophecy and knows all mysteries and has all knowledge, if he doesn’t have love, it is worthless.

4. Faith is Useless without Love: *If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing (13:2).*

Paul seems to be alluding to the saying of Jesus in Matthew 17:20. After His disciples had failed to heal a boy who was demon-possessed, they asked Jesus why they had failed. He answered with these words:

And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this

mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you."
(*Matthew 17:20*).

Jesus was using the same kind of literary technique that Paul is using in this passage. It is the technique of hyperbole. It is the technique of exaggerating to make a point.

This doesn't mean that I can go out and set up a company called Mountain Movers Associates. It does mean that faith is a necessary ingredient in prayer. But as important as faith is, it is nothing if it is not accompanied by love.

5. Even Works of Charity are Useless without Love: *And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor... (13:3).*

Giving all of your possessions to feed the poor is a good thing. But without love, it is an empty thing. Throughout the history of the church, there have been groups that tried to approach God on the basis of poverty and self-denial. These things are of no effect without love.

6. Martyrdom is Useless without Love: *And if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing (13:3).*

Paul says that even if he is taken and burned alive at the stake, it does not accomplish anything without love. Remember that this was not a purely hypothetical situation. There were Christians in Paul's day who were being persecuted for their faith. But love is even required of a martyr.

Do you see what Paul has done? He has described the perfect Christian. He has described the bionic believer, the Christian with a double "S" on his t-shirt, standing for "super saint." This hypothetical Christian does it all and he does it all perfectly.

He would make the perfect missionary because he knows all languages. He speaks the words of God because he has the gift of prophecy. He knows all mysteries and he has all knowledge. He has so much faith that traffic lights click in answer to his summons. He has placed all of his possessions into the offering plate. He ends his Christian career in martyrdom.

He only has one fault. He has a lack of love. Paul shows that all of these other things this man has going for him count for nothing. Such a man produces nothing of value for God.

THE CHARACTER OF LOVE

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

The word “love” is possibly one of the most misunderstood words of all time. It has been used and abused by songwriters and poets alike. What is love? It is described in this passage.

Verses 1-3	Verses 4-7
The need for love	A description of what love is
The emptiness that comes when love is absent	The fulness that comes when love is present

There are fifteen parts to this description of love. Each part gives a different aspect of love. In the original Greek text, each of these aspects is given in the form of a verb. This is significant. A verb is an action word. This means that we are to understand love by looking at what it does.

True love is never passive. It is always active. It is never merely an emotion or a feeling. It always produces an outward action. This means that you cannot truly understand love until you begin to apply it to your life.

Paul has this purpose in mind as he writes to the believers at Corinth. He does not merely want them to come away with a good feeling. He wants them to change their lives.

The greatest picture of love is seen in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Look at the cross and you will see love in action. Therefore, we can say that

this passage is a portrait of Jesus Christ. Try reading through it and substituting the name “Jesus” for the word “love.”

Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind, and is not jealous; Jesus does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; He does not seek His own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Jesus is love personified. He is love because He and the Father are one and God is love.

1. Love is Patient (13:4).

Patience is the ability to be inconvenienced by another over and over without becoming angry or upset. It is the capacity to be injured without wanting to injure in return.

When you love someone and he has a fault, you don't reject him or judge him or push him to the side. You are patient with him in spite of his fault.

This is seen vividly when you watch a mother with a young infant. The infant cannot feed himself. The infant cannot clothe himself. The infant cannot clean up after himself. What is the mother's reaction when the infant that she loves makes a little mess in his diapers? Does she toss him aside and hurl insults at him? No. She is patient with his helplessness. She continues to love him.

What is the opposite of patience? It is short-temperedness. It is having a short fuse. We ought always to remember that we are beneficiaries of the wonderfully patient love of God, for this will help us to be lovingly patient with others.

2. Love is Kind (13:4).

Kindness is the counterpart of patience. Just as patience is the ability to take anything from others, so kindness is the ability to give anything to others. Do you remember the perfect standard of

kindness that Jesus set for those who would be His disciples?

“And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹ And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”
(Matthew 5:40-42).

This is not a popular teaching in the church today. Our society does not see kindness as a quality to be desired. We make heroes of those who fight back. We admire the man who points a gun at someone and says, “Go ahead, make my day.” We look with admiration to those who take revenge.

This is nothing new. Aristotle taught that the ideal Greek virtue was to strike back in retaliation for any offense. Vengeance was a virtue to the Greek way of thinking. If you do not believe that, just pick up some Greek mythology and read through it. Almost all of the stories pictured a hero who exacted vengeance upon his enemy. That is not the quality of love. Love does not retaliate. Love does not fight back. Instead, love is kind.

3. Love... is not Jealous (13:4).

Love and jealousy are mutually exclusive. Love doesn't become upset over the success of another. By contrast, the Christians at Corinth were characterized by petty jealousies. They were jealous of others who might have a better spiritual gift than them. They played games with spiritual one-upmanship.

4. Love does not brag (13:4).

Bragging is the counterpart of jealousy. Jealousy is wanting what someone else has. Bragging is trying to make others jealous of what you have.

Jealousy	Bragging
Wanting what someone else has	Trying to make others jealous of what you have

Love does not act this way. Love does not parade its own accomplishments. Love does not seek to make others jealous.

The Corinthians presented themselves as spiritual show-offs. They paraded their gifts before each other, even the ones they didn't really have. I think that much of their tongues speaking may have been phony, but their proud bragging was genuine.

Do you remember the example of Jesus? He had every reason to brag. After all, He was the Son of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. But He did not glorify Himself. Instead, He humbled Himself.

5. Love... is not arrogant (13:4).

Paul had already dealt with the subject of arrogance in this epistle when he accused the Corinthian believers of being arrogant.

Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. (1 Corinthians 4:18).

The Corinthians were proud. They were proud of their knowledge of philosophy and they were proud of their famous teachers and they were proud of their pseudo-spirituality.

6. Love... does not act unbecomingly (13:5).

Love is not rude. It seeks to make no offense. It is not tasteless or without tact. By contrast, the Corinthians had terrible manners. This was reflected when they came together for the Lord's Supper. Each would begin eating without regard to his neighbor. During the worship service, each would try to outdo the other in speaking in tongues.

Christianity should not be like that. We ought to be winsome. We ought to attract people to us by our actions. It has become commonplace in Reformed circles to speak of the "Truly Reformed." I love what Dr. Rick Cannada, president of Reformed Theological Seminary, had to say about this topic. He said that we in the Reformed faith ought to strive to be "Winsomely Reformed."

7. It does not seek its own (13:5).

This is one of the keys to what love is. Love is not self-seeking. Love always seeks the best for another.

This stands in contrast to the situation in Corinth. The Corinthians seem to have been seeking what was best for them. They were dragging one another to court. They walked all over the conscience of the weaker brother. They did not share their food at the Lord's Supper. They ignored sin in their midst and called it love, unconcerned for the spiritual welfare of the sinner in their midst.

This is a problem today. How many times do you hear people wanting to "stand up for their rights?" It is a good thing for use that Jesus did not stand up for His rights. He was not self-seeking. He sought our own salvation.

8. Is not provoked (13:5).

Love guards against being irritated. It does not become angry when something is done against it. It does not retaliate. It is not short-tempered.

Are you a short-tempered person? You might protest, "I only lose my temper for a little bit. It is all over in a few minutes. So is a bomb, but a tremendous amount of damage can be done in a short time. These explosions of "temper bombs" can cause great harm, especially if they go off on a regular basis.

9. Does not take into account a wrong suffered (13:5).

This is bookkeeping terminology. To take something into account describes the action of entering it into a ledger. The purpose of such an entry is to make a permanent record so that it will not be forgotten.

Love does not keep track of wrongs suffered. We could say that love has a good forgetter. God has treated us in exactly the same manner. He has forgotten our sins. He has not taken them into account.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account (Romans 4:8).

Our sins were put to Christ's account. They were written into His ledger and He paid their penalty on the cross. When we come to Him in faith, His righteousness is put to our account and written into our ledger.

10. Does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth (13:6).

Our society today seems to revel in unrighteousness. Turn on your television on any given evening and you will see an entire generation that rejoices in unrighteousness.

There was a man who was living in Corinth who was living in open incest. He was engaged in an adulterous relationship. The church permitted this sinful condition to continue with no rebuke or removal from the church. They sympathized with evil.

Love cannot do that. Love may act in kindness, but it will not do so to the exclusion of God's truth. Love does not have to abandon truth to be love. It can continue to love in the truth and it can hold forth the truth and still be love.

11. *Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (13:7).

Love is positive. It believes all things. It looks for the best in others. It is not cynical. It is not suspicious. It does not look for the worst in any given situation. If it does see the worst, then it continues to hope for the best. If even the hope is dashed, then it continues to endure. This makes love a force with which to be reckoned.

THE ENDURING QUALITY OF LOVE

⁸ Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but

then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.

¹³ But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

Paul now comes to the last characteristic of love. It is that love never fails. It is that love always endures. It is that love lasts. This is seen in contrast to those spectacular miracle-gifts with which the Corinthian believers were so impressed. Paul mentions three of them.

Gifts of prophecy	The supernatural ability to foretell the future
Tongues	The supernatural ability to speak in languages that have not been learned
Knowledge	Possibly a reference to a supernatural gift of knowledge

All three of these gifts greatly impressed the Corinthians. And yet, these are all temporary. They will all eventually go away. Only love will endure.

There are a great many things in this life that we presently enjoy that are only temporary. You might have good looks. You might enjoy fair health. You might have material wealth. You might be deemed popular. These things are only temporary. One of these days, they will fail. Even the spiritual gifts will eventually fail.

- Do you have a gift for evangelism? Your time to evangelize is limited. There is coming a day when that gift will no longer be needed.
- Do you have a gift for teaching? That is a needed gift today, but it will not always be needed. There is coming a day when that gift will no longer be used.
- Mothers and fathers, you have a special opportunity to minister in the lives of your children. You are their spiritual leaders. But this will not last. One of these days that ministry will be over.

Parental authority does not last forever. Spiritual gifts will one day pass away. But there is one spiritual quality that will never become outdated. It

is love.

1. The Partial and the Perfect: *For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away (13:9-10).*

To what does “the perfect” (τὸ τέλειον) refer? When we hear the word “perfect,” we ought to realize that it can carry several different meanings. It can describe perfection or it can also describe that which is complete or finished. This is the same term that Jesus used when He was on the cross and said, “It is finished!”

What is the meaning of the term here? There have been several interpretations offered:

- It refers to Jesus. Certainly He can be called “the perfect one.” The problem is that “the perfect” in this passage is in the neuter gender. It is unlikely it would refer to Jesus.
- It refers to the completion of the canon of Scripture. While I do believe that the Scriptures are perfect and complete, there is nothing in this passage to suggest that the completion of the canon is in mind.
- It refers to the Second Coming of Christ. This seems to me to be the natural reading of the passage.

We have knowledge today. We have knowledge of who God is and of what He has done for us. But it is a limited knowledge. We do not know completely. Neither do we know perfectly. Some of what we “know” has to be thrown out periodically. There is coming a day when our knowledge will be replaced by that which is perfect and complete.

We have prophecy today. We read the prophecies in the Bible and we interpret them and we learn of things that the Bible says is going to happen. One day there will be no need to prophesy because we shall have the fulfillment of all of the prophecies in our midst.

My teaching to you is partial. I am painfully aware of my shortcomings. I pray that my words might be tender and seasoned

with salt, for tomorrow I may have to eat them.

On the other hand, love is good for eternity. Love will never become antiquated. Love will never become outdated or go out of style. God may someday say to me, “John, your knowledge of that particular doctrine is wrong. We will have to tear it up and start over again in that area.” But He will never say that about my love if it is true love.

Do you see the point? It is that you ought to be more concerned with love than with these gifts.

2. The Childish and the Adult: *When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things (13:11).*

Paul gives the first of two illustrations. These illustrations show how it is important to focus upon the eternal over the temporal; it is important to focus upon love rather than upon various sorts of temporary gifts.

First Illustration	Second Illustration
Illustration of a child	Illustration of an image in a mirror
Children play with childish things	Mirrors produce a blurred reflection
Adults put away childish things	Face to face vision is better
Childish things = Gifts Adult things = Love	Mirrored image = Our attention to gifts Face to face vision = Seeing Christ

The first illustration is of a child. A child has a childish point of view. He is impressed by childish things. He plays childish games. He has childish interests. He thinks childish thoughts. But one day he becomes a man. The child grows up. His point of view changes and his interests change and his thoughts change.

In the ancient world, this transition from boyhood to manhood took place very suddenly. Among the Jews, it took place at the Bar-mitzvah. This was where the boy was taken and declared to be a “son of the covenant.” The Greek and Roman would had similar customs

where a boy was given his first toga and permitted to dress the part of a man.

If you have come to faith in Jesus Christ, then you are no longer a child. He has placed you into His family as an adult son. Now that you are an adult son, you need to act like an adult son (or daughter). Grow up! Take your eyes off the temporary and look to that which is permanent. Stop being so concerned with those things that will pass away and hold onto that which will never fail.

3. The Dim and the Clear: *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (13:12).*

Here is a second illustration. It is the illustration of an image in a mirror. Mirrors in the ancient world were not quite up to today's standards. A number of years ago, I was able to visit the Pompeii exhibit and it included some hand mirrors from the first century. I was surprised at how high a quality they exhibited. Yet as good as they were, the reflection seen in these mirrors was still not quite as good as seeing face to face.

The word "dimly" is a translation of the Dative Neuter of αἰνυγμα, a term that describes a riddle. It is from this word that we get our English word "enigma."
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That describes the kind of knowledge that we have of God today. We see Him pictured in the Bible and the picture is an accurate one. But it is nothing to the clarity that we shall one day enjoy when we see Him face to face.

4. The Partial and the Full: *Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known (13:12).*

I know God. But I only know Him in part. I can see Him only through the veil of the Scriptures. There is coming a day when I shall know Him fully. There is coming a day when I shall see Him face to face. On that day, I shall come to know Him in a greater sense than I can possibly imagine.

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know

that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (1 John 3:2).

You are going to see Jesus. You are going to see Him in all of His glory. You will come to know Him on that day, for you will be like Him.

5. The Greatest thing of All: *But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love (13:13).*

This is the conclusion. Paul closes his statement concerning love with these words. He has shown that love endures. He has pointed out the love will never fail. He has made it clear that love abides.

13:8	13:13	13:8
There are three things that will fail <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prophecy• Tongues• Knowledge	There are three things that remain <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faith• Love• Hope	There is one thing that shall never fail: Love

Now Paul expands upon that point. He points to three qualities that will endure. Just as we saw in verse 8 that there were three spiritual gifts that will be done away, so now we see that there are three qualities that will never fail.

- The first is Faith.

You came to Jesus Christ in faith. You believed in Him, trusting in Him as your Lord and Savior. You received His free gift of eternal life. You continue to trust in Him for all of your needs. You believed His promises on a day to day basis. You will always trust in Him.

- The second quality is Hope.

Hope is faith in the future tense. It is faith that looks forward to that which we expect to come in the future. We have a hope in Christ. It is a certainty that we shall see Him and that He will fulfill all that He has promised.

- The third quality is Love.

This is the greatest quality of all. Faith and hope benefit ourselves, but love reaches out to others. It is for this reason that love makes you the most like Christ. God does not have faith or hope, but God is love (1 John 4:8).

THE TRUTH ABOUT TONGUES

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

The year was 711 B.C. Dark times had fallen upon the land of Israel. From the north, the mighty armies of the Assyrian Empire, led by Sargon, had ravaged most of the known world.

