Shabbat Morning Bible Study Notes 1 Corinthians

1 CORINTHIANS 1 – JESUS, THE WISDOM OF GOD

1 Corinthians 1:1-17 – The Foolishness of Division

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 – The Wisdom of the Cross

A. Greeting and giving of thanks.

1. (1) Whom the letter is from: Paul, a called apostle.

Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother.
a. **Paul**: The apostle Paul follows the normal pattern for writing a letter in ancient times. We write a letter by saying who the letter is *to* first, and we conclude with writing who the letter is *from*. In the ancient culture of Paul, a letter began with writing who the letter is *from*, and then stating who the letter is *to*.

i. Paul had an extensive history of contact with the city of Corinth, beginning with when he established the church in Corinth, coming there after Athens and staying a year and a half (Acts 18).

ii. He wrote a letter to the Christians in Corinth from the city of Ephesus (Acts 19), which is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9. This "previous letter" is lost.

iii. Paul then received reports from people in Chloe's household about disturbances in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11); and he may have received a delegation from Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:7) who brought him questions from the congregation (1 Corinthians 7:1).

iv. Then Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to respond to these reports. But because of all the time Paul spent in Corinth, and all the letters he wrote them, we know more about the Christians at Corinth than we know about any other church in the New Testament.

b. **Called to be an apostle**: At the outset of the letter – indeed, the very first few words – Paul fearlessly declares his apostolic credentials. As is evident from 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul's standing and authority as an apostle were not appreciated among the Christians of Corinth.

i. **Called to be an apostle** is literally **a called apostle**. Paul tells them just what

kind of apostle he is, **a called apostle**. "Paul knows that he is not one of the twelve apostles, but he is on par with them because, like them, he is chosen by God." (Robertson)

ii. **An apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God**: With this, Paul emphasizes his point and already begins contending with the Christians of Corinth. It is as if he says, "You all may not recognize my apostolic credentials. That is of little importance to me, because I am not an apostle because of a popular election. I am not an apostle through the appointment of the other apostles. I am **an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God**, not the will of any man."

iii. What is an **apostle of Jesus Christ**? In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul deals more fully with what makes a person an apostle. However, we learn something just from the meaning of the ancient Greek word "*apostolos*," which has the idea of "a special ambassador." Paul was a "special ambassador" of Jesus Christ to the world and to the church.

iv. Even in his introduction, Paul thinks about the critical issues he needs to communicate to the Corinthian Christians. Paul thought carefully about this letter.

c. **Sosthenes our brother**: This man **Sosthenes** is perhaps mentioned in Acts 18:17, as the head of a Corinthian synagogue who was beaten because he protected Paul.

i. When Paul first came to Corinth, the *ruler of the synagogue* was a man named Crispus. Crispus *believed on the Lord with all his household* (Acts 18:8), and was saved. So he was fired from – or quit – his job as *ruler of the synagogue*!

ii. His replacement was a man named *Sosthenes*, who was beaten by the Roman officials in a bit of anti-Semitic backlash against the Jews who tried to persecute Paul. Perhaps this same *Sosthenes* in Acts 18:17 is now with Paul, so Paul calls attention to the man with him whom the Corinthian Christians would know: **Sosthenes our brother**.

iii. It was common in the ancient world to dictate a letter to a scribe who would write it all down. Probably, **Sosthenes** was Paul's scribe (or, more technically, his *amanuensis*).

2. (2) To: The church of God at Corinth.

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

a. **To the church of God**: Most people today associate the word **church** with a building where Christians meet. But the ancient Greek word for **church** (*ekklesiai*) was a non-religious word for an "assembly" of people, typically gathered together for a specific purpose.

i. "The Greek word has both a Gentile and a Jewish background. In its Gentile sense it denotes chiefly the citizen-assembly of a Greek city... but it is its Jewish usage that underlies its use to denote the community of believers in Jesus. In the Septuagint it is one of the words used to denote the people of Israel in their religious character as Yahweh's 'assembly.'" (Bruce in his *Acts* commentary)

ii. The term **church of God** has Old Testament associations, especially in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament). See passages such as Numbers 16:3, Numbers 20:4, Deuteronomy 23:1, and 1 Chronicles 28:8.

iii. Because **church** was a secular term (referring to "the gatherings of the citizenry in a city-state to discuss and decide on matters of public interest" [Mare]), Paul calls the gathering of Christians in Corinth **the church of God**. This isn't the gathering of the world, but **of God**.

iv. Paul doesn't only consider believers in Corinth to be **the church of God**. Believers in Palestine are described this way (1 Corinthians 15:9), as well as the church at large (1 Corinthians 10:31-32).

b. **Which is at Corinth**: Corinth was one of the great cities of the ancient world, and a community very much like Southern California. It was prosperous, busy, and growing; it had a deserved reputation for the reckless pursuit of pleasure. Corinth had a rich ethnic mix, and it was a center for sports, government, military, and business.

i. When Paul came to Corinth in A.D. 50 the city was famous for hundreds of years before he was born. Ancient writers considered Corinth "rich, prosperous... always great and wealthy" (Mare). The Romans destroyed Corinth in 146 B.C., but Julius Caesar rebuilt the city a hundred years later.

ii. Many things made Corinth famous. Pottery and "Corinthian brass" (a mixture of gold, sliver and copper) from the city were world famous. Famous athletic contests known as the *Isthmian Games* – second only to the Olympian Games – were held at the temple of Poseidon in Corinth every two years. Athena, Apollo, Poseidon, Hermes, Isis, Serapis, and Asclepius, among others, had temples to their honor in Corinth. But most prominent was the worship of the Corinthian Aphrodite, who had more than 1,000 *hierodouloi* (female prostitutes and priestesses) in her service.

iii. Corinth was a major city of business, especially because of its location. It was on a four-and-one-half mile-wide isthmus of land. "At its narrowest part the isthmus was crossed by a level track called the *diolcus*, over which vessels were dragged on rollers from one port to the other. This was in constant use, because seamen were thus enabled to avoid sailing round the dangerous promontory of Malea." (Vincent) Sailors wanted to avoid the dangerous journey around Malea, which was indicated by two popular proverbs: "Let him who sails around Malea forget his home," and "Let him who sails around Malea first make his will." If the ship was too large to be dragged, the cargo was unloaded and loaded onto another ship on the other side of the isthmus.

iv. The Corinthian people were also world known: for partying, drunkenness, and loose sexual morals. The term *Korinthiazomai* was well known in the Roman Empire and it meant literally "to live like a Corinthian." But everyone knew it really meant "to be sexually out of control." "Aelian, the late Greek writer, tells us that if ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play he was shown drunk." (Barclay)

v. Fee comments on Corinth's sexual immorality: "The Asclepius room in the present museum in Corinth provides mute evidence to this facet of city life; here on one wall are a large number of clay votives of human genitals that had been offered to the god for healing of that part of the body, apparently ravaged by venereal disease." Fee sums up his analysis of Corinth by writing: "All of this evidence together suggests that Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world." Leon Morris describes Corinth as "Intellectually alert, materially prosperous, but morally corrupt."

c. **To the church of God which is at Corinth**: Notice the contrast: **The church of God** (something good), **which is at Corinth** (someplace bad). Understanding the tension between the *church* and the *city* is important to understanding the letter of 1 Corinthians. The bottom line is this: is the *church* influencing the *city*, or is the *city* influencing the *church*?

i. Morgan says well in his introduction to 1 Corinthians: "The measure of failure on the part of the Church is the measure in which she has allowed herself to be influenced by the spirit of the age... We are sometimes told to-day that what the Church supremely needs is that she should catch the spirit of the age. A thousand times no. What the Church supremely needs is to correct the spirit of the age."

d. **Those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints**: Paul continued his description of the Corinthian Christians. The words **sanctified** and **saints** communicate the same idea, of being *set apart* from the world and unto God.

i. Notice the words ***to be*** are inserted by translators. The Corinthians were **called saints**, not **called to be saints**.

ii. There is much in 1 Corinthians that is unflattering to the Christians of Corinth. They are shown to have, at times, morality problems, doctrine problems, church government problems, spiritual gift problems, church service problems, and authority problems. It might be easy for us to think they weren't even saved! But they were. They were **called saints**.

iii. We might also think saying **called saints** is mere flattery, Paul's way of preparing them for coming rebuke. It isn't. The Corinthian Christians are **called saints**, but this was not based on the outward performance of the Corinthians. It was founded on a promise of God, when He said *for I have many people in this city* (Acts 18:10).

e. **Both theirs and ours**: In his first few words, Paul lays the foundation for a fundamental issue he will address in this letter: Christian unity, based on the common Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Corinthian Christians are **called... saints**, but this isn't exclusive to them. They are saints together **with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord**. Jesus is both *their* Lord and *our* Lord, and because they share a common Lord, they share an essential unity.

3. (3) Greeting: Grace to you and peace.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. **Grace to you and peace**: The greeting including **grace** and **peace** is typical of Paul's letters, and draws from both Greek and Jewish customs. Paul uses this exact phrase five other times in the New Testament.

i. "Grace is always first, peace always second. This is due to the fact that grace is the source of peace. Without grace there is and can be no peace, but when grace is ours, peace must of necessity follow." (Lenski)

b. **The Lord Jesus Christ**: Paul will often (more than 17 times in the letter) refer to Jesus as **the Lord Jesus Christ**; it is well to recall what the title means.

i. **Lord**: A title designating not only master and boss, but also the **Lord** revealed in the Old Testament (known as *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*). "This term could be no more than a polite form of address like our 'Sir.' But it could also be used of the deity one worships. The really significant background, though, is its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to render the divine name, Yahweh... Christians

who used this as their Bible would be familiar with the term as equivalent to deity." (Morris, in *Romans*)

ii. **Jesus**: The given name of the son of Mary, and adopted son of Joseph, which is the Greek pronunciation of *Joshua*. The name *Joshua* means, "Yahweh is salvation."

iii. **Christ**: This is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew word for *Messiah*, or "Anointed One." This is the One prophesied by the Old Testament Scriptures, sent by the Father to save and deliver us.

4. (4-9) A prayer of thanksgiving.