Only ten years earlier, they had swept down upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the ten northern tribes. The Israelites had fought valiantly, but their defeat had been inevitable. Those who had not perished by the sword or by the siege-induced famine were taken captive. There was a holocaust in which thousands were slaughtered, mutilated and subjected to indescribable horrors. The few survivors were taken away into a foreign land. The Northern Kingdom of Israel ceased to exist.

However, the appetite of the growing monster that was the Assyrian Empire had not been satisfied. Now the Assyrians were casting their eyes to the south where lay the tiny southern kingdom of Judah. It was in this context that Isaiah proclaimed the world of the Lord.

*1 Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,
And to the fading flower of its glorious beauty,
Which is at the head of the fertile valley
Of those who are overcome with wine!*
*2 Behold, the Lord has a strong and mighty agent;
As a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction,
Like a storm of mighty overflowing waters,
He has cast it down to the earth with His hand. (Isaiah 28:1-2).*

Isaiah pictures the Assyrian Empire as merely a tool of destruction in the hand of the Lord. The Assyrian king is nothing but a pawn on God's chess board. He may be strong and he may be mighty, but he is also an unwitting

agent of God. It is God who has planned the strategy and the tactics that have been used against Samaria.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel has been guilty of turning away from the Lord. As a result, God has passed judgment upon them and has sent the Assyrian hordes to punish them.

Israel has not been alone in her sin. The priests and the prophets of Judah have also fallen from the Lord.

7 And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink:

The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink,

They are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink;

They reel while having visions,

They totter when rendering judgment.

8 For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, without a single clean place. (Isaiah 28:7-8).

Because of her sin, Judah will be judged in the same way that Israel was judged. Even now, the same armies that destroyed Israel are preparing to march against Judah. In His grace, God continues to give His word to them that they might repent.

9 To whom would He teach knowledge?

And to whom would He interpret the message?

Those just weaned from milk?

Those just taken from the breast?

10 For He says, "Order on order, order on order,

Line on line, line on line,

A little here, a little there." (Isaiah 28:9-10).

The plea goes out. Who will listen to the word of the Lord? Who will learn His teachings? If not the learned, then perhaps the unlearned. If not the aged, then perhaps the infant. If not the strong, then perhaps the weak.

If God's people continue to reject His message and if they refuse to repent, then He will bring a sign against them. It will be a sign of condemnation. It will be a sign of judgment.

Indeed, He will speak to this people

Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue (Isaiah 28:11).

The word “stammering” is misleading. It has been suggested by some that it refers to a guttural type of language. It will be in contrast to what would have been considered the smooth, poetic flow of the Hebrew language.

This is a prophecy. Notice what it says. God is going to speak to the nation of Israel. But He is going to speak to them in a new way. God’s word is going to be proclaimed to them in a way by which it has never been proclaimed before. It will be proclaimed in the guttural speech of a foreign language.

*12 He who said to them, “Here is rest, give rest to the weary,”
And, “Here is repose,” but they would not listen.
13 So the word of the LORD to them will be,
“Order on order, order on order,
Line on line, line on line,
A little here, a little there,”
That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared,
and taken captive. (Isaiah 28:12-13).*

Notice the purpose clause in verse 13. It tells why this particular sign is to be given. It will be given so that judgment will come against the Jews. It will be given so that *they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive* (28:13).

For hundreds of years, the Jews had heard the message of God from their own prophets and in their own language and they had refused to believe. But there is coming a time when God will send them prophets who will preach in foreign languages. In that day, if they continue in their unbelief, then they will fall under judgment.

*14 Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, O scoffers,
Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem,
15 Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with
death,
And with Sheol we have made a pact.
The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by,
For we have made falsehood our refuge and we have
concealed ourselves with deception.” (Isaiah 28:14-15).*

This condemnation is made against the rulers of Jerusalem. They are the ones who have placed their faith in man instead of in God. They are the ones who are trusting in their political deals and in their secret treaties to deliver them. They will be brought down. They will be destroyed. Why? Because they have not believed. Because they have scoffed and the provision of God. Because they have trusted in man rather than in God.

*Therefore thus says the Lord God,
“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.” (Isaiah 28:16).*

This is a Messianic prophecy. There is coming One in whom the Jews can trust. He will be the place of safety. The one who believes in Him will not be disturbed. Will the Jews believe in Him whom God has sent? Or will they trust in their own treaties and covenants with surrounding nations?

Jesus quoted from this same prophecy as He stood before the chief priests and elders of Israel. For three years, he had been traveling through the nation and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and calling on men to repent and to turn to Him. But the nation had rejected Him. The elders of the nation were plotting to kill Him. Before the week was out, He would be betrayed and delivered to be crucified. As He now stood in the Temple, He quoted from this Old Testament prophecy.

42 Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. 44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”

45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. (Matthew 21:42-45).

Jesus refers to Himself as the chief cornerstone. Though the leaders of the nation of Israel have rejected Him, He will ultimately rule and reign over the kingdom. Those who rejected Him will themselves be rejected. Those who judge the Son will find themselves judged and the kingdom will be given to

others.

They did not have long to wait. The sign of that judgment was seen within two months of the time when Jesus spoke these words.

Picture the scene. The city is alive with rumors. It has been whispered through the streets that Jesus, the Galilean rabbi who had been put to death has been seen alive again. Jerusalem is crowded with pilgrims who have come from afar to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. From every corner of the ancient world, Jews have gathered together on this day. They have come to partake in an experience of worship. They are about to get a lot more than they expected.

A sign is about to be given. It will be a sign of judgment. It will be a sign of condemnation on those who have not believed. It will be a sign of languages. It will be a sign in which the Jews hear the word of the Lord proclaimed in a foreign language.

And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4).

What are these “tongues”? The word “tongues” has both a figurative as well as a literal meaning. The literal meaning refers to that part of the anatomy that is utilized to lick ice cream cones. It describes the literal tongue.

The figurative meaning describes a language that is spoken through the utilization of the tongue. This is the meaning that is in view here. They began to speak in other languages. Their audience were people from all over the world and these people began to hear the message of Christ spoken in the languages of their homelands.

⁵ Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own

language.

7 And they were amazed and marveled, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." (Acts 2:5-11).

The passage is very specific in identifying these tongues as having been specific languages. There were Jews gathered from all over the world. Most of these Jews were bi-lingual. They would speak two and even three languages. But the last thing they ever expected to hear was the languages of their homeland being spoken here in Palestine and especially to hear those languages being used to declare a message from God.

This is not the only instance in which the miracle of tongues was manifested. Twice more the book of Acts records incidents in which this gift was manifested. In each case, tongues was given as a sign to those who were unbelieving. Sometimes the unbelievers were Christians as in the case of those who were not willing to believe that Gentiles could receive the Holy Spirit. But in all three cases, there is a sign that is given to unbelievers who need to see the sign and believe.

There were Jews who heard the message that day and who turned to Christ in repentance. But there were many more who remained in their unbelief. They heard the message of the gospel preached foreign tongues, just as Isaiah had promised, but they did not heed the warning. Within forty years, they were to see the judgment of God, just as their ancestors had seen a similar judgment hundreds of years earlier. Within forty years, the Roman legions under General Titus would march against Jerusalem, burning the temple and hauling the inhabitants away into a captivity from which they would not return.

It is in this context that Paul writes his epistle to the Corinthians. It seems that the sign of tongues is still being manifested. The exact form of that manifestation has been the subject of no little debate among scholars. But whatever form it had taken in far-off Corinth, a problem has arisen. It is

connected to the problem that we saw in the last two chapters. It is a problem in the lack of unity and in the lack of love. I want to suggest that this context is still very much present in this chapter. The flow of thought can be seen in the following chart:

Chapter 12	Chapter 13	Chapter 14
Paul teaches that there are many different gifts, but that each are no less a part of the body	Paul points out that having and exhibiting various gifts is not nearly so important as having love	Paul deals with the specific issue of the use of tongues in the church and how it is better to do that which edifies others

In each of these sections, there is an underlying theme of the importance of the unity of the church in our utilization of various spiritual gifts.

PROPHECY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN TONGUES

1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. 4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying. (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).

Up to this point, Paul has mentioned the gift of tongues only in passing. Now he turns specifically to this gift. Yet he does so in a round-about way. He does not call the Corinthians to set out to exercise the ability to speak in tongues. Instead, he calls them to *pursue love*.

1. The Priority of Love: *Pursue love (14:1)*.

In the previous chapter, Paul dealt with the supremacy of love. The Corinthians were inclined to put a lot of other things in first place. They were impressed by knowledge. They admired strength. They chased after what they considered to be the best spiritual gifts. The one thing that they tended to ignore was the thing that they should have made a priority -- love.

2. The Place of Spiritual Gifts: *Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts (14:1).*

Paul told the Corinthians to make love the most important thing. But this does not mean that he wanted to be understood as saying that spiritual gifts are not important. Spiritual gifts are from God. That makes them good and to be desired. They are only bad when they are used without love.

3. The Call to Prophecy: *Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy (14:1).*

Paul wants to put a special emphasis on the ministry of prophesying. He does this for a reason. He does it because he wants to de-emphasize another ministry. He wants to de-emphasize the gift of tongues.

Paul does not want merely to give the Corinthians a list of negatives. Christianity is more than a list of don'ts. Christianity is positive. And so, before he lists any negatives, Paul first begins with a positive. Before he says what he wants you to avoid, he tells you what he wants you to follow.

Paul calls the believers at Corinth to emphasize a ministry of prophecy. What is a ministry of prophecy? It is a ministry that does the same thing that the prophets did.

The prophets of the Old Testament foretold the future. That is why they were called prophets. By the same token, there are a number of instances in which men and women in the New Testament were able to foretell the future. This was a gift that was given to certain believers.

This is a part of ministry within the church that ought not be

neglected. Christians are people of prophecy. We look at the world around us with all of its troubles and we know how it is going to end. Have you ever heard someone tell a joke that you had already heard? It didn't take you by surprise because you already knew the punch line. We are people who know the punch line. We know that Jesus is going to come back and make all bad things good. He is going to turn all of the wrong things to right. One of the things that ought to be happening in our churches is that we ought to be reminding each other of these truths.

The prophets also had another ministry. They proclaimed God's future truth, but they also proclaimed God's present truth. They looked at the world around them and they pronounced God's answers to the world's problems. They spoke to the issues of the day.

This is another ministry the church needs to take up today. All too often, the church has faced critical issues by ignoring them and hoping that they will go away. But the church is not here to ignore issues. The church is here to proclaim God's answers to the problem issues that plague the world. In the midst of a land that is crying for answers, we too often are stuttering.

We have been entrusted with the answers to the questions that the world is asking. What we need to do is to speak in a way in which the world can understand us. We need to speak God's message in the language of our culture.

4. The Problem with Tongues: *For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries (14:2).*

The Corinthians had heard about the gift of tongues and they were impressed. They decided that it was just the thing they needed to spice up their church service. They began to speak in tongues within the meeting of the church.

What was the source of these "tongues?" Was this a supernatural gift of miraculous languages as is described in the book of Acts? Or was this a Corinthian counterfeit in which certain prideful believers stood up in the service and began to speak in languages that they had previously learned? Or was this some other type of language

speaking not previously described in the Bible?

We are not told. That is okay because the teachings that Paul gives can apply to any type of tongues. It can apply to the use of a supernatural gift and it can apply to the use of foreign languages within a bi-lingual community. It can apply to all sorts of speaking experiences to which Christians have laid claim.

Here is the point. When a man stands up in church and begins to speak in a language that no one else in that church understands, what he is saying is a mystery to everyone. God understands. There is no language spoken by men that God does not understand. But there are a lot of languages that are a mystery to me. I am only edified if I understand what is spoken.

5. The Advantage of Prophecy: *But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation (14:3).*

One who speaks out in the same way that the prophets spoke will produce something that speaking in different languages can never produce. You can speak to me in German all day and it will not do a thing for me because I do not understand a single word of German. A number of years ago, I had the opportunity to visit Germany and to speak in a German church. There was a problem. I don't speak German. And so, as I stood up in the pulpit to speak, there stood with me a translator. He happened to be, not only my brother in Christ, but also my brother in the flesh. He is fluent in German. I spoke in English and he translated my words into German and everyone who was present could understand one of those two languages.

One of the problems with the church today is that it all too often is speaking in a language that the uninitiated do not understand. We use words like "justified" and "redeemed" and "born again" and, unless we are careful to interpret our terms, then it could well be that we are speaking in vain.

It is like the two little old ladies who sat in church every Sunday. "Isn't he a wonderful preacher?" asked the one lady. "He certainly is. I can't understand a word he says, but he certainly knows how to preach!"

We need to make God's truths clear. We need to speak in a way that can be understood.

6. Prophecy and Tongues in Contrast: *One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church (14:4).*

There is a sharp contrast presented in these verses between these two ministries of prophesying and speaking in a tongue.

One who Prophesies	One who Speaks in a Tongue
Speaks to men	Does not speak to men
He is understood by men	Only God understands what he is saying
He edifies and exhorts and consoles	He doesn't benefit anyone but himself
Edifies the church	Edifies himself

There is a principle here. It is that spiritual gifts and abilities have been given for us to edify one another. My spiritual gift was not given to edify me. It is designed to edify you. Your spiritual gift was designed to edify me.

This means that if you are not using your spiritual gifts, then I hurt as a result. Your spiritual growth is important to me because it will benefit me. My spiritual gift is important to you because it will benefit you. We have a vested interest in each other. It ought to result in us being concerned for one another.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING WITH UNDERSTANDING

6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?

7 Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in

producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? 8 For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? 9 So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

10 There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. 11 If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. 12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. (1 Corinthians 14:6-12).

The purpose of language is the communication of thought. That is very basic. It means that if words are spoken that do not communicate and idea to those who listen, then the speaking serves no useful purpose.

There are a lot of people today who engage in something they call “tongues,” but which bears no resemblance to the tongues that are described in the New Testament. When these people babble away, they have no idea what they are saying and nobody else has any idea what they are saying.

1. Speaking must be with Content: *But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? (14:6).*

Speaking in another language merely to be speaking in that language is plain silly if you do not have something to say. Paul is concerned that believers have content to their speech.

Christians ought to have something to say. We have been entrusted with the truths of God. We have been commissioned with a message. We have been given revelation and knowledge and prophecy and teaching.

Paul says, “It doesn’t matter in what language I am speaking if I am not also relaying revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching. It is not the use of a language that is significant, but the content of what I am saying that is important.”

2. Even Lifeless Soundmakers have Content: *Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? (14:7).*

Paul illustrates the truth of communication with content by looking at the realm of music. What would you think if you went to a concert and the pianist merely pounded on whatever keys he desired without any thought to rhythm or harmony?

I must admit that there are certain styles of music that I appreciate over other styles. But all music produces a distinction in the tones. If it did not, then it could not rightfully be called music.

3. The Example of a Bugle: *For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? (14:8).*

In the ancient world, orders on the battlefield were relayed through the blowing of a trumpet. One note was blown to order a charge. Another was sounded for the retreat. There was still another for taps. What would happen if the bugler sounded taps in the middle of the battle? There would be people trying to go to sleep as the war raged around them.

4. The Application to our Speech: *So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air (14:9).*

When I was in high school, my younger brother took up the trombone. At least he attempted to take up the trombone. Today he is a professional musician, but not on the trombone. He doesn't play the trombone today and I can't say that he really played the trombone back then, though he tried.