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

a. **I thank my God always**: Paul will later spend most of this letter rebuking sin and correcting error, yet he is still sincerely thankful for God's work in the Corinthian Christians.

i. Those who feel called to rebuke sin and correct error in the church today should follow Paul's example. Unfortunately, many of them never communicate any encouragement with their correction and advice.

b. **For the grace which was given to you by Jesus Christ**: This was the specific reason for Paul's gratitude. Everything good the Corinthian Christians have from God has come to them by **grace**. Grace means that God gives freely, for His own reasons.

c. **Enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and in all knowledge**: This was the effect of grace in the life of the Corinthian Christians. The Corinthians were a "rich" church, not only materially, but also in their speech and knowledge of Jesus (**all utterance and in all knowledge... the testimony of Christ**), in their abounding in the gifts (**come short in no gift**), and in that they lived in anticipation of Jesus' coming (**eagerly waiting**).

i. The work of God in the Corinthian Christians could be seen by *what they said*, by *what they learned*, by a *supernatural element* in their lives, and by their *expectant anticipation* of Jesus' return.

ii. When Paul looked at the Corinthian church, he could say: "These people proclaim Jesus, they know about Jesus, there are the supernatural gifts of God among them, and they are excited about Jesus' return." Whatever problems they had, these are some pretty impressive strong points. Can even this much be said about many churches today? We may pride ourselves on not having the problems of the Corinthian Christians, but do we have their positives?

iii. Yet, these positives were no great credit to the Corinthian Christians themselves. They were not the spiritual achievements of the Corinthians, but the work of the **grace of God** in them.

d. **You come short in no gift**: Paul thanks God for the gifts among the Corinthians, even though they were causing some trouble. He recognizes that the gifts were not the problem, but wrong attitudes and beliefs about the gifts.

i. The Corinthian Christians were indeed gifted, yet carnal. "Should it not show us that gifts are nothing, unless they are laid on the altar of God; that it is nothing to have the gift of oratory; that it is nothing to have the power of eloquence; that it is nothing to have learning; that it is nothing to have influence, unless they all be dedicated to God, and consecrated to his service?" (Spurgeon)

e. **Confirm you to the end**: The Corinthian Christians had their strong points, and they had their weak points. Paul praises God for their positives, and expresses confidence that God will take care of their weak points, and **confirm** them **to the end**, so that they would be **blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

i. How can Paul be confident of this when the Corinthian church has so many problems? He can be confident because **God is faithful**. He is the One who has called them **into the fellowship of His Son**, so He is the One who will **confirm** them **to the end** and present them **blameless**.

f. **His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord**: In these first 10 verses, Paul refers to Jesus in every verse, for a total of 11 times. In this emphasis on Jesus, Paul promotes the sure cure for the problems of the Corinthians: getting your eyes off self and on Jesus.

B. The problem of divisions.

1. (10) Initial plea: don't be torn apart, but joined.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same

judgment.

a. **I plead with you, brethren**: Paul was an *apostle of Jesus Christ*. He had authority in the church. He had the right, and the authority, to command the Corinthian Christians in these matters. Instead, with loving heart, he begs them – he pleads with them – to be unified as believers.

i. "Now, after preparing their minds for rebuke, acting like a good, experienced surgeon, who touches the wound gently when a painful remedy must be used, Paul begins to handle them more severely." (Calvin)

b. **That there be no divisions among you**: The ancient Greek word for **divisions** is "*schismata*." Although we derive our English word "schism" from this Greek word, it does not really mean a "party" or a "faction"; it properly means "tear or rend." Paul's plea is that they stop ripping each other apart, tearing up the body of Christ.

c. **But that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**: The contrast to **divisions** is to be **perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**. Instead of being torn apart, Paul pleads that they would be joined together in the **same mind and in the same judgment**.

i. Barclay on **joined together**: "A medical word used of knitting together bones that have been fractured, or joining together a joint that has been dislocated. The disunion is unnatural and must be cured."

2. (11-13) Paul exposes the foolishness of their divisions.

For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

a. **Those of Chloe's household**: Chloe was a woman (probably a Christian) whose business interests caused her representatives (those of her **household**) to travel between Ephesus and Corinth. Paul writes this letter from Ephesus, where these people from Chloe's household visited and told him about the condition of the the Corinthian church.

i. Clarke on **Chloe**: "This was doubtless some very religious matron at Corinth, whose family were converted to the Lord; some of whom were probably sent to the apostle to inform him of the dissensions which then prevailed in the Church at that place."

b. **Contentions among you**: The Corinthian church suffered under quarreling and conflict. This conflict had made them divide up into "parties" or "cliques," each party having its own "leader."

i. **"I am of Paul"**: There was the "Paul Party," who declared "We are following in the footsteps of the man who founded our church, the apostle Paul. We're the ones really right with God!"

ii. **"I am of Apollos"**: There was the "Apollos Party," who declared "We are following in the footsteps of a man who is great in power and spiritual gifts, and an impressive man. We're the ones really right with God!" (Acts 18:24-25)

iii. **"I am of Cephas"**: There was the "Peter Party," who declared "We are following in the footsteps of the man who is first among all the apostles. Jesus gave him the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and he's our man. We're the ones really right with God!"

iv. **"I am of Christ"**: There was the "Jesus Party," who declared "You all are so carnal, following after mere men. We are following in the footsteps of no one less than Jesus Himself. We're the ones really right with God!"

v. It is possible there was not an actual "Paul Party" or "Apollos Party" or "Peter Party" or "Jesus Party" at Corinth. Later in this letter, Paul writes that he transferred to himself and Apollos what applied to others (1 Corinthians 4:6). The actual Corinthian factions may have centered around people in the congregation, not the different apostles who ministered to them. Even if this is the case, the picture fits. Paul may be "changing the names to protect the innocent," or to show mercy to the guilty.

vi. The Corinthians' boasting about their "party leaders" was really boasting about themselves. It wasn't so much that they thought Apollos was great, but that *they* were great for following him.

c. **There are contentions among you**: Though *division* is ungodly, it is not wrong to make *distinctions* between churches and ministers. God has made different churches and different ministries with different callings and characters, because the job of preaching the gospel is too big for any one group.

i. "I bless God that there are so many denominations. If there were not men who differed a little in their creeds, we should never get as much gospel as we do... God has sent different men to defend different kinds of truth; but Christ defended and preached all... Christ's testimony was perfect." (Spurgeon)

ii. It is one thing to prefer one minister to another, but we cannot divide into cliques behind one minister or another. "One minister of Christ may be justly preferred to another. We ought to honour those most whom God most honoureth, either by a more plentiful giving out of his Spirit, or by a more plentiful success upon their labours; but we ought not so far to appropriate any ministers to ourselves, as for them to despise others. We are not bound to make every minister our pastor, but we are bound to have a just respect for every minister, who by his doctrine and holy life answereth his profession and holy calling." (Poole)

d. **Is Christ divided?** Jesus does not belong to any one "party." These cliques ignore the truth of unity over all diversity in the church, even if they were all in the name of spirituality.

i. Spiritual elitism is terrible, no matter whose name it is practiced in.

ii. There was an old, contentious Quaker who went from one meeting to another, never finding the "true" church. Someone once said to him, "Well, what church are you in now?" He said, "I am in the true church at last." "How many belong to it?" "Just my wife and myself, and I am not sure about her sometimes."

e. **Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul**: Even more foolish than "dividing Jesus" is to center parties in the church around men. When Paul explained it like this, it shows how foolish it is to focus on anyone but Jesus.

3. (14-17) Paul is grateful he did not happen to baptize more people in Corinth and thereby add more fuel to the partisan debate.

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

a. Apparently, some of the Corinthian Christians (probably those of the "Paul Party") made a big deal of the fact that *they* had been baptized by Paul. Because it was becoming a divisive issue, Paul was therefore grateful that he had not baptized very many in Corinth (**lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name**).

i. Of course, Paul did baptize a few in Corinth. **Crispus** is likely mentioned in Acts 18:8, **Gaius** in Romans 16:23.

b. **I thank God... Christ did not send me to baptize**: For Paul, preaching was more important than baptizing, though he was certainly not opposed to baptism. Yet, we can see by this that *baptism is not essential to salvation*. If it were – if the teaching of *baptismal regeneration* were true – then Paul could never **thank God** that he baptized so few in Corinth, and he, as an evangelist, could *never* say **Christ did not send me to baptize**.

i. That Paul did not regard baptism as essential to salvation is also seen by the fact that he did not keep careful track of those he baptized: **Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other**. Surely, Paul remembered his converts, but the issue of baptism, though important, was not *as* important to Paul.

ii. In light of **I thank God that I baptized none of you**, it is impossible to claim that Paul was a sacramentalist. "He clearly denies here that he considers baptism essential to the remission of sin or the means of obtaining forgiveness." (Robertson)

iii. "While therefore it is unscriptural to make baptism essential to salvation or a certain means of regeneration, it is nevertheless a dangerous act of disobedience to undervalue or neglect it." (Hodge)

iv. This passage also makes it clear that the individual doing the baptizing doesn't really affect the validity of the baptism. Those baptized by the great apostle Paul had no advantage over those baptized by some unknown believer. The power of baptism is in the spiritual reality it represents, not in who performs it.

c. **Not with wisdom of words**: How did Paul preach in Corinth? Not with the **wisdom of words**, which can be translated *cleverness of speaking*. Paul came speaking plainly, without any attempt to dazzle with eloquence or intellect.

i. Paul came to Corinth from Athens, where he contended with the great philosophers of the day in terms they could understand (Acts 17:16-34). Some people think that Paul was disappointed by the results in Athens, and resolved to preach differently in Corinth.

ii. It's wrong to say that Paul preached a watered-down gospel in Athens. "Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator of all and ends with God the judge of all... The speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans." (Bruce, in his commentary on Acts) At the same time, it is not unreasonable to think that Paul came from the intellectual environment of Athens, to the open wickedness of Corinth, with a renewed passion to preach the gospel plainly and without compromise.

iii. There is another significant difference between Paul's ministry in Athens and his work in Corinth. Paul was in Athens a day or two; he stayed in Corinth for a year and a half.

d. **Lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect**: Paul makes it clear that it is *possible* to preach the gospel in a way that makes it **of no effect**. If one preaches the word with a reliance on **wisdom of words**, they can make the gospel of **no effect**.

i. How sobering this is! The great gospel of Jesus Christ, the very power of God unto salvation – made empty and of **no effect** through the pride and cleverness of men! This danger was constantly on the mind of the apostle Paul, and should be constantly on the mind of any preacher or teacher.

C. The power of the cross and the wisdom of men.

1. (18) The central point: How the perishing see the cross, and how the saved see the cross.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

a. **For the message of the cross**: In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul declared the idea that the cross could *be made of no effect* if it were presented with *the wisdom of words*. Paul now will show *why* this is true of the cross and the message of the gospel.

b. **The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing**: To those who reject the salvation of the cross, the idea of being saved through the work of a *crucified* man is foolish.

i. The words **message of the cross** sound kind of noble and religious to our twentieth-century ears. But in the first century, saying **message of the cross** was about the same as saying *message of the electric chair* – except worse! What message does a cruel, humiliating, unrelenting instrument of death have? No wonder it **is foolishness to those who are perishing**!

c. **To us who are being saved it is the power of God**: Though it is a strange message, and regarded as foolish by the perishing, to those who trust in it and are **being saved**, this **message of the cross** becomes to them the actual **power of God**.

i. There is inherent **power** in the preaching of the true gospel, when it is received with faith. The hearing and trusting of the true gospel will bring the **power of**

God into your life.

ii. Though the word *gospel* isn't in this verse, it is in the previous verse. For Paul, the **message of the cross** *was* the gospel. It was impossible for the Apostle to preach the gospel without presenting the **message of the cross**. So, preaching a high moral standard is not preaching the gospel, preaching the universal fatherhood of God is not preaching the gospel, and preaching the universal brotherhood of man is not preaching the gospel. The gospel *is* the **message of the cross**.

d. **Those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved**: The verb tenses of **are perishing** and **are being saved** are significant. They both describe a work in progress. Each of us is definitely moving in one of those two directions.

2. (19-21) The wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God.

For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

a. **For it is written**: In this quotation from Isaiah 29:14, Paul shows that in spiritual matters, God opposes the wisdom of man. He will **destroy the wisdom of the wise**, not bow down before it.

b. **Where is the wise?** Paul says, "In light of what God says in Isaiah 29:14, *now* where is your '**wise**' man? Where is your **scribe**? Where is your **disputer of this age**? God has made them all foolish through His wisdom. He has destroyed the wisdom of the wise, just as He said He would."

i. The **disputer of this age** "was the man who wanted to dispute every issue and solve it by human reason." (Mare)

ii. The point is plain: There is no wise man, no scribe, and no debater who can do what Jesus Christ has done.

c. **The world through wisdom did not know God**: There is a constant tendency to think that the smartest and wisest humans will know the most about God. But God cannot be found through human wisdom, but only through the *message of the cross*. The pursuit of human wisdom may bring an earthly contentment or happiness (though this is rare), but in itself, it can never bring the true knowledge of the true God.

i. It is significant that often the most educated people have the least regard for God. This is not always the case; some of the most brilliant men of history have been Christians (such as Isaac Newton). But largely, the "smarter" one sees himself, the less regard he has for God. Human "wisdom" is constantly rejecting God and opposing Him, and ultimately showing itself foolish and perishing in doing so.

ii. One day, students in one of Albert Einstein's classes were saying they had decided that there was no God. Einstein asked them, how much of all the knowledge in the world they had amongst themselves collectively, as a class. The students discussed it for a while and decided they had 5% of all human knowledge amongst themselves. Einstein thought that their estimate was a little generous, but he replied: "Is it possible that God exists in the 95% that you don't know?"

d. **Through the foolishness of the message**: The Corinthians wanted to believe that the gospel itself was a sublime form of wisdom, as the Greeks considered wisdom (*sophia*). Paul replies, 'how foolish can you get? What is there 'wise' (in the Greek sense of wisdom) about a crucified Messiah?"

i. The phrases **foolishness of the message** and **foolishness of God** do not mean Paul actually considered the message and God foolish. He is describing them as they appear to the perishing man, the "wise" man of this age.

ii. God's wisdom is not man's wisdom multiplied to the highest degree. It is wisdom of a different order altogether. *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

iii. Paul isn't condemning all learning or education; he merely says that by themselves they are useless for obtaining spiritual wisdom.

iv. "It is certain that a blind man is no judge of colours, a deaf man is no judge of sound, and a man who has never been quickened into spiritual life can have no judgment as to spiritual things." (Spurgeon)

e. **It pleased God**: God takes pleasure in accomplishing our salvation in a way no one would have expected. He is *happy* to do it in this way, which offends the height of human wisdom.

3. (22-25) The wisdom of God, though foolish to the world, triumphs.

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom—but we preach Christ

crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

a. **For Jews request a sign**: In Paul's day, the Jewish world was looking for a **sign**. Specifically, they wanted the sign of a miraculous Messianic deliverance. They were not looking for the *message of the cross*. Their desire for deliverance was not bad, but their rejection of God's way of deliverance was.

i. "Their idolatry was that they now had God completely figured out; he would simply repeat the Exodus, in still greater splendor." (Fee)

b. **Greeks seek after wisdom**: The Greek culture valued the pursuit of wisdom, usually expressed in high, academic, philosophical terms. They did not value the wisdom expressed in *the message of the cross*. Their desire for wisdom was not bad, but their rejection of God's wisdom was.

i. "Their idolatry was to conceive of God as ultimate Reason, meaning of course what *we* deem to be reasonable." (Fee)

c. **We preach Christ crucified**: Instead of giving the Jews and Greeks what they demanded in deliverance and wisdom, God gave them something unexpected: a crucified Messiah.

i. **Christ** (Messiah) meant power, splendor, and triumph. **Crucified** meant weakness, defeat, and humiliation. **Christ crucified** was the ultimate oxymoron, and this was what Paul preached!

ii. If the cross doesn't seem strange to you, then you either don't understand how the cross was seen in Jesus' day, or you don't understand who Jesus is. You don't understand the tension between **Christ** and **crucified**.

iii. The great Roman statesman Cicero said: "The cross, it speaks of that which is so shameful, so horrible, it should never be mentioned in polite society." If we were witnesses to the trial of Jesus – when the crowd was shouting out "Crucify him! Crucify him!" – if we had our wits about us, we would have shouted back, "Don't crucify Him! If you must execute this man, do it honorably. Let him die the death of a dignified man. But don't expose Him to the horror and the humiliation of hanging on a cross." But God wanted **Christ crucified**, and if we don't embrace the cross, even with all its strange contradictions and demands, then we are *lost*.

iv. Let every pulpit rightly say, "**we preach Christ crucified**!" A strong church once inscribed these words on an archway leading to the churchyard. Over time,

two things happened: the church lost its passion for Jesus and His gospel, and ivy began to grow on the archway. The growth of the ivy, covering the message, showed the spiritual decline. Originally it said strongly, **we preach Christ crucified**. But as the ivy grew, one could only read **we preach Christ**, and the church also started preaching "Jesus the Great Man" and "Jesus the Moral Example" instead of Christ crucified. The ivy kept growing, and one could soon only read, **we preach**. The church also had even lost Jesus in the message, preaching religious platitudes and social graces. Finally, one could only read **we**, and the church also just became another social gathering place, all about *we* and not about God.

d. **To the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness**: The Jews regarded *Christ crucified* as a **stumbling block**; perhaps this is better understood as an *offense* or a *scandal*. The Greeks regarded *Christ crucified* as **foolishness**. But God did not respond to the polling data. He kept to His gospel, because for those who believed it (**both Jews and Greeks**), *Christ crucified* is **the power of God and the wisdom of God**.

i. If the cross and its message *seem* weak, they are not; they are powerful and wise. But our expectations of what God should do keep us from receiving that power and wisdom.

ii. Paul knew this by experience. He was once scandalized by a crucified Christ; it infuriated him that one obviously cursed by God (according to Deuteronomy 21:23) should be honored as Messiah and Lord. So, he persecuted the church before being confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

iii. As much as Paul was once offended by a crucified Messiah, so the Greeks thought a message of salvation through a humiliating instrument of death foolish. A well-known piece of graffiti in Rome shows a worshipper standing next to a crucified figure with the body of a man and the head of an ass, and it says, "Alexamenos worships his god." This is how foolish the Greeks saw the cross.

iv. Those who insist that we must change the emphasis of the gospel because people can't relate to it today must realize that the people of Paul's day couldn't relate to his preaching either, yet he kept it up, and with great results.

v. "Those who thus veil an unwelcome truth imagine that they make disciples, whereas they are only paying homage to unbelief, and comforting men in their rejection of divine propitiation for sin. Whatever the preacher may mean in his heart, he will be guilty of the blood of souls if he does not clearly proclaim a real sacrifice for sin." (Spurgeon)

vi. "Certain divines tell us that they must adapt truth to the advance of the age,

which means that they must murder it and fling its dead body to the dogs… which simply means that a popular lie shall take the place of an offensive truth." (Spurgeon)

e. **The foolishness of God is wiser than men**: God was at His most "foolish" and very "weakest" at the cross, but it was infinitely wiser and stronger than anything man could do.
i. Salvation is not the achievement of human wisdom; it is the embrace of God's dramatic, unexpected act of love at Calvary.

4. (26-29) God's "foolish wisdom" is also displayed by whom He has chosen for salvation.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

a. **You see your calling, brethren**: Paul says to the Corinthians, "Look at yourselves. You're no great bargain." There were **not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble** among the Christians at Corinth.

i. Lady Huntington, the rich and influential friend of Whitfield and Wesley, said she was going to heaven by an "m": it isn't *any* noble; instead it is not ***m*any noble**.

b. **But God has chosen the foolish things of the world**: Looking again at the Corinthians, Paul can say "you aren't wise according to the world, you aren't mighty, you aren't noble – but you are among **the foolish things of the world**."

i. No doubt, many of the Corinthian Christians were beginning to think of themselves in high terms because of God's work in them. Paul will not allow this. They have not been chosen because *they* are so great, but because *God* is so great.

c. **To put to shame the wise**: This explains part of the *pleasure* of God described in 1 Corinthians 1:21. God loves to rebuke the idolatry of human wisdom, and He often does it by choosing and using the **foolish things of the world**.

i. God isn't saying that it is better to be foolish or uneducated. Rather, He is saying that the world's wisdom and education does not bring us salvation in Jesus Christ. "In putting the strong and wise and great to shame, God does not exalt the weak

and uneducated and worthless, but brings all of them down to one common level." (Calvin)

ii. God has called the weak and ignorant *first*, but not exclusively; shepherds first, then wise men; fishermen first, then the educated (like Paul, who was himself an educated man).

iii. "The ancient Christians were for the most part slaves and men of low station; the whole history of the expansion of the church is in reality a progressive victory of the ignorant over the learned, the lowly over the lofty, until the emperor himself laid down his crown before the cross of Christ." (Alford, quoting Olshausen)

d. **That no flesh should glory in His presence**: This is the end result. No one will stand before God and declare, "I figured You out" or "You did it just like I thought You should." God's ways are greater and higher, and nothing of the **flesh** will **glory in His presence**.

5. (30-31) True wisdom belongs to the believing.

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

a. **Jesus, who became for us wisdom**: Jesus perfectly shows us, in His teaching and life, God's wisdom. This wisdom is often in contradiction to man's expectation.

i. True wisdom isn't about "getting smart." God's wisdom is received in and through the person of Jesus.

b. **Who became for us**: Jesus is not only **wisdom** for us; He is also **righteousness and sanctification and redemption**. In His work, He communicates three things to those who are **in Christ Jesus**.

i. **Righteousness** means that we are legally declared not only "not guilty," but to have a *positive* righteousness. It means that the righteous deeds and character of Jesus are accounted to us. We don't become righteous by focusing on ourselves, because Jesus **became for us... righteousness**.

ii. **Sanctification** speaks of our behavior, and how the believers are to be separate *from* the world and *unto* God. We don't grow in **sanctification** by focusing on ourselves, but on Jesus, because Jesus **became for us... sanctification**.

iii.**Redemption** is a word from the slave trade. The idea is that we have been

purchased to permanent freedom. We don't find freedom by focusing on ourselves, because **Jesus became for us... redemption**.

c. **He who glories, let him glory in the LORD**: Paul uses this reference to Jeremiah 9:23-24 to show that God did it all this way so that God would get the glory. The *path* for God's glory is Christ crucified; the *evidence* of God's glory is His choice of the lowly.