There are few things in this world that sound worse than one who is trying to learn to play the trombone. There are no clear notes. There is just a lot of noise going on in every direction. By the same token, unless speech is clear and understandable, then it is just a lot of meaningless sound.

5. Speech implies Meaning: *There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of*

languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning (14:10).

The problem with the tongues-speaking that was going on in Corinth was not that there were no significant things being said. The problem was that they were not saying those significant things in a language that could be understood by those who were present.

If I were to stand up and to read the New Testament to you in Greek, I would be saying some very significant things. But the significance would be lost on you because it would be Greek to you.

6. Meaning needs to be Understood: *If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me (14:11).*

The Greeks considered anyone who did not speak Greek to be a barbarian. Greek had become the common language in Paul's day. Even in Rome where the official language was Latin, Greek had become the language of the marketplace. Bi-lingualism was the order of the day. Someone who could not speak Greek was considered an outsider. I am reminded of the story of the two China men who were talking in Chinese. A man walked by and heard them and said, "Hey, this is America. If you want to continue to live here, then you are going to have to learn to speak in Spanish."

The point that Paul is making is that if you do not speak in a language that people understand, then the significance of what you are saying will be lost to them.

The Roman Catholic Church used to conduct its mass in Latin, even though no one present was able to speak or understand Latin. People would walk into church and they would listen and they would not understand a single word that was said and then they would walk out again. This did not edify anyone. The reason you are to speak in church is to edify others.

Here is the principle. If there is no comprehension between the speaker and the hearer, then the speaking is of no worth. It matters not what might be the eloquence of the speaker or even the truth of the message. If it does not communicate, then it is useless.

THE NECESSITY OF INTERPRETATION

13 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also. 16 Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

18 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; 19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Corinthians 14:13-19).

Paul moves from the area of teaching to the area of application. He has shown the importance of speaking in a way that is understandable. Now he wants to apply it to the particular situation in Corinth.

1. Interpretation is Necessary: *Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret (14:13).*

Paul does not want to outlaw bi-lingualism in the church. Neither does he wish to outlaw the legitimate use of a supernatural gift. He does want believers to be concerned about making the truths they speak understandable to all who are present.

There is a lesson that we ought to learn. Those of us who have been Christians for a very long time can find ourselves speaking in a language that is not understandable to all who are present. We find ourselves using terms like "born again" and "justification" and "reformed theology." We might as well be speaking Greek or Hebrew for all that is being communicated. That is not to say that such terms never ought to be used. But they should be interpreted. They should always be explained.

2. Interpretation is Fruitful: *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful (14:14).*

What does this mean? Does it mean that a person who speaks in a tongue does not understand what he himself is saying? I do not think so. Paul has just said that his spirit prays. The problem is one of mental unfruitfulness. He has prayed, but his message has not been understood. It has edified no one.

3. Interpretation involves the Mind: *What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also (14:15).*

Paul concludes that he will not merely pray so that he can understand it and his own spirit is edified, but he shall pray so that others also will have understanding.

When we open in prayer in our Sunday morning service, we typically pray in a common language. When we open our hymnbook to sing praises, we typically sing them in a common language. It is not that God cannot understand other languages. It is because we want all of the people who are gathered in the worship service to understand.

4. Interpretation leads to Unified Worship: *Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? (14:16).*

If you pray or sing or speak or bless in a language that you know but which the other people in the worship service do not know, then how will they be able to participate in your worship? How will they be able to say, "Amen," as the end of your prayer?

The word, "Amen," is transliterated from the Hebrew. It is a Hebrew word that is written here in Greek letters. It is a word of acknowledgment and agreement. It signifies that what has been said is true. But you can only agree with what has been said if you know and understand what has been said.

5. Interpretation leads to Edification: *For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified (14:17).*

The reason that Paul wants people in the church to speak in a common language is not so that God might avoid confusion. It is so

that men might be edified. It is for the sake of the person sitting in the pew next to you.

6. More is not Better: *I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; 19 however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue (14:18-19).*

There is no record in the Bible of Paul having a supernatural gift of tongues. He did have other supernatural gifts. He was able to heal. He was given visions from God. He prophesied. But we know of no time when he spoke in supernatural tongues. If there is such an instance, it is not recorded in the Scriptures.

On the other hand, we do have some indications that Paul was conversant in multiple languages. In Acts 21:37, he apparently shows some knowledge of the Greek language. Just a few verses later, in Acts 21:40 - 22:2, we see Paul addressing a group of Jews in the Hebrew dialect. Furthermore, he was a native of Cilicia, a land with its own particular dialect.

It may be that, when Paul says that he speaks in tongues more than the Corinthians, that he is not making reference to a supernatural gift, but to a learned ability. Paul had been educated in the highest universities. He was learned in all of the wisdom of the Jews. He could speak Greek and Hebrew and perhaps a number of other languages. But he did not utilize this ability when he came to the Corinthian church. He spoke in the common language of the people.

THE PURPOSE FOR TONGUES

20 Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature. 21 In the Law it is written, "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me," says the Lord. 22 So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe.

23 If therefore the whole church should assemble

together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?

24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. (1 Corinthians 14:20-25).

The reason that tongues were being misused in Corinth was because the Corinthians had lost sight of their purpose. Many of those who participate in that which is commonly termed “tongues” today have also lost sight of the purpose of tongues. Why did tongues come about? What was their original purpose? The Scriptures do not leave us to guess. Tongues were given as a sign and as a warning of coming judgment upon those who did not believe.

1. *An Appeal to the Scriptures: In the Law it is written, “By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,” says the Lord (14:21).*

Paul quotes from the prophecy of Isaiah. It is found in Isaiah 28. It is a prophecy made to those who were in the midst of unbelief. It is a prophecy of a sign that would be given to those who had rejected the message of God.

The Jews would receive a sign. They had refused to hear the message of God in their own language. Now they would hear the message of God in the languages of pagans.

Those who had always been the guardians and oracles of God would now be given the words of God in foreign languages. It would be a sign of coming judgment. Even though they witnessed this sign, they still would not believe. They would willingly continue in their unbelief.

2. *The Purpose for Tongues: So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers (14:22).*

Tongues are not given to make Christians more spiritual. They are not given to give you a good feeling about your ability or your experience. They are given as a sign to unbelievers. They are given as a sign to those unbelievers who refused to believe the message of

the gospel. They were given to unbelieving Israel as a sign of God’s displeasure. As such, tongues have no place in the meeting of the church.

This is important to know. In many circles, it has become customary to view the speaking in tongues as a sign of spirituality. The very fact that the Corinthians were engaging in some sort of tongues-speaking is a sign that it might have been a sign of their lack of spirituality.

3. The Purpose for Prophecy: *but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe (14:22).*

Both tongues and prophecy are given as a sign. But they each have a different target audience. Tongues are given as a sign of judgment against unbelievers. Prophecy is given for the edification of believers. Tongues are a sign of judgment. Prophecy is also a sign, but it is a sign of hope.

Tongues	Prophecy
Given as a sign to unbelievers (14:22).	Given as a sign to believers (14:22).
A sign of judgment.	A sign of hope and salvation.
The unlearned hear and think that you are mad (14:23).	The unlearned hear and are convicted so that they turn to God (14:24-25).

God has given us some fantastic promises. He has told us that when we die and are placed in the ground, we will grow. He has told us that we will live forever with Him. He has told us that he will come back one day to make all of the bad things good.

4. The Problem with Ungifted and Unbelievers: *If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? (14:23).*

This is similar to the reaction that the Jews first had when they

witnessed the first manifestation of tongues. The scene was Jerusalem. It was the time of the Feast of Pentecost. They followers of Jesus were gathered together when there was suddenly the sound of a mighty rushing wind. Men began to speak in foreign languages. As the crowd assembled and heard them speak, these were accused of being drunk on new wine.

There is an application here that I do not want you to miss. It is not merely toward those churches and Christians of the charismatic persuasion. It is also for the rest of us. We have a tendency to speak in unknown tongues. It is the language of the church and of the Christian and of theology. We tend to use our own terms without regard to the ungifted and the unbeliever who might enter. We use terms like “justification” and “sanctification” and “born again.” Those are not bad terms. They are good terms and they communicate some very special meanings. But if we do not interpret those terms into the language of the ungifted and the unbeliever, then we have failed to communicate and we might as well be speaking in Greek or Hebrew.

Here is the principle. If your words are not edifying to others, then you are misusing your words, no matter what language you think you might be speaking.

THE MEETING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

The church service was over and the people were milling around. A father and his small son were standing at the back of the church where there was a bronze plaque mounted on the wall containing a military emblem and the names of a number of men. The boy asked his father what these names were and his father replied that these were the names of the people who had died in the service. Whereupon the little boy asked, “Which service, morning or evening?”

There are a lot of churches that have a serious problem. They go through all of the formal rituals and they preach nice sermons and they sing nice songs, but they are dead. What are the reasons for this? How can a church be dead?

In His message to the seven churches, Jesus addressed one in particular that He said was dead.

...I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. (Revelation 3:1b).

The church at Sardis was suffering from dry rot. Do you know what that is? It is a form of rot that affects the inside of a tree. Because it rots from the inside out, you can look at the outside and it appears to be completely healthy. The church at Sardis was like that. It looked like it was alive. It did all of the things that we normally associate with a living church.

- They had regular church meetings
- They prayed together
- They collected an offering
- They sang hymns
- They listened to the preaching of a sermon

They had a reputation for being alive. They did all of the things that a church

is thought to do. But these things do not guarantee a living church. It is like a stuffed animal. It may look very nice, but it is dead. There is no life in it.

Sardis was a dead church. But Jesus did not say that all hope ought to be abandoned or that the people of Sardis ought to leave their church and go and join themselves to a different church. Instead, He gives a remedy for the situation at Sardis.

Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. (Revelation 3:2).

The problem in Sardis was not that they had begun to do none of the things they were supposed to do. The problem is that they had left the job unfinished. There were deeds that were incomplete. Because of this, there is a call to action. As Paul writes to the believers at Corinth, he gives them a similar call to action.

THE PATTERN OF THE MEETING

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Most of us today are used to a meeting in which a song leader gets up and leads everyone in the music of the church, then a prayer leader gets up and leads everyone in the prayer of the church and, finally, the preacher gets up and does all of the rest of the talking in the church.

In such a church service, the role of the people is very limited. It is a passive involvement. It is usually to sit and to listen and to try not to fall asleep. While I do believe that the early church had each of these elements, it also seems to have had an additional element that is largely missing in many churches today. What is this missing ingredient? It is corporate involvement.

Paul describes this sort involvement: *When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*

Notice who was involved in the meeting of the New Testament church. It was not just the elders or the deacons. It was not just the seminary graduates. It was not just the ordained ministers. The meeting of the church was made up of the various members of the church you found ways and means to minister during the church during the corporate meeting. There was a plurality of involvement.

The members of the church enjoyed the exercise of their spiritual gifts in the meeting of the church. This was the place where they came to use their spiritual gifts. The result was that the entire body was edified.

Paul does not say that he wants the believers to stop doing this. Instead, he wants them to regulate it.

- They are to speak one at a time
- They are to take turns speaking
- Only three of each gift is to speak

I believe that it will be a great blessing to the church to return to this sort of corporate life. I am not saying that it needs to become a disorganized mob. This was the problem with which Paul dealt in Corinth. But we have a tendency to go to the other extreme. We tend to be so regulated that we have regulated the use of spiritual gifts right out of the church. This can be as unhealthy as the mob scene that characterized the church at Corinth.

THE PLACE OF TONGUES IN THE CHURCH

If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; 28 but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. (1 Corinthians 14:27-28).

Paul has already dealt at length with the subject of the speaking of various languages within the church. The church at Corinth was multi-lingual in nature. This resulted in a number of different languages (“tongues”) being spoken within the church. To make things even more difficult, there were some Corinthian Christians who were speaking in foreign languages that no one else could understand. Were these unknown tongues languages that they had learned to speak in the past? Or was this a supernatural manifestation at

work? Paul does not say. What he does do is to give three regulations that will be applied to any speaking of languages within the church.

- First, the multi-lingual speaking is to be limited to two or three instances per meeting: *If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three (14:27).*
- Secondly, they are to take turns in such speaking: *Each in turn (14:27).*
- Thirdly, there must be an interpretation of what is spoken so that all who are present can understand: *Let one interpret; 28 but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God (14:27-28).*

I have a feeling that the great deal of the modern-day tongues phenomenon would disappear entirely if these three regulations were followed.

1. A Limitation of Speaking: *If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three (14:27).*

The fact that these instances of tongue-speaking was to be regulated to a maximum of two or three tells me something about this phenomenon. It tells me that these tongues were not an irresistible force that suddenly came over someone so that he had no control over it. If that had been the case, then Paul would have had no business telling the Corinthians to regulate their tongues-speaking.

2. An Orderly Allowance: *Each in turn (14:27).*

There was to be an orderly allowance as each person who was going to speak took his turn. This would necessarily mean that, after one person had spoken in tongues, he or she was to wait, perhaps for weeks or even for months until everyone else had opportunity to do so before taking another turn.

3. A Required Interpretation: *Let one interpret (14:27).*

If all things in the church are to be done for edification, then it will be necessary for everyone who is present to understand what is said.

There is an application of this truth that needs to be mentioned. Our teaching in the church ought to be on a level that everyone can understand and at which everyone will be edified. This means we need to be careful to explain our terms when we use theological words.

4. An Alternative of Silence: *But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God (14:28).*

There have been a number of occasions where I have had opportunity to attend church services in other countries. In many of those situations, the music and the prayers and the praise and the preaching were all done in languages I could neither speak or understand. Those times where I was the most edified were those times when an interpreter was present.

On a number of those occasions, I was invited to speak and to share a word with the congregation. Each time I assented to speak, there was an interpretation made of my words into the language of the people who were present. If there was no interpreter present, then I did not speak.

If you were in the church at Corinth and your native language was Parthian, you were not to pray aloud in Parthian unless there was someone present to interpret. Likewise, if you were to receive a supernatural ability to pray in Parthian, you were not to use that ability unless someone else was able to interpret, either naturally or through a corresponding supernatural ability of interpretation.

This did not mean you could not pray. It only meant that you were not to pray aloud. You could still pray to yourself and to God. This tells me something about public prayer. It is directed to God, but it is also intended to edify those who hear. I am to receive a blessing when I hear someone else pray.

THE PLACE OF PROPHECY IN THE CHURCH

29 And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. 30 But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent.

31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; 33 for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (1 Corinthians 14:29-33).

Just as the speaking in tongues is to be regulated within the meeting of the church, so also the ministry of the prophet is also to be regulated.

1. A Numerical Limitation: *And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment (14:29).*

The preaching and teaching and exhorting and encouraging within the meeting of the church was never designed to be only by one man. Paul is very specific. He allows for a plurality among those who preach and prophesy within the meeting of the church.

There is a reason for this. It is so that there can be a system of checks and balances within the meeting of the church. It is so that believers can be accountable toward one another.

2. An Orderly Submission: *But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets (14:30-31).*

If a prophet is standing and speaking in the church and another is given a revelation, when it becomes his turn to speak, the first is to remain silent. One person is not to be interrupting another, but instead, all are to act in a polite and orderly manner.

At this point, you might be scratching your head and saying to yourself, “I have been going to church for a long time and I have never seen such a service.” The sort of service that Paul describes is not very popular. We like to have the music director lead everyone in a few songs and then the preacher give his sermon and we like to sit and to listen (more or less) because that means we do not have to do too much. Yet Paul’s description of the church is one that sees all of the members actively involved.