1 CORINTHIANS 2 – REAL WISDOM FROM GOD

1 Corinthians 2-3 – A Wise God and Carnal Christians

A. Paul's reliance on God's wisdom.

1. (1-4) How Paul preached to the Corinthians.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

a. **When I came to you**: Paul's arrival in Corinth is described in Acts 18. He came and met a Christian couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers by trade, like Paul. He ministered in Corinth for more than a year and a half, supporting himself by tent making.

b. **Did not come with excellence of speech**: Paul didn't come as a philosopher or a salesman; he came as a *witness* (**declaring to you the testimony of God**).

i. Paul was certainly a man who could reason and debate persuasively, but he didn't use that approach in preaching the gospel. He made a conscious decision (**I determined**) to put the emphasis on **Jesus Christ and Him crucified**. Paul was an ambassador, not a salesman.

ii. In taking this approach, Paul understood he didn't cater to what his audience *wanted*. "Corinth put a premium on the veneer of false rhetoric and thin thinking" (Barclay). He already knew *the Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom* (1 Corinthians 1:22), but he does not seem to care. He will preach **Jesus Christ and Him crucified**.

iii. If a preacher is not careful, he will get in the way of the gospel instead of being

a servant of the gospel. They can obscure Jesus by their preaching, either in the presentation or the message. Like the little girl, who when a smaller man was guest speaking could finally see the stained glass window of Jesus behind the pulpit said, "Where's the man who usually stands there so we can't see Jesus?"

c. **Not to know anything** "does not mean that he left all other knowledge aside, but rather that he had the gospel, with its crucified Messiah, as his singular focus and passion while he was among them." (Fee)

d. **I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling**: Paul was not brimming with self-confidence. Knowing the need and his own limitations made him weak and afraid. Yet it kept him from the poison of self-reliance, and let God's strength flow.

i. Vincent says the implication of 1 Corinthians 2:3 is that his condition grew out of the circumstances in which he found himself in Corinth. Paul's **weakness**, **fear**, and **trembling** could have been the result of an illness he suffered under while in Corinth, or some (like Calvin) believe it was because of the threat of persecution.

ii. Whatever the cause, "So great was his sense of weakness and fear, and so profound his lack of trust in himself that he quaked, he trembled. Those are the secrets of strength in all preaching." (G. Campbell Morgan)

e. **Not with persuasive words**: Paul is not rejecting preaching, even persuasive preaching (his sermon before Agrippa in Acts 26 is a remarkable example of persuasive preaching). Paul is rejecting any reliance on the preacher's ability to persuade with **human wisdom**.

i. "It is ours to speak the truth boldly, and in every case we shall be a sweet savour unto God; but to temporise in the hope of making converts is to do evil that good may come, and this is never to be thought of for an instant." (Spurgeon)

f. **But in demonstration of the Spirit and of power**: Paul knew it is the preacher's job to preach and it is the Holy Spirit's job to demonstrate. Paul's preaching may not have been impressive or persuasive on a human level, but on a spiritual level it had **power**.

2. (5) The reason for reliance on the Spirit instead of human wisdom.
That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

a. **That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men**: Preaching strategies centered on **the wisdom of men** – around emotion, entertainment and human personality – may yield *response*, but not *results* for the kingdom of God.

i. Many people use slick, entertaining, or even deceptive means to "lure" people into the church, and justify it by saying, "we're drawing them in and then winning them to Jesus." But the principle stands: what you draw them *with* is what you draw them *to*.

b. **Not be in the wisdom of men**: If someone's faith is in **the wisdom of men**, and not the **power of God**; if someone can be *persuaded into* the kingdom by human wisdom, they can also be *persuaded out* of the kingdom by human wisdom.

B. Paul preaches real wisdom, not the wisdom of men.

1. (6-8) God's wisdom is not recognized by this age.

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory

a. **However, we speak wisdom**: Just because Paul would not cater to the Corinthian love of human wisdom does not mean that his message had no wisdom. In fact, there is a vast wealth of wisdom sealed off to everyone except the Christian.

b. **Among those who are mature**: Who are the **mature** Paul could speak this wisdom to? Some think the line is drawn between saved and unsaved, others think it is between mature and immature believers.

i. Paul does use the word **mature** for mature believers in passages like Ephesians 4:13, 1 Corinthians 14:20, and Philippians 3:15. An immature person (such as a baby) doesn't have the discernment to know what is good to eat and what isn't. A baby will put *anything* into its mouth.

c. **Which none of the rulers of this age knew**: The **mature** recognize God's wisdom, but **the rulers of this age** do not. Are **the rulers of this age** men or demonic powers?

i. This debate goes all the way back to the time of Origen and Chrysostom. On the surface, it seems clear that **the rulers of this age** must refer to *human* rulers, because only they didn't know what they were doing when they incited the crucifixion of Jesus. "Paul habitually ascribes power to the demonic forces, but not ignorance." (Morris)

ii. However, one could say that demonic powers were ignorant of what would *result* from the crucifixion of Jesus – the disarming and defeat of demonic powers (Colossians 2:15) – and had they known they were sealing their own doom by inciting the crucifixion, they would not have done it.

iii. No matter who exactly the **rulers of this age** are, their defeat is certain: **who are coming to nothing**. Their day is over and the day of Jesus Christ is here.

d. **Which none of the rulers of this age knew**: Why did the **rulers of this age** fail to recognize God's wisdom? Because it came in a **mystery**; a "sacred secret" that could only be known by revelation. It is **the hidden wisdom** that is now revealed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which Paul preaches.

e. **Lord of glory**: Some scholars consider **the Lord of glory** the loftiest title Paul ever gave to Jesus. It is certain proof that Paul regarded Jesus as God, the Second Person of the Trinity. It is inconceivable that Paul would give this title to any lesser being.

2. (9-11) God's wisdom is known only by the Holy Spirit.

But as it is written:
"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

a. **As it is written**: Properly speaking, this is not a strict quotation from the Scriptures. Paul is paraphrasing Isaiah 64:4 to remind us that God's wisdom and plan is past our finding out on our own.

i. "*As it is written* is not, in this case, the form of quotation, but is rather equivalent to saying, 'To use the language of Scripture.'" (Hodge)

b. **Eye has not seen**: Most people wrongly take **the things which God has prepared for those who love Him** to mean the things which are waiting for us in heaven. While it is true that we cannot comprehend the greatness of heaven, that isn't what Paul means here, because 1 Corinthians 2:10 tells us **God has revealed them to us through His Spirit**. This glorious thing *has* been revealed by the gospel.

i. "These words have been applied to the state of glory in a *future* world; but certainly they belong to the *present* state, and express merely the wondrous light, life, and liberty which the Gospel communicates to them that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in that way which the Gospel itself requires." (Clarke)

ii. Paul is communicating much the same message as Ephesians 3:1-7, where he writes about the mystery of the church, and how the church *in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.* (Ephesians 3:5)

iii. Before the life and ministry of Jesus, God's people had a vague understanding of the glory of His work and what it would do for His people. But they really did not and could not fully understand it ahead of time.

c. **Through His Spirit** reminds us that only the Holy Spirit can tell us about God and His wisdom. This knowledge is unattainable by human wisdom or investigation.

i. **No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God**: Paul argues from the Greek philosophic premise that *like is known only by like*. You can *guess* what your dog is thinking, but you really can't know unless he was to tell you. Even so, we could *guess* what God is thinking, and about His wisdom, but we would never know unless He told us.

e. **Yes, the deep things of God**: In their love of human wisdom, the Corinthians proudly thought Paul was just dealing in "just basics" like the gospel. Paul insists that his message gets to the heart of **the deep things of God**.

3. (12-13) How we can receive this wisdom.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

a. **That we might know**: This wisdom comes by **the Spirit who is from God**, not from **the spirit of this world**. Since every believer has **received... the Spirit who is from God**, every believer has the access to this spiritual wisdom.

i. This does *not* mean every believer has equal spiritual wisdom. And it does *not* mean we will understand all spiritual mysteries. It *does* mean every believer can understand the basics of the Christian message, which is unattainable (and undesirable) by human wisdom.

b. **Comparing spiritual things with spiritual**: Christians combine spiritual things with spiritual words; they use words and concepts taught only by the Holy Spirit.

i. Or, Paul may be speaking of the way only a spiritual man can receive spiritual things. "The passage therefore should be thus translated: *Explaining spiritual things to spiritual persons*." (Clarke)

4. (14-16) The natural man and the spiritual man.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

a. **But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God**: The ancient Greek word for **natural man** is "*psuchikos*." It describes the *materialist*, who lives as if there were nothing beyond this physical life. This is the kind of life common to all animals.

i. The **natural man** is where we all start life, the life inherited from Adam. The **natural man** is unregenerate man, unsaved man.

ii. We have to deal with the material world, so there is nothing inherently sinful in "natural" life. God is not displeased when you have to eat and sleep and work. But life on this level is without spiritual insight: **the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God**.

iii. Spiritual things seem **foolishness** to the **natural man**. Why waste time on "spiritual" things when you could be making money or having fun?

b. **Does not receive the things of the Spirit of God**: The **natural man** doesn't *want* the things of God because he regards them as foolishness. What is more, he *can't* understand the things of God (even if he wanted to) because **they are spiritually discerned**. It would be wrong to expect the **natural man** to see and value spiritual things, just as it would be wrong to expect a corpse to see the material world.

i. The **natural man** is unsaved. Too many Christians still think like natural men, refusing to **spiritually** discern things. When our only concern is for "what works" or the "bottom line," we are not **spiritually** discerning, and we are thinking like the **natural man**, even though we might be saved.

c. **He who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one**: Paul is not saying that every Christian is above every criticism (after all, much of this letter is criticism). The point is clear: no natural man is equipped to judge a spiritual man.

d. **Who has known the mind of the LORD**: Isaiah 40:13 refers to the mind of Yahweh (translated here as **LORD**); but Paul has no trouble inserting **mind of Christ** for **mind of the LORD**, because Jesus is Yahweh!

1 CORINTHIANS 3 – CARNAL CHRISTIANS AND GODLY MINISTERS

1 Corinthians 2-3 – A Wise God and Carnal Christians

A. Carnality in the Corinthian church.

1. (1) Paul confronts their condition.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

a. **And I, brethren**: These people are part of the family of God (he calls them **brethren**), and that is the problem. Though they have the Holy Spirit (unlike the *natural man* of 1 Corinthians 2:14), they are not behaving like **spiritual people**, but like **carnal** – that is, fleshly -people, like immature Christians (**babes in Christ**).

i. There is a significant debate as to if there can be such a thing as a **carnal** Christian. Some say it is a contradiction in terms; that Paul really says that these **carnal** ones are not Christians at all. Yet he clearly calls them **brethren**, and says they are **babes in Christ**. How could these terms be used of someone who is not a Christian?

ii. These Christians, to some extent, are *thinking* and *acting* according to the flesh, not the Spirit. Of course, the flesh does not dominate *every* aspect of their life, or they would then have no evidence of being born again. But Paul is addressing issues where they clearly are thinking and acting in a **carnal** – that is, in a fleshly – manner.

iii. "The carnal Christian is a child of God, born again and on his way to heaven, but he is traveling third class." (Redpath) Romans 7 is a portrait of the carnal Christian;

indwelt by the Spirit, but mastered by the flesh.

b. **Could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal**: There is a difference between being *fleshy* (*sarkinos*, used in 2 Corinthians 3:3) and being *fleshly* (the Greek word *sarkikos*, used here in this passage).

i. *Fleshy* is simply "made of flesh"; it can speak of the weakness that is common to every fallen human.

ii. *Fleshly*, when used of a person means, "characterized by the flesh." It speaks of the one who can and should do differently but does not. Paul says that the Corinthians were *sarkikos*.

c. **Spiritual... carnal**: Paul speaks about three categories of men.