Christian worship was never meant to be a spectator sport. You

know all about spectator sports. It is what happens during football season when 22 men who desperately need rest are watched by 50,000 fans who desperately need exercise.

If there is a word that is to describe Christianity, it is involvement. We are members of a body. The quickest way to kill a body is to have some of the key organs shut down and stop working.

3. A Peaceful Representation: *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (14:33).*

This is the key to everything Paul has been saying. He has not been speaking against the use of tongues, but has only been insisting that it be done in an orderly manner. He does not say that a plurality of people should be forbidden from speaking in the meeting of the church; he has only insisted that they take their turn in an orderly manner.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35 And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

Paul now moves to another issue among those who were speaking in the meeting of the church. It is the subject of the role of women in the church. This is as much of an issue today as it was in Paul's day. Should women be ordained as elders within the church? Should women be permitted to speak from the pulpit? Can a woman serve as the pastor of a church?

1. The Prohibition for Women to Speak: *Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak. (14:34).*

Before I comment on what this passage does say, I first want to focus on what it does not say. I've recently heard a new proposed interpretation of this passage that claims that instead of these verses being an injunction by Paul toward women, he is merely quoting and

rebuking the mistaken practice of the Corinthians toward women. This re-translation of the passage would say something like: *“You Corinthians have been telling your women to keep silent in the churches and that they are not permitted to speak, but you only let them subject themselves and you use the Law as an excuse and if they desire to learn anything, you only let them ask their own husbands at home; for you think it is improper for a woman to speak in church.”*

What shall we say to such an interpretation? It is true that no ancient Greek text uses quotation marks, but this did not come as a shock or a hindrance to those Greek writers. When they wanted to indicate that a quote was being made, they merely included the words, “He said” or “They are saying.” There are places in the New Testament where a series of false statements are quoted in this manner. But in every one of those instances, the passage itself makes it very clear in the context that we are to understand that this is a quote. Consider the following:

And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just. (Romans 3:8).

Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:12).

But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” (1 Corinthians 15:35).

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Each of these passages make it very clear that a quote from those teaching falsehood is to be understood by the inclusion of a qualifying phrase {“Why not say...” or “Each one of you is saying...”

or “Someone will say...”).. 1 Corinthians 14:34 contains no such qualifying phrase and no indication from the context that we are to understand that a quote is to be understood.

The contextual subject of the passage has been that there is unwarranted speaking going on in the church. Paul has been giving instructions to restrict such promiscuous speaking as the abuse of tongues within the church. As he comes to verse 34, he now approaches some new restrictions. They deal with restrictions toward women speaking in the church.

*Was it from you that the word of God first went forth?
Or has it come to you only? (1 Corinthians 14:36).*

Is verse 36 connected with the previous two verses or with the following verse? Either interpretation is possible.

If it is looking back to the previous two verses, then Paul is giving a rebuke aimed at women who are attempting to take more of a speaking role within the church and who are therefore being disruptive.

If it is connected with verse 37, then Paul is aiming his rebuke to all of the Corinthians who are attempting to “do their own thing” in worship.

In either case, the common point is that people are not free to do as they like within the local church. Paul calls for worship to be conducted in a manner that is both orderly and in keeping with certain guidelines. These are not merely Paul’s own personal preferences; they are the commands of the Lord (14:37).

This command is that women are to remain silent in the churches. Why? Why are women to remain silent? Is it because they have nothing worthwhile to say? Is it because they are not as smart as men? No. It is because they are reflecting an attitude of submission.

2. The Principles of Subjection: *But let them subject themselves (14:34).*

Many people have a hard time dealing with these commands, especially when Paul says that women are to subject themselves. But

such a command should not surprise us. Christianity is characterized by an attitude of submission.

- We submit to the leadership of the elders in the church (1 Thessalonians 5:12).
- We submit to the leadership of those in government and to the authorities of the land (Romans 13:1-7).
- Slaves were ordered to submit to the authority of their masters (Titus 2:9).
- Children are instructed to obey the authority of their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).
- Women are to observe the authority of their husbands (Ephesians 5:22).

In each of these cases, there is no mention made about obeying the authority only if it is worthy of obedience. Paul told believers to respect the governmental authorities at a time when the government was burning Christians at the stake. Your responsibility is to obey that authority, whether you agree with it or not.

The only time that disobedience is permitted is when that authority orders you to do something that is wrong. Then and only then do you have the right to disobey that authority in that particular matter. At this point of disobedience, you should also make ready to reap the consequences of your disobedience.

3. The Precept from the Law: *But let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says (14:34).*

The principles of subordination is not a new idea. It did not come from the Greco-Roman culture in which Paul found himself. It came from the Old Testament Scriptures. It came from the creation account. Paul explains this elsewhere.

Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. 12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. 13 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. 14 And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Timothy 2:11-14).

Notice the reason Paul gives for the subordination of women in the church. It has nothing to do with the culture of his day. It has nothing to do with Paul's own personal prejudice. It has to do with the order of creation and it has to do with the fall.

Let me explain. The reason that a husband has authority over his wife is because God created them to be that way. Even before the fall into sin, there was an order of creation.

At this point, I ought to clear up a common misconception. When the Bible says that woman is subordinate to man, that does not mean she is some type of second-class-Christian and that she has been relegated to some inferior position. Jesus showed us the true meaning of subordination when He subjected Himself to the will of the Father. Did this render Him into some sort of second-class position? Not at all! To the contrary, by means of His obedience, He has been elevated to being the first over all creation.

In the same way, when a woman follows the role set out for her in the Scriptures, she becomes a picture of the relationship that Christ has with the Father and the relationship the church has with Christ.

Authority	Subordinate	Result
The Father	Jesus Christ	Has been highly exalted
Jesus Christ	The Church	Has been saved
Husband	Wife	Given authority in the home

Many women are tempted to go beyond the Biblical role that God has established because they see men who are not responsible in filling their own roles of leadership. More often than not, this only compounds the problem.

4. The Provision of her Husband: *And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. (14:35).*

There apparently was a part of the meeting of the early church where questions could be asked and where answers could be given. Paul's exhortation to the women in the church is that they take their

questions to their husbands at home.

There is a phenomenon going around today called the home Bible study. Let me go on record as saying that I think it is a wonderful thing when people come together in an informal setting to study the Bible. But a problem often develops in such settings. The women in these groups get in the habit of taking their questions to the teacher of the study instead of to their husbands. Do you see what has happened in such a case? Such a woman has taken her husband out of the leadership role and has replaced him with a Bible study teacher. This ought not to be. Rather, she needs to recognize her husband as her spiritual leader and go to him with her questions. If he does not know the answers, then he can go out to some other source in search of the proper answers. In this way, he is encouraged to grow and develop as the spiritual leader of his family.

THE RECOGNITION OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

36 Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? 37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. 38 But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

39 Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. 40 But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner. (1 Corinthians 14:36-40).

The reason you have women preaching in churches today and the reason you find a misuse of tongues in churches today is because there is a lack of recognition of spiritual authority. We are an independently-minded people. We want to go out and to do our own thing. We resent being told what to do.

A number of years ago, there was a television show called "Candid Camera" that would try to capture people doing funny things. One particular gag involved a wooden fence with a hole in it. Under the hole, they placed a sign that read, "Do not look through this hole." People who passed by and who did not notice the sign never bothered to look through the hole. But every

single person who saw the sign and read it would stop, look both ways to see if anyone was looking, and then would peer through the forbidden hole.

It is in our very nature to disobey. We come by it naturally. Our ancestors were placed into a garden and told they could do anything they wanted except to eat the fruit of one particular tree. What happened? They ate from that tree!

The Corinthians have a similar problem. They have been given a series of instructions, but Paul knows they are going to argue. The reason there will be an argument is because they resent authority. They are already thinking, “Who does Paul think he is in telling us what to do?” It is for this reason Paul makes the point that his authority comes from God.

1. A Rhetorical Question: *Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? (14:36).*

The question drips with satire. Paul is the one who led most of these people to the Lord. The word of the Lord had come to them through his ministry. It is in this light that he asks them whether they have a monopoly on spirituality.

There is a principle here. It is that you should never be arrogant about your knowledge of spiritual things because you got it from someone else. You might protest, “Wait a minute! I got this particular spiritual truth from the Bible and not from anyone else!” But that only begs the question: From where did you get your Bible?” We can never be proud or arrogant of our knowledge or of our faith or of our beliefs because everything we have was given to us.

2. A Recognized Challenge: *If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment (14:37).*

Paul issues a challenge. He says, “If you think that you have such great spiritual insights, then use them on the teaching I have given you. If you recognize they are from God, then you have passed your first pop quiz in Prophecy 101. Do you aspire to the gift of prophet? Do you want to be spiritual? Read the Bible. Then recognize it as the word of God and live accordingly.

EVIDENCES FOR THE RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

There once was a woman who was planning to move to another city. She had already packed her furniture and she had only her dog left, a brown cocker spaniel. She placed her dog into a cage, had it crated, and instructed the movers to transport it to her new home.

When the movers had arrived at the new city, they opened the cage and found that the dog was dead. This through them into something of a panic until one of them had an idea. “We can go out and find another dog to replace this one and she will never know the difference.”

With this plan, the men scoured every pet store in the city until they found a dog that looked exactly like the one that had died. They purchased him and placed him in the cage and closed it up to await the coming of the woman.

When she arrived, they opened the cage for her and, as her eyes saw the dog jumping and barking in the cage, her jaw dropped and her eyes became as wide as saucers. “Is anything wrong,” they asked. Still staring at the barking dog, she replied, “Yes there is. When I put that dog in there, it was dead.”

The resurrection is both hard to believe and yet is the central truth of Christianity. We believe that a man died and was placed into the ground and that He rose again from the dead. Because we believe that, we believe a lot of other things.

- Because he rose, we know that He was really who He said He was.
- Because he rose, we believe that our sins are forgiven.
- Because he rose, we have a reason for living.
- Because he rose, we know that we are going to grow when they plant us in the ground.

The Greeks had a problem in believing the resurrection. They believed in the

immortality of the soul, but they never conceived in a resurrection of the body. The Greek philosophers taught that the body was evil while the soul was good. In this light, death was considered to be the final release of the soul from the body.

The body was considered to be a prison. The soul was the prisoner. They held that if a man was to be free from sin, then his soul must be free from its prison house - the body.

This philosophy was reflected in the reaction of the men of Athens when Paul preached to them on the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-32). It was when Paul mentioned the truth of the resurrection of the dead that they began to turn away and to mock.

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." (Acts 17:32).

The preaching of the resurrection was a stumbling block to the Greeks in the same way that the preaching of the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

Paul begins with the importance of the teaching of the resurrection. Before he tells the Corinthians about the resurrection, he wants to tell them why they need to know about it. We are inclined to think that a lot of the truths of the Bible are given merely to provide filler for dry, dusty volumes of systematic theologies. That is not true. The teachings of the Bible are both relevant and important for you to know.

1. It is Important because it makes us Brothers: *Now I make known to you, brethren (15:1).*

Paul is speaking to "brethren." These are believers. They have heard

the message of the gospel and they have believed that message and it has bound them together in a common brotherhood.

If that is the case, then why does Paul tell them about it again? It is because they need to be reminded of it. It is the downfall of men that they forget and this is one of the reasons the church exists -- that we might remind one another of the gospel.

2. It is Important because it is part of the Gospel: *Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you (15:1-2).*

There is an emphasis here in the Greek text that is missed in our English translations. It is an emphasis of the word “gospel.” The word is repeated in the Greek text so that we could translate this as follows: *Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I gospelized to you.*

What is the gospel? It is the good news that Jesus Christ has come to earth and that He died for our sins, that He was buried and that He rose again. Paul uses four verbs in this passage. They reflect the relationship of the Corinthian believers to the gospel:

The Gospel...	<i>I preached to you</i>	Aorist tense	Looks to an event that took place in the past
	<i>Which also you received</i>		
	<i>In which also you stand</i>	Perfect tense	Looks to that which began in the past but that has continuing results
	<i>By which also you are saved</i>	Present tense	Continuing action in the present time

- *I preached to you (15:1).*

This is a tense in the Greek language known as the aorist. It indicates a specific point in time. It looks back to the point in

time when Paul came and preached the gospel to the Corinthians. As we mentioned earlier, the word that is translated “preached” is from the root word εὐαγγελίζω and is related to the word for “gospel.” A literal translation of this phrase would read: *I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I gospelized to you.*

- *Which also you received (15:1).*

This is also an aorist tense. It looks to the point in time when the Corinthians believed. This is the tense of salvation. You do not initially receive Christ over a period of days or weeks or months or years. You come to Him in a point in time. At that very instant, you are born again and transformed into a child of God.

- *In which also you stand (15:1).*

Now the tense changes. This time it is a perfect tense. The perfect tense indicates action that took place in a point in time, but that has result that continue up through the present.

Notice what Paul is saying: “I preached the gospel in a point in time, you believe it in a point in time, and then you took your stand on the gospel with the result that you are still standing upon it.”

- *By which also you are saved (15:2).*

This time we have a present tense. The result of what was preached and what you received and where you stand is that now you have a present salvation. This is important. Our salvation is not some fabricated fairy tale for the future. It is a present reality.

You are saved today *if you hold fast the word which I preached to you (15:2)*. Paul has stated that they heard and received and are standing and are saved. But now he adds a conditional clause. When he says they are saved, he is assuming that something is true. He is assuming that they are holding fast to the message that he preached to them.

I am sometimes asked about the situation of one who once came to the Lord and believed the message of the gospel, but who later fell away to the point where faith was replaced by disbelief. The Bible describes such a person as one who was never really saved.

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19).

There are people who hear the message of the gospel and who have an initial response that appears very positive. They are attracted to its beauty like moths to an open flame. But there is no life in them. For a short time, their lives have been changed. They are like the pig that was taken out of the mud pit and cleaned up and given a colorful bow. After a while, they are back in the pit, wallowing in the mud. The reason is that they have a piggy nature. They have been changed on the outside, but they are still the same on the inside. Eventually, what is on the inside will manifest itself.

3. It is Important because Faith is Empty without it: *Unless you believed in vain (15:2).*

What does it mean to “believe in vain”? It means to believe something that is empty. It means to believe in a useless thing.

Do you see what Paul is saying? We do not have salvation if we have believed in something that is empty. We do not have salvation if we have believed in a Savior who did not rise from the dead.

Faith alone can never save you. I have heard people say, “It isn’t important what you believe as long as you have faith.” That is a lie. Faith by itself cannot save you. Faith is no stronger than the object in which that faith is placed. Faith in an unworthy object is useless. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then He cannot save you. If He did not rise from the dead, you believed in vain.

THE MESSAGE OF THE RESURRECTION

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Just as Paul used four verbs to express the relationship of the Corinthians to the gospel in verses 1-2, so now he uses four more verbs to describe the facts of the gospel.

I delivered to you the message you received...	<i>Christ died for our sins</i>	Aorist tense	Looks to an event that took place in the past
	<i>He was buried</i>		
	<i>He was raised on the third day</i>	Perfect tense	Looks to that which began in the past but that has continuing results
	<i>He appeared...</i>	Aorist tense	Records the events of the past

1. The Death of Christ: *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (15:3).*

This verb is in the aorist tense. It indicates a point in history. The death of Christ is not a myth or a fairy tale or a fable. It is a historical fact. It took place in a point in time. Jesus died FOR our sins. This is the preposition of substitution. He died instead of us. He died in our place.

One of the modern arguments against the resurrection is known as the “swoon theory.” It says that Jesus did not really die -- that He merely fainted on the cross and that he later revived in the coolness of the tomb, leading people to believe that he had risen from the dead. There are several problems with this theory.