There is the *natural man* (1 Corinthians 2:14), who is patterned after Adam and rejects the things of the Spirit;

there is the *spiritual* man (1 Corinthians 2:15), who knows the things of God;

and there is the **carnal** man who knows the things of God, yet in some significant ways is still characterized by the flesh. Which one are you?

2. (2) How Paul treated carnal believers.

I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able.

a. **I fed you with milk**: Paul kept his teaching on the basics, even though they had an inflated view of their spirituality. They believed they were ready for the "deeper things," but were not living any deeper in the basic things he already preached to them.

b. **With milk and not with solid food**: The difference between **milk** and **solid food** is one of degrees, not kind. Every doctrine that can be taught in seminary can be taught to children, though not in the same words.
i. There are not two gospels, one for the learned and one for the unlearned; there is no part of the gospel that we are authorized to keep back from the people.

c. **You were not able to receive it**: It wasn't that God prevented them from receiving the **solid food** Paul gave. The real problem was the Corinthian attraction to spiritual "junk food," based on man's wisdom and eloquence. They were so "filled" with this junk food that they were **not able to receive** the spiritual **solid food** Paul wanted to give them.

i. Some "spiritual junk food Christians" are greatly blessed when they get a spiritual meal of **solid food**, but others, when presented with **solid food** are **not able to receive it**, because their spiritual "taste buds" are so conditioned to junk food, that is all they have a taste for.

3. (3-4) Evidence of their carnality.

For you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I *am* of Apollos," are you not carnal?

a. **For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal**: The Corinthian Christians thought of themselves as spiritual, but their divisions show that they are in fact fleshly.

i. The problems they had in human relationships showed there was something wrong in their relationship with God. It was evidence of carnality, of a fleshly way of thinking and living.

ii. **Divisions**, **envy** and **strife** among Christians are not the only signs of fleshiness, but they are the ones most evident among the Corinthians.

b. **Are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?** Paul did not say that they *were* **mere men** (that is, not saved), only that they were **behaving like mere men**. Christians have a higher call than living like the rest of humanity.

i. "Spiritual people are to walk in the Spirit. If they do otherwise, they are "worldly" and are called upon to desist. *Remaining worldly* is not one of the options." (Fee)

c. **When one says, "I am of Paul," ... are you not carnal?** We might think Paul would be more kind to his own "fan club." Instead of letting their praise stroke his flesh, Paul denounced even his own partisans.

B. How to regard leaders in the church.

1. (5-7) The foolishness of exalting church leaders.

Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

a. **Who then is Paul?** Paul and Apollos are not the ones you believed on for

salvation; they only brought Jesus to you. They are **through whom you believed**, not *on* whom you believed.

i. "So what was the use of fighting which of two nothings was the greater?" (Maclaren)

b. **I planted, Apollos watered**: Christian workers have different jobs and see different results, but God is the one who gets the work done. Only **God... gives the increase**.

i. When a farmer plants a seed, and waters it, he really does not *make* it grow. The miracle of life does that. All the farmer can do is provide the right environment for growth, and trust in the miracle of life. We do the same thing in ministering Jesus to other people.

ii. Some people are frustrated because they want to water when God has called them to plant, or they want to plant when God has called them to water. Others are frustrated because they want to make the increase happen, when only God can do that. Real fruitfulness in ministry happens when we are peacefully content with what God has called us to do.

c. **I planted, Apollos watered**: **Planted** and **watered** are in the ancient Greek aorist tense, marking definite acts in the past. **Gives the increase** is in the imperfect tense, marking the continued work of God.

2. (8-9) Christian workers work together, but are rewarded according to their own labor.

Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building.

a. **He who plants and he who waters are one**: In combating the Corinthian desire to divide among leaders, Paul reminds them they are all on the same team.

i. How silly to say, "Planting is what is really important. Those waterers are really missing the boat." Or to think, "Watering is where it's at. Those planters better get their priorities straight." The fact is planters and waterers are both necessary, both need each other, and both are working towards the same goal.

b. **Each one will receive his own reward**: All work together, but each is rewarded individually. Reward is not given according to gifts, talents, or even success, but according to their **own labor**.

i. God knows how to reward properly. On earth, many ministers either receive too much or too little reward.

ii. "The faithful, laborious minister or missionary who labours in obscurity and without apparent fruit, will meet a reward far beyond that of those who, with less self-denial and effort, are made the instruments of great results." (Hodge)

iii. Young preachers used to ask G. Campbell Morgan the secret to his preaching success. He would answer: "I always say to them the same thing: work; hard work; and again, work!"

c. **We are God's fellow workers**: God gives us the amazing opportunity to work with Him. We cannot work without Him, and He will not work without us (generally speaking). God wants *you* as His working partner.
i. When you consider all the ways God *could* have done His work, it is even more amazing to know He wants our participation.

d. **You are God's field, you are God's building**: The work Paul did with God was to work "on" God's people. They were his "field" (using the picture of a farmer planting and watering), and they were his "building" (using the picture of a builder).

3. (10-15) The church as a building.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

a. **According to the grace of God**: In describing Paul's work among the Corinthians, he begins with a declaration of **grace**. He knew that his status as a worker in God's field, or on God's building, was based on *God's undeserved favor*, not on his own deserving or merit.

i. It is an exalted thing to be a *fellow worker* with God. But God doesn't choose exalted people to do His work. It isn't anything in them that makes them worthy to be His worker, it is **according to the grace of God**.

b. **I have laid the foundation**: When Paul founded the church in Corinth (Acts 18), he set the only foundation that can be laid – the person and work of **Jesus Christ**. Yet he knew that others would come after him and build on the foundation he set.

i. So, **let each one take heed how he builds on it**. There is only one foundation for the church. If it isn't founded on Jesus Christ, it isn't a church at all. So one can't build on any other foundation; but one can build *unworthily* on the one foundation.

c. **Each one's work will become clear**: God will test the building work of all His *fellow workers*, so **each one's work will become clear**. Some build with precious things like **gold, silver, precious stones**; others build with unworthy materials like **wood, hay,** and **straw**.

i. By using the figures of **gold, silver,** and **precious stones**, Paul seems to have in mind the building materials used in the construction of the temple (1 Chronicles 22:14, 22:16, and 29:2). The "building" is what God builds in His people with the help of His *fellow workers*.

ii. **Precious stones** doesn't mean jewels, but fine stone materials like marble and granite. Mixing the wisdom of men with the wisdom of God in the work of building the church is like using alternate layers of straw and marble in building. Straw may be fine, it may have a place (in the barn), but it is an inadequate building material. In the same way, human wisdom and fleshly attractions may have a place in life, but not in the building of the church.

d. **The fire will test each one's work**: When God tests our work, it will be **revealed** what kind of work it was. Just as fire will destroy **wood, hay,** and **straw**, but not **gold, silver,** and **precious stones**; so the work of some will be revealed as *nothing* on that Day.

i. Notice that the *amount* of the work isn't going to be evaluated (though it does have some relevance). Paul says the work will be tested to see **what *sort* it is**. If one did a lot of the wrong **sort** of work, it will be as if he did nothing. His work will be burned and will vanish in eternity. Moody wisely said that converts ought to be *weighed* as well as *counted*.

ii. Paul also referred to this great testing in 2 Corinthians 5:10: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*. When our work is tested before the Lord, we will be rewarded according to what remains.

iii. It is a sobering thought: many, many people who believe they are serving God,

but are doing it in an unworthy manner or with unworthy "materials" will come to find in eternity that they have, in reality, done *nothing* for the Lord. Some will be saved, but with a life that was wasted, and receive no crown to give to Jesus, for His glory (as in Revelation 4:10-11). **He himself will be saved, yet so as through the fire** shows that some will be saved, but barely saved, and saved with everything gone.

e. **If anyone's work**: The fire does not purify the *worker*, it tests their *workmanship*. Roman Catholics use this passage to teach purgatory, the idea that when we die, we go to a place where we are purified by fire before we go to heaven. The idea of purgatory has nothing to do with this passage, and nothing to do with any other passage in the Bible. Purgatory is strictly a human invention, and denies the finished work of Jesus for the believer.

i. This passage has first application to Christian leaders, because this is Paul's topic in context, but the application extends to all servants of God.

4. (16-17) The church as a temple.

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are.

a. **You are the temple of God**: Paul will later (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) speak as individual Christians being temples. Here his emphasis is on the church as a whole (though it has application to individuals).

i. When Paul calls the church a temple, don't think he is using a picture. The physical temple was the picture; God's dwelling in us is the reality.

b. **You are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you**: What makes the church a temple? **The Spirit of God dwells in you**. The ancient Greek word used for **temple** (*naos*) refers to the actual sanctuary, the place of the deity's dwelling, in contrast to the broader word *hieron*, which was the temple area in general.

c. **If anyone defiles the temple of God**: If you defile the church, God will **destroy** you. God's temple – His church – is **holy**, and it matters to God how we treat His holy temple.

C. How to glorify God.

1. (18-20) Glorify Him by pursuing real wisdom.

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness"; and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

a. **If anyone among you seems to be wise**: Paul is being a little sarcastic here. Of course the Corinthians considered themselves **wise in this age**! That was one of their problems, their love of worldly wisdom.

b. **Let him become a fool that he may become wise**: What is one to do if they are **wise in this age**? If they are wise according to a human measure of wisdom? They are to **become a fool that he may become wise**.

i. Paul asks them to renounce all worldly wisdom, all *humanism* (man-centered philosophy), even if it means being called a fool. If one is not willing to be considered a **fool** by those who value only human wisdom, they will never be able to truly **become wise**.

c. **The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise**: God has evaluated the **wisdom of this world**, and He considers it **foolishness**, **craftiness**, and **futile**. Will we agree with God's evaluation or not?

2. (21-23) Glorify God by seeing His servants in the right perspective.

Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's.

a. **Let no one glory in men**: How prone we are to **glory in men**! We are more excited about being with the influential and famous of this world than about being with God. We value the gifts and honors of men more than the gifts and honors God gives. How we need to hear, **let no one glory in men**!

b. **For all things are yours**: To say *I am of Paul* or *I am of Apollos* is to have a view that is too narrow, too constricted. Both Paul and Apollos belong to you; the whole universe is yours in Christ.

i. Why, even **death** is "ours"; it is our servant, not our master! Death may be to us as the angel who touched Peter in Acts 12, causing his chains to fall off, and leading him through a gate that opens by itself, into real freedom.

c. **All are yours**: This is Christian liberty. **And you are Christ's**: This is Christian

responsibility.

1 CORINTHIANS 4 – ARE YOU GLORIFIED WITHOUT US?

1 Corinthians 4 – How to Regard God's Servants

A. How the Corinthians should consider Paul and the apostles.

1. (1-2) Servants and stewards.

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

a. **Let a man so consider us**: Paul asks that he, and the other apostles (**us**) be regarded by the Corinthians as **servants**. Paul had a real problem with the Corinthians; they tended to look down on him and not respect his apostolic authority. In carefully chosen words, Paul will show the Corinthians how to have a proper regard
– not too exalted and not too low – of himself and the other apostles.

b. **So consider us, as servants of Christ**: There are several different words in the language of the New Testament to describe a servant. Here, Paul uses the word "*hyperetas*," which describes a subordinate servant functioning as a free man. He does not use the more common New Testament word for a servant (*doulos*) which designated a common slave.

i. The word *hyperetas* literally means an "under-rower," in the sense that someone is a rower on a big galley ship. So, though it is not the most lowly word for a servant, it is certainly not a prestigious position. Under-rowers serve "Christ the master-pilot, helping forward the ship of the Church toward the haven of heaven." (Trapp)

ii. G Campbell Morgan describes this "under-rower" as "one who acts under direction, and asks no questions, one who does the thing he is appointed to do without hesitation, and one who reports only to the One Who is over him."

c. **And stewards**: In addition to a **servant**, Paul asks to be considered as a **steward**, who was the manager of a household.

i. In relation to the master of the house, the **steward** was a slave; but in relation to the other slaves the **steward** was a master.

ii. "The *steward*... was the master's deputy in regulating the concerns of the family,

providing food for the household, seeing it served out at proper times and seasons, and in proper quantities. He received all the cash, expended what was necessary for the support of the family, and kept exact accounts, for which he was obliged at certain times to lay before the master." (Adam Clarke)

d. **And stewards of the mysteries of God**: What did Paul and the other apostles "manage" in the household of God? Among other things, they were **stewards of the *mysteries* of God**. They "managed" (in the sense of preserving and protecting) and "dispensed" (in the sense of distributing) the truth of God.

i. Whenever Paul would hear criticism of his style or manner, he could simply ask, "Did I give you the truth?" As a good steward, that's what he first cared about.

e. **It is required in servants that one be found faithful**: For stewards, the important thing was faithfulness. They had to be efficient managers of the master's resources. A steward never owned the property or resource he dealt with; he simply managed it for his master and had to manage it faithfully.

2. (3-5) Being God's servants, we answer only to Him.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

a. **It is a very small thing that I should be judged by you**: Paul insists that their low estimation of him really mattered little; it is what God judges that is important (**he who judges me is the Lord**).

i. Can, or should, every Christian today have the same attitude? Should we have no or little regard for what other Christians think about us, and just say **he who judges me is the Lord**? We can only say this, in the full sense that Paul means it, if we are apostles. If the Corinthians claimed that Paul could not judge *them*, and that *they* would simply wait for God's judgment, Paul would remind them that he is a father to them, and has the right to correct their behavior.

b. **In fact, I do not even judge myself**: Even our estimation of ourself is usually wrong. We are almost always too hard or too easy on ourselves. Paul recognizes this, and so will suspend judgment even upon himself. In the end, **he who judges me is the Lord.**

c. **For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this**: Paul also

recognizes that he does not stand in a perfect state of justification or innocence just because his conscience was clear. Paul knew his righteousness came from Jesus, not from his own personal life – even though he had a godly walk.

d. **Therefore judge nothing before the time**: It is as if Paul were saying, "You Corinthians act like judges at athletic events, qualified to give some the trophy and to send others away as losers. But Jesus is the only judge, and you are judging before the events are over."

e. **Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of men's hearts**: When Jesus judges, it will be according to the motives of the heart, not only the outward action. This is another reason why human judgment is often wrong, and why Paul feels free to disregard the harsh judgment of the Corinthian Christians towards himself.

f. **Each one's praise will come from God**: Paul knew he had little praise from the Corinthian Christians, but that did not concern him. He knew there was a day coming when our praise will come from God, not from man.

B. A sarcastic rebuke of Corinthian pride.

1. (6) The broader application of Paul's words.

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

a. **I have figuratively transferred**: In the first few verses of this chapter, Paul spoke of the apostles being servants and stewards. He does not mean this in a literal way, but in a figurative way, so the Corinthian Christians would learn a more proper way to see the apostles.

b. **That you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written**: Paul hopes his writing will help the Corinthian Christians learn to keep their thinking *Biblical*, and to not use standards beyond the Word of God to judge him or the other apostles.

i. Many people today evaluate a pastor or a minister on unbiblical standards. They judge him on his humor, his entertainment value, his appearance, or his skill at marketing and sales. But this is to **think beyond what is written** in the sense Paul means it here.

ii. In a broader sense, it is an important lesson: **not to think beyond what is written**. We must take our every cue from Scripture. It used to be that something was considered *Biblical* if it came from the Bible; today, people say things are

"Biblical" if they can't find a verse which specifically condemns it. This is to **think beyond what is written.**

c. **That none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other**: When the Corinthian Christians used unbiblical standards to judge the apostles, they could easily like one and hate another based on bad standards. But if they learned to **not think beyond what is written**, they wouldn't proudly take sides behind certain apostles as 1 Corinthians 3:4 says they did.

2. (7) Three questions to humble the proud.

For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*?

a. **For who makes you differ**: The *puffed up* state of the Corinthian Christians meant there was a pride problem. Though the pride was evident in the cliques around the different apostles, the cliques weren't the problem as much as pride was the problem. Paul addresses their proud hearts with three questions.

b. **Who makes you to differ from another?** If there is a difference between us, it is because of what God has done in us, so there is no reason for pride.

c. **And what do you have that you did not receive?** Everything we have has come from God, so there is no reason for pride.

d. **Why do you glory as if you had not received it?** If what you have spiritually is a gift from God, why do you glory in it as if it were your own accomplishment? There is no reason for this self-glorying pride.

i. These three questions should prompt other questions in my heart: do I truly give God the credit for my salvation? Do I live with a spirit of humble gratitude? Seeing that I have received from God, what can I give to Him?

ii. Augustine used this text often in proclaiming the total depravity of man against the Pelagians. He knew that it taught there is nothing good in us except what we have received from God.

3. (8-13) Paul's sarcastic rebuke.

You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us; and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and

to men. We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

a. **You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us**: "My, you Corinthians seem to have it all! Isn't it funny that we apostles have nothing!"

i. Though Paul uses strong sarcasm, his purpose isn't to make fun of the Corinthian Christians. He wants to shake them out of their proud, self-willed thinking. "He was laughing at them with holy laughter, and yet with utter contempt for what they had been doing." (Morgan)

b. **Indeed I could wish you did reign**: Wouldn't it be great if they really were reigning already? Then Paul **also might reign with you!**

c. **God has displayed us**: Instead of being **full**, and **rich**, and reigning as royalty, the apostles were on display in a humiliating **spectacle to the world**. The Corinthian Christians looked at themselves so highly, while **God has displayed** the apostles so low.

i. The image of 1 Corinthians 4:9 is either from the coliseum or the parade of a conquering Roman general, where he displayed his armies first, the booty second, and at the end of the procession, the defeated captives who would be condemned to die in the arena. Just as before going into the arena, the gladiators said, *morituri salutamus* ("we who will die salute you"), so Paul now salutes the Corinthian Christians.

ii. The word **spectacle** is "*theatron*," from which we get our word "theater." When Paul says **we have been made a spectacle to the world**, he speaks of how the apostles were publicly humiliated. This kind of humiliation was the greatest horror to the pride of the Corinthian Christians.

iii. The Corinthian Christians had two problems: they were proud of their own spirituality, and they were somewhat embarrassed of Paul because of his "weakness" and humble state. Paul is trying to address both of these problems.

d. **We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ!** With contrast after contrast, Paul sarcastically shows how foolish it is for the Corinthians to think that they are more spiritually privileged, blessed, or endowed, than the apostles were.

e. **We both hunger and thirst**: Paul's description of his own ministry focuses on deprivation and humiliation. These were things that the Corinthian Christians, in their pride, wanted to avoid at all cost.

i. Today, the church is heavy with this same attitude of the Corinthian Christians. They were concerned about the image of worldly success and power, and many of them despised Paul and the other apostles because they did not display that image. Today, there is no shortage of ministers who want to display the image of worldly success and power, and no shortage of Christians who will only value that in their minister.

f. **And we labor, working with our own hands**: The Corinthians, in their love of Greek wisdom, embraced the Greek idea that manual labor was fit only for slaves. It would offend them that one of God's apostles would actually work with his own hands!

g. **Being defamed, we entreat**: Paul is saying that when they were slandered, the apostles would reach out in kindness to the one who spoke against them. This also was offensive to the Greek ideal; they thought a man was a wimp if he didn't fight back when slandered.

h. **The offscouring of all things**: Some ancient Greeks had a custom of casting certain worthless people into the sea during a time of plague or famine, while saying "Be our offscouring!" The victims were called "scrapings" in the belief that they would wipe away the communities' guilt.

i. So Paul may have a double meaning here when using the words **filth** and **offscouring**. He may mean he is both *despised* and a *sacrifice* on their behalf.

i. **We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now**: It's a little embarrassing to read Paul's description of his ministry while working on a nice computer and surrounded by several hundred books. And especially knowing how much I, like most people, would like to have the respect and admiration of the world.

i. After all, think of Paul's resume: bounced from church to church, run out of many towns, accused of starting riots, rarely supported by the ministry, arrested and imprisoned several times. Who today would hire Paul as a pastor?

ii. Our problem is we often want a middle road: a little popularity, a little reputation, but still the anointing of God. We want the power without the cost. God help us to choose Paul's way, because it is really God's way.

C. Paul's warning and a challenge.

1. (14-17) Paul asserts his right to correct as a father.

I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you*. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do* not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

a. **Shame you... warn you**: With his biting sarcasm, Paul knows the Corinthian Christians might be pretty ashamed. He wants them to know his purpose hasn't been to make them feel ashamed, but to warn them of a significant spiritual danger – pride.

b. **You might have ten thousand instructors**: The *instructor* was a "*paidagogoi*," a guardian or "slave-guide," who escorted the boys to and from school and who supervised their general conduct.

c. **For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel**:
The *instructor* did have legitimate authority, but certainly not like a father. Paul had a unique place of authority and leadership among the Corinthian Christians, not only because he fathered the church itself in Corinth (**I have begotten you through the gospel**), but also because of his apostolic authority.

i. We don't have apostolic authority like this. Leading someone to Christ does not give you special authority over their life, but it does give you a special relationship.

d. **I urge you, imitate me**: The first reaction of many of the Corinthian Christians would probably be horror. "Imitate *you*, Paul? You are regarded as a fool, as weak, as dishonored; you are hungry and thirsty and poorly clothed, homeless and beaten; you work hard to support yourself with manual labor. People look at you and see filth and the offscouring of all things. And you want us to **imitate** *you*?"

i. Paul might reply, "Yes, imitate me. Not because of all these difficulties, but despite them, and often because of them, the glory and power of Jesus Christ shines through me."

ii. Because they didn't have printing back then, Paul couldn't just hand out Bibles. People had to learn the gospel by watching his life. Maybe that wasn't so bad after all!

e. **I have sent Timothy**: Timothy seemed to be Paul's chief "troubleshooter," often being sent to problem churches.