First, there is the testimony of the Roman soldiers. The reported to Pilate that Jesus was dead.

And Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. 45 And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. (Mark 15:44-45).

The Roman soldiers were professionals. They were experts in taking live people and in making them dead. Not only had they scourged Jesus and beaten Him to a pulp, not only had they mashed a crown of sharpened thorns onto His head and nailed Him spread-eagle on a cross, but they had taken a spear and had shoved it through His chest cavity to make sure that He was really dead.

And that is not all. The corpse was then taken and wrapped in spices. This was the equivalent of placing someone into formaldehyde. It would probably kill a healthy person, not to mention a freshly crucified one.

And that is not all. After the stone was rolled into place and the seal set upon the stone, a Roman guard was placed around the tomb. Their job was simple. They were to make certain that this corpse did not go anywhere.

2. The Burial of Christ: *He was buried (15:4).*

Once again there is an aorist tense. This took place in a point in time. It is a historical fact. As Paul writes these words to the Corinthians, there is an empty tomb in Jerusalem that had once held a corpse.

Another argument used by critics of Christianity is the “wrong tomb theory.” It suggests that the women went to the wrong tomb and, finding it empty, merely jumped to the mistaken conclusion that Jesus had risen from the dead. This theory crumbles into silliness when it is examined in detail.

To cover all the bases, this theory must maintain that...

- The women went to the wrong tomb
- John and Peter also went to the wrong tomb
- Joseph of Arimathea who owned the tomb went to the wrong tomb
- The angels who appeared must have also been mistaken, for

they also went to the wrong tomb.

Furthermore, the tomb was clearly marked. The Roman soldiers had set a seal upon the stone. This seal marked the stone from all other stones. It was a seal of protection and a seal of authority. To tamper with such a seal would be a serious offense.

Besides, if there had been any problem with people going to the wrong tomb, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem could have easily stopped the fledgling Christian church simply by going to the right tomb and producing the body of Jesus.

3. The Resurrection of Christ: *He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (15:4).*

This time there is a change in tenses. Paul leaves the aorist tense and instead uses the perfect tense. This is the tense that indicates an event that took place in the past but which now has continuing results. Jesus was raised in the past with the result that He is alive today.

In 1965, Dr. Hugh Schonfield wrote a book entitled *The Passover Plot*. In this book, he theorized that Jesus did not really rise from the dead, but that His disciples came and stole the body.

This is amazing. While an entire company of Roman guards slept, we are supposed to believe that...

- The disciples came
- They broke the Roman seal on the stone
- They rolled back the heavy stone
- They removed the grave clothes from the body
- They folded the headpiece off by itself
- They took the body
- While no one awoke to know what was happening
- Years later, every disciple except for John went on to suffer a martyr's death for preaching this lie when they could have been spared merely for telling the truth.

There are a number of holes in Schonfield's theory. The disciples lacked the means, the opportunity and the motive to carry out the supposed abduction. They lacked the means and the opportunity because there was a Roman guard in place whose very job was to

make certain that the tomb remained undisturbed. They lacked the motive because there was absolutely nothing to be gained and everything to be lost in faking a resurrection.

To believe such a theory takes a great leap of faith. On the other hand, we have ample proof that Jesus did rise from the dead. The evidence is seen in the numerous eyewitness testimony to the resurrected Christ.

WITNESS FOR THE RESURRECTION

*...and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).*

Paul gives six groups of witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. They are given in the order of their occurrence.

At the same time, we should recognize that this is not an exhaustive list. There are no women mentioned in this list. There is a reason for this. In the ancient world, a woman was not considered to be a legal witness. Paul is giving a legal presentation of the evidence for the resurrection. He is giving the kind of evidence that would stand up in a court of law.

1. Cephas: *He appeared to Cephas (15:5).*

The name Cephas is an Aramaic name. It means “rock.” It is the same as the Greek name “Peter.” It is the nickname that Jesus had given to Simon. Jesus appeared to Simon Peter.

2. The Twelve: *Then to the twelve (15:5).*

The Twelve refer to the disciples whom Jesus chose while He was on earth. The term is used here, even though Judas Iscariot was no longer among them and even though Thomas was not present at the first appearing in the Upper Room.

The testimony of the Twelve is significant because they were not expecting a resurrection. To the contrary, when Thomas heard that they had seen the risen Jesus, he was skeptical and refused to merely “take it on faith.” It was not until he had seen with his own eyes the risen Jesus that he would believe that He had come back from the dead.

3. Five Hundred: *After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep (15:6).*

We are not told when and how this appearance took place. The Gospel accounts make no mention of it. At some point, Jesus had appeared to a large assembly of believers.

You might get two or three people to admit to a lie and even have them die for it. It is perhaps believable that twelve people might die for a lie that they know to be a lie. But here we have over 500 witnesses.

Paul says that most of these 500 witnesses to the resurrection are still alive. The implication is obvious. If you have any doubts about the truth of the resurrection, you can go to Jerusalem and ask them.

4. James: *Then He appeared to James (15:7).*

There are several different people in the New Testament named James. It was a common name. It was the Hellenized form of “Jacob.” In this case, it seems to be a reference to the half-brother of Jesus.

The witness of James is especially significant because it is the witness of a skeptic. None of the brothers of Jesus originally believed in him (John 7:5). They had grown up with Him and they knew Him to be a good man, but they rejected His teaching. They could not do too much to believe that this humble carpenter-turned-rabbi could be the Messiah of Israel.

Then something happened that changed their thinking. James saw his half-brother alive again from the grave. This made a believer out of James.

5. All the Apostles: *Then to all the apostles (15:7).*

The last appearance of Jesus while He was still on earth was to all of the apostles. It was at this time that He gave them their marching orders. Their commission was to go out to all the world and to make disciples.

6. Paul: *Last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also (15:8).*

The last appearance that Paul cites is the appearance of the resurrection Jesus to Paul himself. It took place as Paul traveled on the Damascus Road. The story is told in Acts 9:1-6. Paul, or as he was then known, Saul, was on his way to Damascus on a mission to obliterate Christianity. He has already run all the Christians out of Jerusalem and now he was seeking to do the same thing in Damascus. It was on the road that he was struck down in a confrontation with the resurrected Christ.

Paul describes his conversion experience *as it were to one untimely born*. It was as if he had been born violently and prematurely. Paul's salvation was something of an abortion. While the other disciples were brought gradually and gently to know about Christ, Paul was violently aborted from the womb of Judaism.

Some of us are like Paul. God occasionally reaches down and knocks us flat on our backs before we will look up. We are like the donkey who was purchased by a farmer for his work in the field. "This is a great donkey," said the used donkey salesman. "All you have to do is to talk to him and he will take orders on command." The farmer paid his price, but when he went to lead the donkey away, the donkey dug in his heels and refused to budge. He pulled and he pushed to no avail. He was about to ask for his money back when the salesman came up behind the donkey and hit him over the head with a long two-by-four. "I thought that you said I only needed to talk to the donkey," said the farmer. "That is right," replied the salesman, "But first you have to get his attention."

We are like that. There are times when God whispers to us and we refuse to listen, so He uses pain to get our attention. Have you been going through some hard times lately? Listen up! It might be that

the Lord is trying to get your attention.

THE RESULT OF THE RESURRECTION

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:9-11).

The vision of the resurrection made a dramatic change in the life of Paul. He who had once persecuted the church now became the great advocate of the church. He who once sought to destroy the church now planted churches all over the Roman world.

This is not a matter of boasting on Paul's part. He is not saying this in order to have you think, "What a wonderful person Paul is!" He says this only to point out the grace of God.

1. The Principle of Grace: *But by the grace of God I am what I am (15:10).*

The word "grace" is translated from the Greek word *χαρις* (*charis*). This is an old word in Greek writings, used as early as the days of Homer. It was used by the ancient Greeks to describe a favor that is done for a friend that expects no return. It is a favor that is freely given. It is closely connected to the idea of a gift (*χαρισμα*) as well as with joy (*χαρα*). In nearly all cases, the idea of *χαρις* was that it was a favor done for a friend.

Aristotle, defining χαρις, lays out the whole stress on this very point, that it is conferred freely, with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver. But in Pagan Greece, this favor was always conferred upon a friend, not upon an enemy. (Kenneth Wuest).

Here lies the difference between the pagan use of χάρις versus that which is used by Paul. The Greeks used it to describe the actions of an individual toward his friend. Grace was always directed toward someone who was a friend, never toward an enemy.

This is the complete antithesis of what Paul describes in this passage. Paul describes God's grace as coming to him when he was at enmity with God and when he was persecuting the church of God.

There is an important principle here. God's grace in your life did not become operational because you turned from your sins and began to seek after Him. God saved you when you were in the midst of your sins. God chose you before you ever chose Him.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Just as Paul's salvation was by the grace of God and apart from his own merit or effort, so also his Christian life continues to be lived by grace.

2. The Power of Grace: *His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me (15:10).*

I have often heard one of the complaints against teaching of the grace of God that say people will not serve the Lord if they find out that everything in Christ has been freely given to them via the grace of God. The argument goes like this: "Why should I labor for Christ if He has given me everything there is to give through faith alone?"

Paul does not view this as a logical result of grace. On the contrary, he pictures the grace of God as a motivation for service. As he comes to see the wondrous and undeserving goodness that God has bestowed upon him, he is moved to labor even more greatly.

The story is told of a World War One general who called in his company commander into his tent and pinned a medal on his chest. "Captain," he said, "You are a hero. Now go out and lead your men

up that hill.” That is what God has done to us. He has chosen us and called us and saved us and sanctified us. Now He says, “Go out and live like people who are chosen and called and saved and sanctified.”

How about you? Has the resurrected Christ made a difference in your life? If He has not, then perhaps it is because you have never met Him. You can come to know Him today and you can enter into the life that only He can provide.

WE WILL RISE

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

The story is told of a man who decided he wanted to try to take all of his money with him to heaven when he died. He never went anywhere without taking his wallet and he would grab it and hold to it tightly whenever he thought he might be in danger.

He got to thinking that if he were to die while he was asleep in bed, then he would have no chance to grab his money. Each night, he would take his money and his valuable and place them on a table up in the attic over his bed, figuring that, if he died, he would be able to grab it all on the way up to heaven.

Sure enough, he died one night in his sleep. When his wife saw him lying there the next morning and realized that he was dead, she raced up into the attic to find that all of his money and belongings were still on the table where he had left them. "I knew it!" she exclaimed, "I knew he should have put them in the basement!"

It is an amusing story, but the truth is that death is no respecter of persons. It makes no distinction between rich or poor, black or white, man or woman. Death statistics are consistent. One out of every one person dies. The Christian is not to be disturbed by such statistics. The Christian has a hope in the future. It is a hope based upon a future resurrection.

The Corinthian believers were willing to agree that Jesus had risen from the dead. That is what made them believers. What they had problems in believing is that they would also rise from the dead.

Greek philosophy generally held that the body was evil while the soul and spirit were good. Death was considered to be the final release from the evil part of man so that he could be fully good. The body was considered to be a prison and the soul was the prisoner. Death was the release of the soul from its prison house. The idea of a resurrection did not seem a thing to be

desired in such a context and you will remember that, when Paul was preaching at the Areopagus in Athens, it was the mention of the resurrection that brought an objection on the part of the Greek audience (Acts 17:32).

Neither were Greeks the only ones who denied a future resurrection. The Sadducees had been heavily influenced by Greek thought and they had also come to deny a future resurrection. It is for this reason that Paul now sets out to show that we can look forward to a future bodily resurrection.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION

12 Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; 14 if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith also is vain.

15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. 17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

Paul has just gone to great lengths to cite the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He did this in the first eleven verses of this chapter. He did this for a reason. It was not because the Corinthian Christians had rejected the teaching that Jesus arose from the dead. It is because the fact of the resurrection of Christ is the basis of belief in our own resurrection.

If you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then it is not too much harder to believe that you will also rise from the dead when He says that you will. It is for this reason that the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate apologetic for the Christian.

To make this point, Paul asks the question: *If Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* (15:12). This points out an inconsistency in the thinking of the Corinthian Christians. They had read the preaching of the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus. They had believed the message. They had become followers of Christ. But they continued to hold to their old philosophical idea that there is no resurrection.

It is like the man who thought he was dead. No matter what people said to him, he was convinced that he was dead. His wife came to the point where she could take it no longer and insisted that he go and see a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist had the man read a number of medical books and reports to prove that dead men do not bleed. Then he took him to see an autopsy so that he could see for himself that dead men do not bleed. After all of this, the psychiatrist questioned the man and listened to him agree that dead men do not bleed. Then the psychiatrist took out a pin and pricked the man's finger. As a drop of blood welled out, the man's eyes opened wide and he exclaimed, "What do you know, dead men bleed after all!"

The Corinthians were no less inconsistent in their thinking. They believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, but they persisted in their old philosophy that said men do not rise from the dead.

Paul therefore takes up the false presupposition of the Corinthians in order to show where it will lead them. He uses a debater's technique. He assumes for the sake of argument that the Corinthians are right and that there is no resurrection of the dead. This leads to eight logical conclusions.

1. If there is no Resurrection, then Christ has not been raised: *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised (15:13).*

If it is indeed impossible for people to rise from the dead, then it is just as impossible for Jesus to have risen from the dead. Yet Paul has just shown that the resurrection of Jesus was substantiated by literally hundreds of witnesses and that He was seen at different times and on different occasions.

2. If there is no Resurrection, then Preaching is Worthless: *If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain (15:14).*

Paul had devoted his entire life to the preaching of the message of the resurrection of Christ. If Christ is not risen, then Paul has been wasting his time.

If Christ is not risen, then all of the churches in all of the communities of the world should close their doors. All of the missionaries should come home. All of the Christian schools should send their students away. All of the Bible should be collected and burned.

3. If there is no Resurrection, then the Christian's Faith is Worthless: *If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith also is vain (15:14).*

If Christ is not risen, then your faith is empty because you cannot depend upon a dead savior. Faith is no stronger than the object of that faith and, if Christ is not risen, then the object of your faith is rotting in a grave.

How would you feel if you were dying of cancer and a friend told you, "I know of a terrific doctor. Just come with my and I will introduce you to him." You get into the car and your friend drives you to the local cemetery and pulls up in front of a large tombstone. "Here he is!"

It would not be very reassuring. What can a dead doctor do for you? Nothing. And the same is true of a dead savior.

4. If there is no Resurrection, then the Apostles were Liars: *Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised (15:15).*

If is bad enough to be a false witness; that is a violation of the ninth commandment. But to be a false witness of God is even worse. If there is no resurrection, then Paul is a liar. And so is Peter and all of the apostles. And so is Billy Graham and Martin Luther and John Calvin and Dwight Moody. And so is every preacher in every evangelical church. And so am I.

If Christ is not risen, we are not only liars, but we are also guilty of

blasphemy against God because we have declared that He did something that He did not do. We would be speaking against God and His judgment would be against us.

5. If there is no Resurrection, then the Christian Faith is Worthless: *If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless (15:17).*

Faith by itself is totally powerless. Faith cannot do anything. It cannot save you. It cannot make you into a better person. It cannot help you at all. Faith has no worth at all if it is based upon an unworthy object. The strength of the Christian faith is to be found in Christ. It stands or falls upon Him.

6. If there is no Resurrection, then you are still in your Sins: *If Christ has not been raised... you are still in your sins (15:17).*

If there is no resurrection, then you are going to stand before a holy God who is going to judge you and you have no recourse. You are a sinner and God hates sin and that means He hates you and you are eternally without hope. The awesome anger of a holy God is directed against you and there is no escape because nobody has a solution to your problem of sin.

7. If there is no Resurrection, then those who have Died are gone forever : *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (15:18).*

Have you ever had someone die who was close to you? Maybe it was a grandfather or a grandmother. Maybe it was a brother or sister. Perhaps it was a friend. You attended their funeral and perhaps you were comforted by the thought that their parting, though painful, is only temporary.

If there is no resurrection, then you will never see them again. They are gone and the comfort you took at their death has been taken away because they are not in a better place. They are in a much worse place and you will soon be there, too.

8. If there is no Resurrection, then Christians are Pitiful: *If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied (15:19).*

If there is no resurrection, then all the Christians who ever suffered persecution and who sacrificed their hard-earned money and who wasted their time in doing good did so in vain. Instead of wasting your time in church, you could have been out having a good time. If there is no resurrection, then your life is nothing but a bad joke and you are the punch line.

THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE RESURRECTION

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

Having shown the logical consequences of denying the resurrection, Paul now brings us back to reality and reaffirms the fact that Christ has indeed risen. In the previous verses, we see the results of a wrong presupposition; now we see a true declaration.

Christ has been raised. Paul states this in the perfect tense. It is the tense that looks to the past and then emphasizes its continuing results. Christ has been raised from the dead with the result that He is now alive.

The other major religious leaders of history are all in their graves. Only one still lives today. He is alive. He is the God of the living. Just as He has risen from the dead, so also His people will one day rise. That is what is meant when Paul says that Christ is *the first fruits of those who are asleep*.

In order to understand the significance of the firstfruits, we have to look at the Israelite Feast of Firstfruits. In the first month of the Jewish year, the Jews observed three different Feasts.

- Passover.

The Passover took place on the 14th day of the first month. It was designed to be a reminder of how God had delivered the Israelites from the plague of the firstborn and had brought them out of their slavery in Egypt.

- Unleavened Bread.

This feast was a week-long observance that began on the day following the Passover. During this week, the Jews removed all of the leaven from the bread they ate.

This was a remembrance of their separation from the culture and the land of Egypt. God had taken them out and had made them a people who were to be set apart from the rest of the world.

- Firstfruits.

This took place on the first day of the week that followed the Passover. On this day, each Israelite was to bring the first sheaf of grain that he had harvested in the early spring harvest. Bringing his sheaf of grain before the Lord, he was to have the priest wave it before the door of the Temple. By doing so, he would be pledging the entire harvest that was soon to follow. This was a demonstration that, just as the people were God's people, so also the harvest was God's harvest.

All three of these ceremonies looked forward to the coming of Jesus. Each of them had a special significance that looked to something he would accomplish.

Passover	Memorialized Israel's deliverance from the plague of the firstborn and their exodus from Egypt	Looks to the death of Christ on the cross. Just as the lamb's blood on the doorpost cause the angel of death to pass over that household, so the death of Christ caused God's wrath to be removed from those who believe in Him.
Unleavened Bread	Memorialized the separation of Israel from the culture of Egypt.	Looks to the sanctification process that God works in the life of the believer who is set apart to Him.
Firstfruits	Offered a representative offering of the future harvest to the Lord	Looks to Jesus as the one who rose from the dead as being promissory of our future resurrection from the dead.

This is what it means when it says that Jesus is our firstfruits. Just as the waving of that first sheaf of grain was a pledge of the entire harvest to follow, so also the resurrection of Christ is our guarantee of a resurrection to come.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive (15:22). Jesus is our second Adam. When we came to Christ, we changed from one family into another. We were taken out of the family of the old Adam and brought into the family of the second Adam. Just as we were once identified with the old Adam who sinned in the garden, now we have been identified with Jesus Christ and with His righteousness.

Adam	Jesus Christ
He was one man.	He is one man.
By this man came death.	By this man comes the resurrection of the dead.
All who are in Adam die.	All who are in Christ shall be made alive.
By his sin be brought condemnation.	By His obedience he brings justification.

It was through Adam's sin that physical death came into the world. In the same way, it is through the work of Christ that death has been conquered.

THE ORDER OF THE RESURRECTION

23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

27 For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection

to Him. 28 And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:23-28).

There is an order to the resurrection. It takes place in an orderly progression. Just as the first sheaf of fruit was followed by the rest of the harvest in its time, so also the resurrection of Christ is followed by our own resurrection. When does our resurrection take place? The answer is found in verse 23. It is *at His coming*.

The order of events is carefully outlined for us.

- First came the resurrection of Christ: *Christ the first fruits (15:23).*
- Then shall come our resurrection *at His coming (15:23).*
- Finally comes the end when Christ *delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father (15:24).*

The first part of this schedule has already taken place. It took place when Jesus rose from the dead. We now await the second part -- the resurrection of believers when He comes again.

1. The Coming of the End: *Then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power (15:24).*

Verse 24 begins a parenthesis that continues all the way to verse 28. It deals with that final event when Christ delivers over the kingdom to God the Father.

15:20	15:23	15:24	15:29
Christ has been raised as our firstfruits	The rest of the resurrection shall take place in its own order	Then comes the end (described at length)	Further reasons to believe in the resurrection
This entire chapter is devoted to the ongoing theme of why it is necessary for us to believe in the resurrection		Parenthetical section	

The Son is the King of the Kingdom. But there is coming a day when He will deliver up His kingship to the Father. In the end, it will be as it was in the beginning. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. Sin will be no more. The Father will reign without opposition.

2. The Conquering Reign: *For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet (15:25).*

When a king had conquered a neighboring kingdom, the defeated king would be brought forward and made to kneel with his face to the floor. The victorious king would then place his foot on the head of his enemy. This was a sign of total victory.

There is coming a day when Jesus is going to do that. He will defeat every enemy in total victory. It is the very purpose of the incarnation. It is the reason God became flesh. It was to destroy the works of Satan and to defeat the enemy of God. When every enemy has been defeated, He will return the kingdom to His Father.

3. The Last Enemy: *The last enemy that will be abolished is death (15:26).*

Death is an enemy. Those who try to say that death is a natural part of life are wrong. We look at death and there is something within us that protests, "That is not the way it is supposed to be!" Death is an enemy. Though it has been defeated in the resurrection, it still continues to manifest itself in a very real way. People continue to die. But that will not always be the case. There is coming a day when death will be abolished.

RESURRECTION AND THE PROBLEM OF PERSECUTION

29 Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? 30 Why are we also in danger every hour? 31 I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?

If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

³³ Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” ³⁴ Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame. (1 Corinthians 15:29-34).

Now Paul brings forth his final argument for the bodily resurrection. It is the argument from the suffering and the persecution and the martyrdom of believers. Notice the elements of this argument:

- There is danger (15:30)
- There is dying (15:31).
- There is potential for fighting wild beasts (15:32).

This is the language of persecution and martyrdom.

1. If there is no Resurrection, then why do we Baptize for the Dead?

Here is the question. If there is no bodily resurrection, then why should I risk my life by holding onto my Christian faith? In Paul’s day, it was not healthy to be a Christian. Paul himself had suffered many things for the cause of Christ. He had been beaten with rods, stoned, lashed and thrown into prison. He had come through hunger, thirst, exposure and sickness.

Now comes the question. Why is Paul doing this if there is no bodily resurrection when the only reason he is being persecuted is because he said that a certain dead Galilean got up and walked?

It is in this context that Paul asks, “*What will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?*” The Mormons take this verse to indicate that it is possible for a person to be baptized on behalf of someone who has already died and thereby gain salvation for that person. They point to the phrase *for the dead* and point out that the Greek preposition can be translated, “*in place of the dead.*” They are correct linguistically, but miss the point that the passage is written in a context of persecution and martyrdom.

Here is the question that Paul asks. Why do believers who are under

persecution continue to hold to their faith in a resurrection that results in their being persecuted if there is no resurrection? And why do new converts rise up to be baptized in place of those who are being put to death if there is no resurrection of the dead? Why are new believers being baptized and filling up the ranks of the church *in place of* those who have died if there is no resurrection when it results in being in danger every hour and in daily danger of death (“I die daily”)?

If Paul were to be thrown to the lions in the great stadium in Ephesus because of his stand for Christ, that would be of great benefit. But that is only true if there is a resurrection from the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then it is silly for Paul to risk his life.

If there is no resurrection from the dead, then we have followed a lie. If this is the case, then we are not doing God’s will, but only the will of another group of men. If I am martyred only on the basis of some misguided men, what does it profit me?

The good news is that Christ has risen from the dead. That is why people continue to believe in Him, filling up the ranks of those who have gone before us. And that is why you have been baptized in place of the dead.

Thus, the picture of being baptized in place of the dead is a picture of new converts coming to Christ and being baptized to replace those who have died in Christ. There is a sense that when you were baptized and brought into the body of Christ, you were baptized to take the place of those who had come before.

2. If there is no Resurrection, then *why are we in danger every hour?* (15:30). It makes no sense to continue to be persecuted for holding to the faith in the central core of that faith is known to be false.

To this end, Paul says, “*I die daily*” (15:31). Because of his stand for Christ, he finds himself daily in danger of death. He can expect to be martyred on any given day. Why should he willingly live under this threat if there is no resurrection of the dead?

3. If there is no Resurrection, then why do Martyrs willingly suffer their fate? Paul asks this question in the form of a hypothetical martyr: *If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does*

it profit me? (15:32).

In case you did not notice, the fact that Paul is alive and writing this letter shows that he has not actually been fed to the lions at Ephesus. He is speaking hypothetically.

If Paul were to be thrown to the lions at Ephesus because of his stand for Christ, there would be spiritual profit, but only if there is a resurrection of the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then suffering a martyr's death is silly.

4. If there is no Resurrection tomorrow, then we ought to live only for today: *If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (15:32).*

There were evidently some within the church who were being tempted to take this very philosophy. It was not a foreign way of thinking to the Greeks. This was the philosophy of the Epicureans (Acts 17:18). This school of thought held that all existence ends with death. Now is the time to live it up. Enjoy life while you can, for there may be tomorrow.

Paul agrees. He says that if the premise is true, then the conclusion is also valid. If there is no resurrection, then this ought to be your philosophy.

5. If there is no Resurrection tomorrow, it does not matter who you listen to today: *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." (15:33).*

Paul gives a common proverb from his day. It is a quote from one of the works of Menander of Athens, a playwright from the days immediately following Alexander the Great. Paul takes these familiar words and applies them to his readers, bringing them back to reality with this hard verbal slap across the face. He tells them not to be deceived. There is a resurrection. He says, "You Christians have been living as through there were no resurrection. You have been keeping company with those who deny the resurrection and you have been starting to swallow their lies and you have been falling into the moral traps that come with such a philosophy."

There is an important point here that I do not want you to miss. You may have been reading through this chapter and saying to yourself, “This does not apply to me at all because I believe in the resurrection.” That is a good thing, but is your manner of life consistent with that belief? Are you living life as though this life is only temporary and to be followed by an eternal existence? Or are you a practicing atheist?

Quite a number of years ago, I met a teenager who, when I asked his religious background, informed me that both his parents were atheists. When I finally met them, I commented, “I hear that the two of you are atheists.” They were both surprised. “Atheists? Whatever gave you the idea that we are atheists?” Their son was just as surprised and replied, “I never heard you talk about God. I just assumed that you were atheists.”

If you really believe in the resurrection, then your life ought to be lived in a manner that manifests such a belief. It ought to be seen in what you do and in how you act.

6. If there IS a resurrection, then sin ought to be abandoned: *Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning (15:34).*

This is Paul’s final exhortation. It is based upon everything that has been said up to this point. It is a twofold plea.

- First, it is a plea to become sober-minded. This is a plea to wake up. It refers to their thinking. They were to think about how they were living and they were to begin to live purposefully.
- With this comes another plea. It is based upon the first. It is a plea to stop sinning. It is a plea for their life to begin to reflect the truth of the resurrection.

This tells us something about Biblical prophecy. It is always given so that you will live differently. It is not given merely to satisfy your curiosity. It is not given to make you spiritually proud. It is given so that the truth of the resurrection might be reflected in the way you live your Christian life.

THE RESURRECTION BODY

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

A little boy was watching his father bury a dead cat that had been hit by a car. He stood there in silence for a while and then he said, "It won't do any good, Dad. It won't grow."

There is a saying that goes, "Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." Yet if the Lord delays his coming, then we are going to die. It is the one constant in life. However, we must also add that death is not the end for the Christian. When he gets put into the ground, he is going to grow. One of these days, we are going to rise from the grave.

THE QUESTION OF THE RESURRECTION BODY

But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" (1 Corinthians 15:35).

In the first part of this chapter (15:1-34), Paul has demonstrated that, since Christ rose from the dead in a bodily resurrection, we will also have a bodily resurrection. Now he anticipates and objection. This objection is presented in the form of two questions.

1. Question #1: *How are the dead raised?*

Skeptics will always deny that something can be done if they cannot understand how it is accomplished. This is one of the issues at stake. How is it possible for a body that has died and has been buried and has now rotten away into dust to now be brought back to life?

2. Question #2: *With what kind of body do they come?*

The Corinthians looked at the human body with all of its weaknesses and aches and pains and they said, “You mean that we are going to have to spend eternity in one of those?”

Paul answers these questions in three parts. First, he shows how the resurrection body is illustrated in nature. Then he shows how the resurrection body is necessary from the Old Testament Scriptures. Finally, he shows how the resurrection body will be experienced at the coming of Christ.

15:35	15:36	15:45	15:50
Two questions	Three Answers: The Resurrection Body is...		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How raised? • What body? 	Illustrated in nature	Necessary from the Old Testament	Experienced at the coming of Christ

THE RESURRECTION BODY ILLUSTRATED IN NATURE

36 You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; 37 and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.

39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. 41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:36-44).

The Greeks prided themselves in their observations of the natural world around them. They thought of their philosophy as a philosophy of nature, but they failed to learn the lessons of nature.

1. A Strong Rebuke: *You fool! (15:35).*

This is strong language, especially when we consider that these are the people who took such pride in their worldly wisdom. Paul says that their wisdom has brought them to the heights of foolishness.

The wisdom and the philosophy of the Greeks taught that the body is evil while the soul is good. The release of a soul from its body was a thing to be desired. For this reason, they looked with disdain on any teaching that said there would be a bodily resurrection.

Paul is going to illustrate the truth of the resurrection from three areas of nature.

15:36-38	15:39	15:40-41
Illustrated from agriculture	Illustrated from zoology	Illustrated from astronomy

2. Illustrations from Agriculture (15:36-38).

The first area that Paul uses to illustrate the nature of the resurrection body is taken from the realm of agriculture. There are four parts to this illustration.

- The Law of Death before Life: *That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies (15:36).*

The seed will not grow until it is planted in the ground and dies. When the seed is placed into the ground, the outward form of the seed must decay for the plant to begin to grow. When the plant begins to grow, what happens to the seed? It is gone. So it is with the resurrection. The old body must pass away before the new body can come.

- The Law of Growth: *That which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of*

something else (15:37).

That which you place into the ground is not the same as that which grows from the ground. If you want to grow a watermelon, you do not plant a watermelon, you plant a watermelon seed. You plant the seed, but it is a vine that grows and produces a multiplicity of fruit.

The same is true of the resurrection. The body that dies and goes into the ground is not the same as the one that will come out of the ground. They are different.