2. (18-21) How do you want me to come to you?

Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God *is* not in word but in power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

a. **Some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you**: Some Corinthian Christians were so arrogant they thought Paul was afraid to visit them. When they thought Paul was afraid of them, it made them all the more proud in their hearts.

b. **Not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power**: Those among the Corinthian Christians who loved high-sounding words and their successful image had their own **word**, but Paul had the true power of the gospel. The final test of wisdom is power; the word of the cross not only has the power to mentally illumine, but also to morally save.

i. **Puffed up**: Essentially, Paul threatens to pop the bubble of these puffed-up gasbags.

c. **What do you want?** Paul leaves the ball in their court. Which Paul did they want to come – the Paul with the **rod** of correction (used by shepherds to smack disobedient sheep), or the Paul with the **spirit of gentleness?** There is no doubt Paul would prefer to come in gentleness, but he'll leave that decision up to the Corinthian Christians.

i. In this section of the letter, Paul faced some of the real challenges of ministry: how to confront sin without being too harsh, or implying that you are above sin; how to get people to conform their lives to the gospel when they think too highly of themselves. This is tough work to do in a heart, and only a great work by the Spirit can accomplish it!

1 CORINTHIANS 5 – CONFRONTING IMMORALITY IN THE CHURCH

1 Corinthians 5 – Confronting Immorality in the Church

A. The problem is addressed.

1. (1) The sin of an unnamed Christian in Corinth.
It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!
a. **It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you**: The term **sexually immorality** is the ancient Greek word "*porneia*." It broadly refers to all types of sexual activity outside of marriage (including homosexuality).
i. Originally, "*porneia*" just referred to going to prostitutes; but before New Testament times, the Jewish community used the word to refer to any kind of extramarital sex, including homosexuality. This is its sense in the New Testament.
ii. Commentators on the word *porneia*: "The Scripture by this word comprehends all species of unlawful mixtures." (Poole) It "must be understood in its utmost latitude of meaning, as implying all kinds of impurity." (Clarke)
iii. "*Porneia*" so often appears first in New Testament "sin lists," but not because the first Christians had a lot of "hang-ups" about sex. Instead, it is because the area of sex was one of the most dramatic places where the ethics of Greek culture clashed with the ethics of Jesus. Sexual immorality was an accepted fact of life for the common person in Greek culture, but it was not to be so among the followers of Jesus.
b. **That a man has his father's wife**: Apparently, someone was having an on-going sexual relationship (either as married or living together) with his stepmother (**his father's wife**). The woman involved must not be a Christian, for she isn't even addressed.
i. The verb **to have** is a euphemism for an enduring sexual relationship, not just a passing fancy or a "one-night stand."
c. **And such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles**: Paul understood that this kind of incestuous relationship was considered taboo even among the pagans of their culture, yet the Corinthian Christians seem accepting of this behavior.
i. The ancient Roman writer and statesman Cicero said this type of incest was an incredible crime and practically unheard of. Truly, it was **not even named among the Gentiles**.
ii. It should have been enough that this is declared sin by the Bible (Leviticus 18:8, Deuteronomy 22:30 and 27:20); it should have been enough that the worldly culture itself considered it sin, but the Corinthian Christians didn't seem bothered by it at all.
2. (2) The reaction of the Corinthian church to the sin.
And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.
a. **And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned**: As bad as the sin itself was, Paul was more concerned that the Corinthian Christians seemed to take the sin lightly, and they were unconcerned (**have not rather mourned**) about this behavior.
i. Previously in the letter, Paul dealt mainly with the "mental" problems of the

Corinthian Christians: their wrong ideas about God's power and work and His servants. Now Paul starts to deal with their "moral" problems. But the two are connected; their moral problems come because they aren't thinking right about God and His word.

b. **That he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you**: Clearly, this was Paul's solution to the problem – to take this notoriously unrepentant man away from the protection of the fellowship of God's people. Yet, the Corinthian Christians were not doing this. Why not? How could this kind of thing be allowed?

i. Remember that Corinth was a city notorious for sexual immorality, and the pagan religions did not value sexual purity. It wasn't hard for a Corinthian to think you could be religious, yet still act any way you pleased when it came to sex. Greek culture could matter-of-factly say: "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children."

ii. Wouldn't they know it was wrong through the Old Testament? Though Leviticus 18:8 expressly forbids a man to have sex with his stepmother (*The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover*), some rabbis, such as Rabbi Akibah, said such a relationship was permissible for a Gentile convert to Judaism, because they were a completely new person, and their old family relationship didn't count at all.

iii. More than anything, the Corinthian Christians probably allowed this in the name of "tolerance." They probably said to themselves, "Look how loving we are. We accept this brother just as he is. Look how open-minded we are!" We should never underestimate what people will allow in the name of "open-mindedness."

c. **And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned**: The Corinthian Christians were *proud* (**you are puffed up**) of their acceptance of this man; they thought it said something *good* about them! But instead of glorying, they should have grieved, both for the man and for what they must do to him (**be taken away from among you**).

3. (3-5) Paul's prescription.

For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

a. **Absent in body but present in spirit**: When Paul mentions his **spirit** being present, he isn't speaking of astral-projection in the early church. He is truly represented in their midst by his letter, which was a valid spiritual extension of his apostolic authority.

i. In other words, Paul didn't have to be there to exercise his authority; distance didn't make him any less an apostle.

ii. Paul pushes his authority hard here (**have already judged**), but not too much, because he recognizes that it must be done in the name and power of the Lord Jesus (**in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**).

b. **For I indeed... have already judged**: Is Paul disobeying what Jesus said in Matthew 7:1-5? After all, "judge not, lest you be judged!"

i. Paul is not being disobedient in the slightest way. Jesus' command in Matthew 7:1-5 forbids *hypocritical* judgment, and judging others by a standard that we ourselves do not want to be judged by. Paul is perfectly willing to apply the same standards to himself that he is applying to the Corinthian Christians.

ii. Some judgment is permitted, and some is not. "While Christians are not to judge one another's motives or ministries, we are certainly expected to be honest about each other's conduct." (Wiersbe)

c. **Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh**: How could they **deliver such a one to Satan**? By putting him outside the church, into the world, which is the devil's "domain." The punishment is a removal of spiritual protection and social comfort, not an infliction of evil.

i. God often protects us from the attacks of Satan, even when we never knew about the attacks (Job 1:10 and Luke 22:31-32).

ii. The fact that so many can leave many churches without a second thought shows how weak those churches really are. Shouldn't they be places a person under discipline, put outside the fellowship, would miss? But doesn't it also say something about a Christian if they can willingly neglect the assembling together of the saints – and prefer their isolation?

iii. Paul's command also served the important purpose of removing any false feeling of security the sinning man might have among the fellowship of Christians. They couldn't just ignore his sin, and let him ignore it, pretending it wasn't there. If the man refused to face his sin, the church must face it for him, for his sake and for their sake.

d. **For the destruction of the flesh**: The purpose of putting this man outside the spiritual protection and social comfort of the church was the **destruction of the *flesh***, not the *body*, but his rebellious **flesh**.

i. This man, though a Christian, was at this time given over to the sins of the flesh. Paul says that as they put him out, the man will be given over to the sinful consequences of his flesh, and the hope is that by wallowing in the results of his sin, the sinful impulse of the flesh in this particular area will be "destroyed."

ii. As Christians, we do continual battle with the flesh, because though the old man is dead, having been crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6), the flesh lives on, having been "educated" in sin by the old man, the devil, and the worldly culture around us. God now calls us, in partnership with Him, to do to the flesh what He did by Himself to the old man: crucify it (Galatians 5:24). Paul hopes that putting this man out of the fellowship of the Corinthian Christians will lead him to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires.

iii. The words **deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh** were used to justify terrible torture during the Inquisition, but this isn't what Paul means at all. Paul isn't talking about destroying the man's physical body, but addressing the spiritual power of his sinful flesh.

e. **That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus**: The *goal* of the

discipline is clear – the salvation, not the destruction, of his spirit. Though this man's conduct was clearly sinful, and needed severe correction, Paul does not write him off as forever lost – the effective use of church discipline may yet see him to salvation.

i. All discipline in the church is to be carried out in this attitude of restoration, not condemnation. As Paul also wrote, *And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.* (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)

ii. "Church discipline is not a group of 'pious policemen' out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of brokenhearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family." (Wiersbe)

f. **That his spirit may be saved**: Paul does not say the church should take away the sinning man's salvation. The church does not grant salvation; it certainly cannot take it away. But there are cases, for the good of the sinner, and for the good of the church, when someone should be put out of the congregation.

i. Some call this "excommunication" or "disfellowshipping" a person. They are to be put outside the congregation until they repent. In today's church culture, this rarely brings a sinner to repentance, because they can so easily just go to another church and pretend that nothing happened at their old church. Or, it is easy for them to play the victim, and act as if their former church was cruel towards them. While it is true that some churches have been cruel towards their members, and have unjustly put some out of the congregation, it does not mean the church should never practice the Biblical principles Paul teaches here. It is to be done, for both the good of the church and the good of the sinner.

ii. So, "There was to be a meeting of the church, where Paul, spiritually present, would, in the name of Christ, and in the exercise of the miraculous power with which he was invested, deliver the offender to the power of Satan." (Hodge)

B. The rationale for purity in the church.

1. (6) A little sin influences the entire group.

Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

a. **Your glorying is not good**: Again, the Corinthian Christians were proud and pleased to ignore this man's notorious sin! They thought it showed the whole world how "loving" they were. But you don't show "love" to a body by being kind to a cancer!

i. We can rightly say Paul is more concerned about the sin of the entire church (especially the leadership), than the sin of the individual man. Both are important, but the sin of the church is worse.

b. **A little leaven leavens the whole lump**: The leaven mentioned isn't merely yeast, but a pinch of dough left over from the previous batch, as in the making of sourdough bread. This is how bread was commonly leavened in the ancient world, and a little pinch of dough from the old lump could make a whole new lump of dough rise and "puff up." In this way the work of leaven was thought to illustrate

the work of sin and pride. The presence of a little can corrupt a large amount.
i. In this light, the Passover command to purge the leaven had a health purpose. This method of fermentation, used week after week, increased the danger of infection or food poisoning, so at least once a year, the Israelites started from scratch.