- The Law of the Creator: *But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own (15:38).*

God gives each seed a body as He wishes. It is God who produces the fruit *according to the good pleasure of His will* (Ephesians 1:11). He is the source of growth.

The same is true of the resurrection. It is something that will be accomplished by God. It is a body that He will give.

- The Law of Identity: *But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own (15:38).*

Each of the seeds has a body of its own. This is the principle of identity. There is maintained a relationship between the seed and the plant that grows. When you plant apple seeds, you grow apple trees that produce apples. You don't get banana trees that produce oranges.

So it is with the resurrection. Though you will one day be changed, you will still be you. You will not cease to exist and another being be created in your place. You will merely be changed.

3. Illustrated in Zoology: *All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish (15:39).*

There are many different kinds of flesh.

- Men
- Beasts
- Birds
- Fish

But they all have one thing in common. They are all made up of flesh. This commonality does not change merely because they are different kinds of flesh.

So also is the resurrection. As there is natural flesh, so also there is spiritual flesh. Just as different types of flesh do not cease to be flesh, so also different types of bodies do not cease to be bodies.

4. Illustrated in Astronomy: *There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory (15:40-41).*

Paul moves from the worlds down here to the world up there. He points to the world of astronomy to illustrate his point. Just as there are different kinds of astronomical bodies, so there are different kinds of resurrection bodies.

<i>So also is the resurrection of the dead...</i>	
<i>It is sown a perishable body (15:42)</i>	<i>It is raised an imperishable body (15:42)</i>
<i>It is sown in dishonor (15:43)</i>	<i>It is raised in glory (15:43)</i>
<i>It is sown in weakness (15:43)</i>	<i>It is raised in power (15:43)</i>
<i>It is sown a natural body (15:44)</i>	<i>It is raised a spiritual body (15:44)</i>
<i>If there is a natural body (15:44)</i>	<i>There is also a spiritual body (15:44)</i>

You have a body right now. It may work okay for the moment, but it is

slowly falling apart. After 70 or 80 years, it will finally quit working. It will decay. It will die. That is the bad news. The good news is that you are going to get a new body. It will be an eternal body. It will never fade or decay.

THE RESURRECTION BODY SEEN IN THE SCRIPTURES

45 So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. 48 As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

Paul makes an appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures to show the difference between the natural body that is sown and the spiritual body that will be raised. There is a lesson here. It is that Christianity is not a recent development. It is not a religion that someone dreamed up a few years ago or even a few thousand years ago. It is not a man made philosophy. It goes all the way back to Adam and even before. It originates with the Creator of the universe.

1. The Original Body: *"The first man, Adam, became a living soul."* (15:45).

This is a paraphrase of Genesis 2:7. It is evident from the Genesis account that Adam was initially created and designed for an existence on planet earth. He was created from the very material of the planet on which he was made to live.

You have experienced this same type of existence through natural birth. You are related to Adam. You are of the earth and when your body dies, it returns to the earth.

2. The Original Resurrection Body: *The last Adam became a life-giving*

spirit (15:45).

This is the second type of existence. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you have experienced this type of existence through the new birth. You have been born into the family of God. You are now related to Jesus Christ. This relationship supersedes the old one with Adam. You now have a position in the heavenlies. You are “in Christ.” It is your legal standing.

The same will one day be true of your body. Right now, it suffers through the relationship with Adam. Because Adam experienced pain and weariness, you also experience pain and weariness. Because Adam’s body once died, your body will also die. But because Christ rose and now has a spiritual body, so you shall also have a spiritual body at the resurrection.

3. The Contrast between the Two: *However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual (15:46).*

Which came first, the natural body or the spiritual body? It is the natural body that came first. This sets up a contrast that describes our own future.

Adam	Jesus Christ
Became a living soul at his creation	Became a life-giving spirit at His resurrection
The first man	The second man
From earth	From heaven
Bore descendants who are of the earth	Bore descendants who are from above
Just as we have borne the image of the earthly...	We shall also bear the image of the heavenly

By coming to Christ in repentance and faith, we have abandoned the fate of the first man to share in the eternal destiny of the second man.

THE FINAL VICTORY OF THE RESURRECTION

50 Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

Having shown that the truth of the resurrection is revealed both in nature and in the Scriptures, Paul now moves to a description of that final resurrection. In doing so, he is pointing out that we have a goal in life. It is found in death. It has been said that no one really grows up until he realizes that he will die.

I can remember when that happened to me. It was when my father died. I was struck with the full realization that I was a mortal and that, if the Lord's coming were to be delayed, then I would one day die.

I am told that in the cemetery of Christ's Church in Philadelphia is the grave of Benjamin Franklin. On the tombstone are engraved the following words:

The body of Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here food for worms. But the work will not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant

edition, revised and corrected by the Author.

Those words are an echo of those that were written by the Apostle Paul in this chapter. They are words of victory.

1. The Necessity of the Resurrection: *Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (15:50).*

For a man to inherit the kingdom of God, he must be changed. The initial change is spiritual. He must be born again. Jesus said that in His conversation with Nicodemus when He told him, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” (John 3:3).

There must also be another change. This is a change from a temporal body to an eternal body. There is coming an hour when those who have died will rise from death to a new kind of body that will never again see death.

This brings up an interesting problem. What is to happen to those believers who have not yet died when Christ returns? The seed of their body has not yet been sown. Death has not taken place. How can they experience a resurrection if they have not yet died? The answer is seen in verse 51.

2. The Mystery of the Resurrection: *Behold, I tell you a mystery (15:51)*

When you hear the word “mystery,” you might think of an Agatha Christie novel in which the butler is the prime suspect. The word “mystery” was commonly used in Greek literature to describe the secret cultic rites of the ancient mystery cults. An integral part of this concept was that those who took part in the mysteries must be initiated.

Paul is speaking to those who are initiated. He is speaking to believers. He is about to tell them a mystery. He is about to tell them of something that has been previously hidden from them, but which is about to be revealed.

3. The Blessing of the Resurrection Change: *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (15:51-52).*

The problem with which Paul is dealing here is the exact opposite of the one that faced the Thessalonian believers.

Thessalonian Christians	Corinthian Christians
In 1 Thessalonians 4, the question was whether those who have died in Christ receive the same benefit as those who are alive and remain	Here the question is whether those who are still living receive the same benefits of those who already died
Will those who died receive what we get?	Will we get what those who have died receive?

The answer to both questions is YES! We who are still alive at the time of Christ’s return will be changed. How will this take place? Verse 52 goes on to describe how this will happen. There are three specific points in this description.

- This change is Instantaneous: *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (15:52)*. This will not be a gradual process like the growing of a seed into a plant. It takes place in a single instant.
- The change takes place at the Last Trumpet: *at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised (15:52)*.

This phrase tells us when this change will take place. It will take place at the time when the last trumpet is sounded. The sounding of God’s great trumpet is a common theme throughout the Scriptures.

*It will come about also in that day that
a great trumpet will be blown; and those who
were perishing in the land of Assyria and who*

were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (Isaiah 27:13).

*And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. ³¹ And He will send forth His angels with **a great trumpet** and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:30-31).*

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with **the trumpet of God**; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16).*

These passages are very clear. The sounding of the trumpet of God is going to accompany the gathering of God's people. It will take place at the time of the Second Coming of Christ.

- This change will take place after the dead have been raised:
The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed (15:52).

The raising of the dead are mentioned first and then this is followed by the statement that we shall be changed. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is even more specific to tell us that this is the order in which these events are to take place.

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and **the dead in Christ shall rise first**. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).*

Why do the dead rise first? One old country preacher suggested it is because they have six feet further to go. In reality, the Bible does not tell us why this is the case.

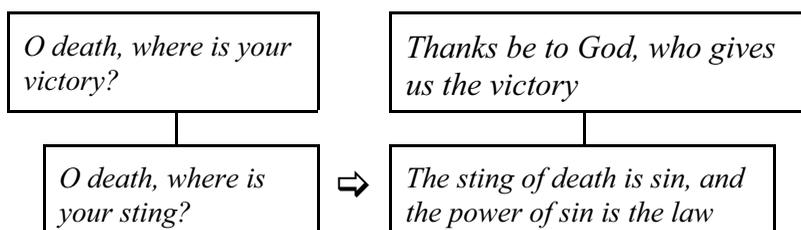
4. The Victory of the Resurrection: *But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (15:54).*

The history of the world has been a history of open warfare. This war has been against death. It started in the Garden of Eden and it will finally conclude at the coming of the Lord in victory. Notice the study in contrasts:

Perishable	- puts on imperishable
Mortal	- puts on immortality
Death	- is swallowed up in victory

5. The Celebration of the Resurrection: *O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (15:55-57).*

Paul breaks into a song of victory. We don’t know the tune, but we can see the chiasmic format of the song.



What does Paul mean when he says that *the power of sin is the law*? There is something about the law that entices people to sin. When I was a lot younger, there was a television show called “Candid Camera.” They would play practical jokes on people and catch it on film. One such joke involved a hole in a wooden fence and a sign under it that said, “Don’t look through this hole.” What happened? People who had walked by ignoring the hole now stopped, looked

both ways and then looked through it.

There will come a day when sin will lose its power. It will be in that day when we shall see Christ and we shall be like Him. It shall be that day when our love for Him shall be consummated and when the law will no longer be needed.

6. The Motivation of the Resurrection: *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord (15:58).*

In view of the future Paul has predicted, he now gives an admonition for the present. It is a twofold admonition. First, we are to be steadfast and immovable. This is a reference to your stability. How do you become stable? By having a solid foundation. By being grounded in the Word. By holding fast to proper teaching.

There is also a second admonition. We are to be *always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord*. This is a call to service. It is not enough to have a solid foundation. You must subsequently build upon it. It is not enough to be grounded in the Word of God. There must also be growth in your life. It is not enough to hold to Biblical teachings. Those teachings must accomplish their work in you and bring forth fruit.

The order in which these two admonitions are presented is crucial. First you need to know the Word and especially the good news about Jesus and His death, burial, and resurrection. It is only then that you can begin to grow and to function and to serve Him.

CLOSING COMMENTS

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

In the last chapter, Paul dealt with the most glorious subject imaginable -- the teaching of the resurrection. The most glowing and fantastic promises were given as we saw a vision of our future destiny. Then, as we turn the page, we read: *Now concerning the collection for the saints*. What a contrast!

Yet this is the very character of Christianity. It contains both the glorious and the mundane. It deals with the dynamic and the everyday.

There is a reason for this contrast. It is because the glorious vision of the future riches of the heavenly kingdom ought to serve as an impetus to our present service. Because we shall be so richly blessed in the future, we should be all the more ready to share in today's earthly riches.

In this chapter we see Christianity in action. This call to action is seen in several different venues:

- A collection of money for needy Christians (16:1-4).
- Paul's plans for future ministry (16:5-9).
- Exhortations to stand strong (16:13).
- Exhortations to continue in love (16:14).
- A call to obey church authorities (16:16).

This is shirt sleeve Christianity. It is as though Paul has taken off his coat and tie and kicked off his shoes to close this letter with some informal greetings and goodbyes.

There is a principle here that we have already mentioned but which will bear repeating. It is that the prophecies of the Bible are not given merely to satisfy our curiosity or to allow us to draw up a prophetic timetable. They are given to encourage us to live differently.

THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. 3 And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

The believers in Jerusalem had come into hard times. A famine had come over the land. This is the same famine that had been prophesied by Agabus in Acts 11:28. The prophecy had come true and this had brought economic depression to Palestine. Jerusalem, as the capital city, was especially hard hit due to the over-population in the city.

The suffering of the Christians in Jerusalem was exceptionally heavy since, in addition to the normal economic woes, there was added to their lot a persecution for their faith. This persecution had come about largely at the hands of their fellow Jews. As a result, the other churches throughout the ancient world began a program of supporting the needy Christians in Jerusalem with gifts of money.

The way in which Paul speaks of “the collection” indicates that it was not a new subject to the believers at Corinth. They had apparently already been informed of the needs at Jerusalem and had decided to partake in the ministry of meeting those needs.

1. A General Practice: *As I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also (16:1).*

The principles that Paul lays down for the church at Corinth were not confined to that particular church. They were universal principles. They were also meant to be applied to the church at Galatia and they can also be applied today.

2. A Weekly Gathering: *On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper (16:2).*

The Time	<i>On the first day of every week</i>
The Participants	<i>Each one of you (believers)</i>
The Funds	<i>Put aside and save</i>
The Amount	<i>As he may prosper</i>

- a. The time: *On the first day of every week (16:2).*

Paul directs that the gathering of these funds be accomplished upon a regular basis. More specifically, they were to be gathered *on the first day of every week*. It is evident both from this passage and from the descriptions of the early church fathers that this had become the meeting day of the church. Why was this day chosen? It was the day on which the resurrection had taken place. It was also the day on which Pentecost had taken place.

- b. The participants: *Each one of you (16:2).*

It is rather obvious that this collection was to involve believers. Paul does not seek these collections from those who were outside the church. There were other social and civic groups in Corinth, but Paul does not solicit money from any of them. This is the duty of Christians. Because God has freely given them all things, they are to freely give of the material blessings they enjoy.

- c. The funds: *Put aside and save (16:2).*

The Corinthians were to *put aside and save* the money that was collected for the Corinthian saints. There are two primary reasons that the New Testament mentions for giving:

The first object of our giving is to be the compensation for those who labor in the church in teaching and preaching (1 Timothy 5:17).

The second object of our giving is to meet specific financial needs of the poor. This was the purpose of this collection in Corinth. It was a collection for charity.

- d. The amount: *As he may prosper (16:2).*

No specific amount of percentage is demanded in this offering. Instead, each man is to give *as he may prosper*. This kind of voluntary giving is not confined to the New Testament. The Old Testament Scriptures lay the foundational principles for giving.

*9 Honor the LORD from your wealth,
And from the first of all your produce;
10 So your barns will be filled with plenty,
And your vats will overflow with new wine.
(Proverbs 3:9-10).*

*The generous man will be prosperous,
And he who waters will himself be watered.
(Proverbs 11:25).*

The principle of giving recognizes that all blessings come from the Lord. He has ordained that some money will have an abundance of money while others have a deficit. There is a Jewish proverb that says, “God must love the poor because He made so many of them.” The truth is that He gives riches to certain believers so that they can use their wealth to help those in need.

At this point, you might be thinking to yourself, “That lets me off the hook because I am certainly not rich.” However, if you have more than another Christian brother who is in need, then you are instructed to share your prosperity with him according to the amount the Lord has prospered you.

3. A Plan of Foresight: *That no collections be made when I come (16:2).*

Paul had a plan and there was a reason for the plan. The plan was that money be laid aside each week. The reason for the plan was so that a special collection would not need to be taken when Paul arrived. By planning ahead and setting aside a portion each week, the church would not be excessively burdened when Paul arrived as it tried to raise the funds all at once.

This teaches us something about the Christian life. It is that there is nothing inconsistent with a Christian who plans ahead. I have seen some Christians who never seem to bother to balance their checkbook, cheerfully announcing, “The Lord will provide.” What they fail to realize is that the Lord provided them with an education in mathematics so that they could balance their checkbook and intelligently plan their finances.

4. A System of Accountability: *And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; 4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me (16:3-4).*

I want you to notice that there is a system of accountability in the handling of these funds. Paul is not going to take the money and pocket it. He isn't going to touch the money at all. Instead, the church of Corinth will choose responsible and trustworthy men of their own number who will take the gift of Jerusalem. There will also be signed letters that shall accompany the gift. Although Paul does not specifically say it, the implication is that the letters will state the amount of the money in the gift. There will be no question in anyone's mind that everything was done decently and properly.

A PLANNED VISIT

5 But I shall come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; 6 and perhaps I shall stay with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. 7 For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.

8 But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; 9 for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. (1 Corinthians 16:5-9).

This section seems to be given in the form of a postscript, a “P.S.” You've done that in a letter before. You have said everything you planned to say and you have practically finished the letter and then you remember something else. You jot down the letters, “P.S.” and you give this last, short, final message.

If this is indeed what Paul is doing, then you might be asking yourself what relevance it can have for believers today. Outside of a bit of early church trivia, of what importance is this section? I believe there are some worthwhile lessons that we can learn.

1. The Lesson of Goal-Setting: *But I shall come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia (16:5).*

It is evident as we read this passage that Paul had some very definite goals. He is presently in Ephesus. That is Anatolia in modern-day Turkey. He plans to come to the Corinthians and he plans to go by a specific route that shall first take him through Macedonia. That is not a direct line. It is a carefully thought route that will take him through each of the churches he has planted during his second missionary journey.

There are some Christians who seem to think that it is wrong to set goals, that you are not really trusting in the leading of the Lord if you make definite plans. You can usually recognize these people by the fact that they are the ones sitting in the same spot and doing nothing.

The Bible is full of examples of godly men who set goals for themselves and who then worked to see those goals accomplished. At the same time, you must be balanced when you are setting your goals. The necessary ingredient that needs to accompany your goal-setting is flexibility.

2. The Lesson of Flexibility: *Perhaps I shall stay with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I may go (16:6).*

Although Paul had some very definite goals, he was flexible enough to realize that they might be overruled. He sees several different possible outcomes of his planning and he will be ready to change his plans as needed. He is flexible enough to cover the various contingencies.

What is your attitude when you come to a life detour? Do you become frustrated and angry when your well-laid plans are pushed aside? You need to realize that plans are your timetable while detours are God's timetable. You will only be able to believe this as

you believe in the sovereignty of God.

3. The Lesson of Sovereignty: *For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits (16:7).*

In forming his plans, Paul recognizes the sovereignty of God. Although he has some special plans to spend some quality time with the Corinthians, he is quick to add, “*if the Lord permits*” (16:7).

Paul recognizes that the Lord has His own timetable and it is the one that counts. He is willing to view the unexpected as a part of God’s sovereign agenda.

4. The Lesson of Quantity Time: *For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits (16:7).*

Paul isn’t satisfied with merely touching base with the Corinthians in a short visit. He does not want to see them only “in passing.” He wants to spend some time with them. He realizes that the process of discipleship takes time.

We tend to speak of spending “quality time” with people and that is a good thing. It is possible to be with someone physically yet to have the time poorly spend. But while quality time is important, it cannot be at the expense of quantity time. You don’t develop disciples in occasional meetings. You develop disciples by being with people and by letting them watch how you live. Parents, you need to spend real time with your children. It needs to be both time of quality and it also needs to be time of quantity.

5. The Lesson of Opportunity: *For a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries (16:9).*

Paul had learned to take hold of opportunities that manifested themselves. Even though he desired to visit his friends in Corinth, he found himself in a situation in which the possibilities for ministry in other places were wide open.

What possibilities were these? They were the possibilities of sharing

the gospel to a world in darkness. That world has its share of adversaries. Paul had faced some serious opposition in Ephesus. In the previous chapter, he related how his life was in danger due to his ministry in the gospel. Yet although there are “many adversaries,” Paul is not discouraged. He realized that God is in control and that the outcome of the battle is certain.

This realization is a motivation to service. It is always easier to join the battle when you know that you are on the winning side. An assurance of victory is a great impetus to endurance. What would you attempt for Christ if you were guaranteed success?

CONCERNING TIMOTHY

Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid; for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. 11 Let no one therefore despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren. (1 Corinthians 16:10-11).

Timothy had accompanied Paul for several years. He had been in Corinth during the two years of ministry as the church was first planted. When Paul departed from Corinth at the end of that time, Timothy had accompanied him on his way.

Paul is now in Ephesus. From this base of operations, he has sent Timothy and Erastus back to Greece to check up on the church and to see how they are doing. We have a reference to this return mission in the book of Acts.

Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” 22 And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. (Acts 19:21-22).

Timothy and Erastus evidently took the land voyage across the Hellespont into Macedonia. From there, they turned southward, coming down the Greek peninsula. If all goes well, they will soon arrive at Corinth. It is in this context that Paul delivers his instructions to the Corinthians.

1. Their Care for Timothy: *See that he is with you without cause to be afraid (16:10).*

The Corinthians had a tendency to be arrogant and intimidating toward anyone whom they did not consider to be their intellectual equal. In their pride, they have even begun to look down on Paul. If they had treated the master harshly, what would they do to the student?

Yet it is not for Timothy's benefit that Paul speaks, but for their own. Paul had not sent Timothy to Corinth for his own benefit, but to benefit the Corinthians.

2. Timothy's Care for the Corinthians is seen back in the 4th chapter of this epistle: *For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17).*

Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to reinforce his teachings to them. His job will be that of a reminder. He will be an example of how the Corinthians ought to live. When they look at Timothy and see the way he lives, they will be reminded of Paul and the way he lived. Neither are Paul's ways an end to themselves; they are an example of what it means to be "in Christ."

CONCERNING APOLLOS

But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity. (1 Corinthians 16:12).

Apollos was the young preacher from Alexandria, Egypt. He reminds me of one of my heroes in the faith, Steve Brown. Steve told me not to call him that, but I'm going to, anyway. Apollos reminds me of Steve because they are both exceptional preachers, especially when it comes to their delivery. Apollos also reminds me of Steve because they were both preachers before they heard the gospel and were saved.

It was while Apollos was preaching at Ephesus that he met Aquila and Priscilla and they disciplined him in the Word (Acts 18:24-26). He had subsequently gone on a preaching tour through Greece that took him through Corinth. During this time at Corinth, he had become known to the church and had ministered there.

Apollos had eventually returned to Ephesus. There he met the Apostle Paul. Upon their meeting, Paul encouraged the young Apollos and, more specifically, encouraged him to make a return trip to the church at Corinth. But Apollos did not want to go at the moment. It was not an opportune time for Apollos to come now. We don't know why. Perhaps he didn't want to be involved right now in a problem church. Or perhaps his ministry in preaching at Ephesus was more pressing. His reason doesn't really matter. He just did not want to go at the moment.

What is interesting is Paul's attitude toward the matter. Although he had *him greatly* to go to Corinth, he was willing to relent when Apollos was dead set against going at the moment.

There will be times when you think the Lord is leading in a specific direction. At the same time, there might be another Christian brother who is just as convinced that the Lord is leading in the opposite direction. What is the answer? How can you tell? Sometimes you can't. Sometimes it is better to take a wait-and-see attitude.

This is what Paul did. He had encouraged Apollos to make the return trip to Corinth. Perhaps he even felt the Lord to be leading Apollos to Corinth. There was only one problem. Apollos did not feel the same leading.

We can learn a lot from Paul's reaction. He does not panic. He does not berate Apollos for defying the will of God. He does not issue an ultimatum to Apollos. He is instead content to let Apollos wait for that leading from the Lord. He recognizes that it will come in the Lord's good time.

A CALL TO ACTION

Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

In these two very short verses, Paul gives five commands. They are all positive in nature. As I read them, I am impressed that these positive commands correspond to the negative situations with which Paul dealt throughout this epistle.

1. *Be on the alert (16:13).*

The Corinthians had not turned from the truth to follow false doctrine. Instead, they had become lax in their practice of the faith. They needed a wake up call. They needed to keep a careful watch on their spiritual lives.

It is easy to hold fast to all of the correct doctrines of the faith while beginning to slip in your actual living of the Christian life. All you have to do is to lower your guard. Forget to make it personal. Hear a truth of the Word and fail to apply it personally in your life.

You've heard the illustration of the frog in the frying pan. I've never tried it and I'm not saying you ought to, either, but I'm told you can sit a frog in a pan of water and slowly turn up the heat until he boils alive. He will not jump out of the pan because he sees no immediate danger.

The same message is here for you. In a society that is so alluring, it is easy to become sidetracked -- to gradually become deadened to the presence of sin in your life. This is the reason for Paul's message to you. Be on the alert! Wake up!

2. *Stand firm in the faith (16:13)*

There is a lie going around today and it is not a new lie. It was making the rounds in Corinth in Paul's day. It is the lie that says the wisdom of the world has a more solid foundation than the truths of Christianity. I have news for you. The truths of the Bible are rock-solid. They are a firm foundation. You can stand firm on them and they will not slip.

3. *Act like men (16:13)*

Paul has already told the Corinthian believers to grow up. He repeated this injunction several times throughout the book.

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to **babes** in Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:1).*

*Brethren, do not be **children** in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature. (1 Corinthians 14:20).*

Have you ever seen a big baby? He may be six feet tall and drive a fancy car and live in a nice house, but he has never grown up. He is easy to recognize. He is the one who has never learned to take on responsibility. He only thinks of himself. Everyone else in his world exists only to serve his needs and his desires. He is described by a funny old song that Amy Grant used to sing:

*I know a man, maybe you know him, too
You never can tell, he might even be you.
He knelt at the altar and that was the end,
He's saved and that's all that matters to him.*

*His spiritual tummy, it can't take too much,
One day a week he gets a spiritual lunch.
On Sunday he puts on his spiritual best,
And gives his language a spiritual rest.*

What kind of Christian are you? Have you begun to grow and to mature in your relationship with the Lord? Or do you still resemble the immature, the unbeliever?

4. *Be strong (16:13)*

Strength is something that everyone admires. We have contests to see who is the strongest and then we give awards to them. This is not what Paul is describing. The verb used here in the Greek text is in the passive voice. Paul is not saying to become strong. He is saying to receive strengthening.

There is an ever-present danger in Christians that they might think of themselves as being strong in themselves. The truth is that, in yourself, you are not strong at all. Your strength lies in the hands of the Lord. He is strong. And you are strong only when you rely on

His strength.

5. *Let all that you do be done in love (16:14)*

This is the central message of the epistle to the Corinthians. This is an epistle about unity. The Corinthians had a problem with unity. At the root of that problem was their lack of love.

Paul has already spent an entire chapter on the importance of love. Indeed, every practical command and exhortation that Paul has given can be summed up in this single imperative. Do everything in love.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.

17 And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men. (1 Corinthians 16:15-18).

One of the lessons we see illustrated time and time again through the Bible is that God works through individuals. He doesn't call a crowd. He usually chooses an individual and gets him to move in the right direction and pretty soon the crowd starts to follow.

That is what a leader is. He is someone who influences people. He is someone whom people follow.

There was such a man in Corinth. His name was Stephanas. We don't know a lot about him. We know that he and his family were among the first converts in all of Greece. We know Paul had led them to Christ and then had personally baptized them (1 Corinthians 1:16). From that time on, the household of Stephanas became known as a family that was devoted to the ministry to the saints.

Paul urges the Corinthians to *be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors* (16:16). Do you see the exhortation? You might have missed it the first time you read the verse because of the parenthetical section that described Stephanas and his family and their conversion experience.

Now I urge you, brethren...¹⁶ that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. (1 Corinthians 16:15-16).

This is a call to subjection. Paul uses Stephanas and his family of examples of what godly leadership is and what our attitude ought to be toward those who manifest that kind of leadership. That attitude is summed up in one word — subjection. That is a word that isn't very popular these days. Today's heroes are those who buck the system. They are rebels. They refuse to subject themselves to anyone.

Christianity is a religion of subjection. It teaches subjection to government, to authorities, and to the church. It tells wives to be subject to their husbands, children to be subject to their parents and slaves to be subject to their masters. Nor does it stop there. Paul gives a general command regarding subjection when he writes:

...and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. (Ephesians 5:21).

We recognize every believer as a priest of the living God. In the Old Testament, God communicated through certain men, but today we all have a royal priesthood. Because of this, God can use all of us in revealing His will to others. You can exhort me to godly living and I can exhort you to godly living and we are called to be subject to one another in the face of such exhortations.

FINAL GREETINGS

¹⁹ The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. ²⁰ All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. ²¹ The greeting is in my own hand-- Paul. (1 Corinthians 16:19-21).

Paul is saying his final goodbyes. There is a genuine bond of fellowship pictured in these verses. It is a fellowship that flows from the love within the body. This bond transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. It breaks the barriers of race and age and gender. It passes through all social and economic strata.

1. The Physical Signature of Greeting: *Greet one another with a holy kiss (16:20).*

In the ancient world, the kiss was a common sign of affection, not only between men and women, but also for people of the same gender. Such a kiss was given on the cheek or on the forehead and signified what a warm embrace signifies in today's culture.

Notice it is called a "holy kiss." The outward manifestation of the bond that exists between Christians is to be special and holy. The holy kiss is to be something special. It is something that has been set apart by God for His own people to show their love for one another.

Paul gives this injunction concerning the holy kiss on four different occasions (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). It would seem that he thought it important.

The holy kiss has fallen out of use among most Christians in the west. That is probably unfortunate. But at the very least, we ought to be regular in our use of a "holy hug."

2. The Written Signature of Greeting: *The greeting is in my own hand - Paul (16:21).*

It was Paul's custom to dictate his epistles while someone else penned them. This was very common throughout the ancient world. People who wanted to write a letter used a scribe in the same way that we use a keyboard. The mark of authenticity of such a letter would be in the signature. It would seem that this is Paul's reference to a greeting that is in his own hand.

If I may be permitted to point out an analogy, Christians are the letter that God has written to the people of this world. There is also a signature. It is the mark of authenticity. The signature of God is His Spirit in your life. People will only believe your message as they see

the signature; as they see the effects of the Holy Spirit in your life. In the words attributed to Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel always; and when necessary, use words.”

CLOSING COMMENTS

22 If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha.

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen. (1 Corinthians 16:22-24).

With these last few words, Paul comes to the close of his epistle. He has given his warnings. He has called for love. He has demonstrated the grace of God. Now he gives a final reminder.

1. A Warning to Love: *If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed (16:22).*

Paul calls for a curse upon anyone who does not love the Lord. This is the same term that he used in Galatians 1:8-9 when he called for a curse on anyone who preaches a false gospel.

These are not two different curses. They are one and the same. There are only two kinds of people in the world. There are those who love the Lord and there are those who do not. There are those who believe and preach the gospel and there are those who believe and who preach in cheap substitutes.

Those who love the Lord	Those who do not love the Lord
They have been blessed by God	They will be eternally cursed by God
They are in Christ and have been identified with Him through faith	They are still in their sins and will bear the consequences of those sins

They have entered into eternal life	They will know only death
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The question that arises is an obvious one. If there are only two kinds of people in the world, which kind are you?

2. A Word of Aramaic: *Maranatha* (16:22).

Our English translation does not actually translate this phrase. It only transliterates it. It merely gives the same word in English letters without translating it.

The translators did this for a reason. They did this because Paul himself did this. Paul's epistle was written in Greek, but here there is a change. This is not Greek. It is Aramaic. And it is not a single word, but two.

Mara is the Aramaic word for "Lord."

Atha is Aramaic for "come."

When we consider the context in which this is used, we can see that it is both a prayer of blessing as well as a warning. Those who do not love the Lord are one day going to be faced with the coming of the Lord and then they will experience His curse.

For those who love the Lord and who trust themselves into His hand, the coming of the Lord is not a curse, but a wonderful blessing. It is the time when we shall finally see the fullness of His grace and His love. Even so, *Maranatha*!