2. (7-8) We are to live a perpetual Passover feast.

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

a. **Purge out the old leaven**: At the Passover feast, all leaven was to be removed from the house, and nothing with leaven in it was to be eaten for a whole week. Paul says that just as the Jews were concerned to remove all leaven from their midst, so the church should have a concern to remove such notorious, unrepentant sinners from their midst.

b. **Christ, our Passover**: Paul's connection between the purity of Passover and the Christian life is not a strange stretch. Jesus is in fact our Passover Lamb, whose blood was shed that the judgment of God might pass over us. So, we are to live in the purity that Passover speaks of.

i. Our Christian lives are to be marked by the same things which characterized Passover: salvation, liberation, joy, plenty, and purity from leaven.

c. **Since you truly are unleavened**: Paul's point is both clear and dramatic – you must *live* unleavened because you ***are*** **unleavened**. "Be what you are" is the basic message of the New Testament for Christian living.

i. "Salvation *in* sin is not possible, it must always be salvation *from* sin." (Spurgeon)

d. **Sincerity and truth**: These are two strong guardrails for the way of the Christian life.

C. The principle of Christian separation.

1. (9) Paul told them, in a previous letter, to avoid sexually immoral (porneia) people.

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

a. **I wrote to you in my epistle**: Where is this previous letter from Paul? The apostles wrote many letters to churches which we no longer have. Certainly such letters were inspired to speak to that specific church at that specific time, but not to all the church for all time. So, such letters were not preserved by the Holy Spirit, through the church.

b. **Keep company** is literally to "mix up together." In the context of social relations it means to "mingle with," or "associate with" in a close way.

2. (10-13) Paul clarifies the principle of separation.

Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater,

or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what *have* I *to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

a. **Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world**: Paul did not want the Corinthian Christians to expect godly behavior from ungodly people. To disassociate from sinners in a sinful world would mean we **would need to go out of the world**.

i. Surprisingly, this is *exactly* the approach many people take to holiness and Christian living – to get as far away from the world as possible. This was the whole spirit behind the monastic movement in the early and medieval church.

b. **The sexually immoral people of this world**: Instead, without approving the sin of sinners in this world, we should expect that they would be sinners.

i. It should not surprise or offend us that those who do not yet know Jesus are **covetous**. Literally, the word means those "who must have more."

ii. It should not surprise or offend us that those who do not yet know Jesus yet are **extortioners** (*harpax* in the ancient Greek). The word describes those who steal by violence.

iii. It should not surprise or offend us that those who do not yet know Jesus act as a **reviler**, describing a person who is a character assassin.

c. **Not to keep company with anyone named a brother**: But the Corinthian Christians *were* to expect Christian behavior from their fellow Christians, and they were not doing this! Instead, Paul commands that they were **not even to eat with such a person**.

i. In the culture of that day (and in many cultures today), eating with someone is an expression of friendship and partnership. In some cultures, if a man eats at your table, you are bound to regard him as a friend and a partner. Paul warns the Corinthian Christians they cannot continue in Christian fellowship with a notorious sinner who calls himself a Christian.

d. **What have I to do with judging those also who are outside?... those who are outside God judges**: Unfortunately, too many Christians are busy judging those outside of the church (which is God's job only) and are neglecting purity within the church.

e. **Do you not judge those who are inside?... Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person"**: The Corinthian Christians were failing to judge where they should have made judgment. They should not have "winked" at the notorious sinner among them, and they should not have considered themselves "loving" for doing so.

i. We must remember *both* reasons why it was important to deal with this sinning man among the Corinthian Christians: not only for the sake of purity in the church, but also for the sake of the man's own salvation (1 Corinthians 5:5).

1 CORINTHIANS 6 – LAWSUITS AND LOOSE LIVING

1 Corinthians 6 – Lawsuits and Loose Living

A. Instruction regarding lawsuits among Christians.

1. (1) Paul denounces their recourse to the pagan law courts in disputes among Christians.

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?

a. **Dare any of you** is strong wording. Paul simply can't believe what these Corinthian Christians are doing.
b. **Having a matter against another**: Apparently, one Christian believed he had been wronged by another, and sought justice in the local courts (**go to law before the unrighteous**).
i. The local judge sat in what was known as the "*bema*" seat of the civil magistrate, located in the heart of the marketplace. Because Greek culture found a good legal battle entertaining, anyone's lawsuit soon became public knowledge.
c. **Unrighteous** is literally *unjust*, in the sense of "not justified before God, not saved." Why are the Corinthian Christians trying to find *justice* from those who aren't *justified* before God?
i. Paul is using the term **unrighteous** in a religious sense, not a moral sense. It isn't that Corinthian judges were necessarily bad judges, but they were not Christians.

2. (2-6) Why Christians are fully capable of judging their own matters, and it is wrong to go to heathen law courts in disputes among Christians.

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!

a. **The saints will judge the world... we shall judge angels**: Christians should be fully able to judge their own matters because of our *destiny*. As we reign with Jesus Christ, we will (in some sense or another) **judge the world**, and even **judge angels**.
i. The idea of Christians judging angels is fascinating. It does not mean we will sit in judgment of faithful angels, as if we could penalize them for letting us down or not being there, but we will have a part in judging evil angels.

ii. How great is God's destiny for redeemed men and women! "Is there any statement in the apostolic writings in certain senses which has more definite and tremendous implication of the union of the saints with their Lord?" (Morgan)
iii. The destiny of redeemed men and women – to one day be higher than the angels and to even sit in judgment of them – must greatly annoy a certain high angel in heaven. He did not want to serve an inferior creature now, and did not want that inferior creature to be raised up higher than even he. So, he rebelled against God, and is determined to keep as much of humanity as possible from sitting in judgment of *himself*. We can imagine the perverse, proud pleasure Satan takes over every soul that goes to hell: "*They* won't sit in judgment over *me*!"
b. **Are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters**: If Christians are being prepared right now for such a glorious destiny, why do the Corinthian Christians allow those **least esteemed by the church** (that is, the secular judges) to decide disputes among Christians?
c. **Is there not a wise man among you**: The Corinthian Christians were proud of what they thought was their "wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:18-31), but their actions showed that there was **not a wise man among** them.
d. **Brother goes to law against brother**: By his actions, Paul showed he was not against all legal action. In Acts 22:25 and 25:10-11, he appealed to Roman courts for his rights. However, Paul knew it was wrong when **brother goes to law against brother**.
i. It is important for Christians to settle disputes among themselves according to God's principles. This can be done either through the church, or through Christian arbitration. But today, even as in Paul's day, there is no reason for Christians to sue one another.
ii. Does this mean that it is permissible for Christians to sue non-believers who wrong them? This is an important question in our age where people are so ready to sue. Paul certainly does not bring up this specific issue, and he does not say matters between Christians should be unresolved – only that they should be settled in the proper arena.
iii. Paul does not say that Christians should have their own court system to handle *criminal* law. In Romans 13:3-4 Paul says that it is appropriate for the state to handle criminal cases. Christians should, however, be able to handle *civil* cases among themselves. "Those in a religious community who *will not* submit to a proper arbitration, made by persons among themselves, should be expelled from the Church of God." (Clarke)

3. (7) Paul rebukes the man who had been wronged: why not accept the wrong?

Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated?

a. **It is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another**: The Corinthians were just like modern Americans: addicted to their own "rights." But in clinging to their rights so fiercely, they had already shown **utter failure**. Just

by going to court against your brother, you already lose.
b. **Why do you not rather accept wrong**: It would be better to **accept wrong**. It would be better to **let yourselves be cheated** than to defend your "rights" at the expense of God's glory and the higher good of His kingdom.
i. Paul called this man to do something hard: to give up what he deserved for the higher good of God and His kingdom. But the man who was wronged should not think Paul was asking him to take a loss. No one who accepts wrong for the sake of God's glory will be a loser.
ii. Ideally, the church should have settled the dispute. But if the church failed to do so, Paul asked the man to trust in God, not in secular judges and lawsuits and courts.
iii. Paul didn't say, "Why not suffer wrong instead of confronting the problem?" Instead, he said, "Why not suffer wrong instead of bringing your dispute before unbelievers?"

4. (8-11) Paul rebukes the man who had done the wrong: do you realize how serious your sin is?

No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and *you do* these things *to your* brethren! Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 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 and by the Spirit of our God.
a. **You yourselves do wrong and cheat**: There is no place for dishonest dealing *by* Christians; how much less place is there for dishonest dealing *among* Christians! Many have rejected the things of God and the fellowship of the saints because of dishonesty and cheating among Christians.
b. **Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?** Paul speaks strongly to the brother who did the wrong. "Don't you realize how serious your sin is? The only thing you may 'gain' from cheating your brother is eternity with the unrighteous!"
i. Paul was not, categorically, denying the man's salvation (Paul says he is among the **brethren**); however, Paul will not allow a "religious faith" that is separate from our *actions*. If a Christian can cheat and defraud his brothers without conscience, it may be fairly asked if he is a Christian at all.
c. **The unrighteous**: This man who wronged his brother sets himself in bad company – in with **fornicators**, **idolaters**, **adulterers**, **homosexuals**, **sodomites**, **thieves**, **covetous**, **revilers**, and **extortioners**; and none of those who live characterized by these sins **will inherit the kingdom of God**.
i. No doubt the man figured, "Sure, what I'm doing to my brother isn't good but it isn't that bad." Paul wants him to know just how bad it was.
ii. We shouldn't think that a Christian who has committed an act of fornication or homosexuality (or any of the other listed sins) is automatically excluded from

the **kingdom of God**. Instead, since Paul describes these people by their sins, he means those whose lives are dominated and characterized by these sins. So, is an occasional act of fornication or homosexuality no big deal to God? Of course it is a significant matter, because it goes against everything we have been given in Jesus, and because a lifestyle of sin *begins* with single acts of sin.
iii. The man who cheated his brother had to see that if his life was dominated and characterized by this sin, just as much as any of the other people Paul described, he should also be just as concerned for his salvation as any of those other people.
d. **Nor homosexuals**: Since this is such a clear condemnation of homosexuality, those who would like to justify the practice say Paul speaks of homosexual prostitution, not a "loving, caring homosexual relationship." But taken in context, there is *no doubt* God is speaking of homosexual acts of all kinds with the words *malakoi* (**homosexuals**, which literally refers to male prostitutes) and *arsenokoitai* (**sodomites**, a generic term for all homosexual practice).
i. Paul did not write *in* or *of* a "homophobic" culture. Homosexuality was rampant in the ancient world; 14 out of the first 15 Roman emperors were bisexual or homosexual. At the very time Paul wrote, Nero was emperor. Nero castrated a boy named Sporus and then married him (with a full ceremony), brought him to the palace with a great procession, and made the boy his "wife." Later, the emperor lived with another man, and Nero was declared to be the other man's "wife."
ii. In this list of sins, homosexuality (not some "special" version of homosexuality) is described, but it is described right along with other sins. Some who so strongly denounce homosexuals are guilty of other sins on this list.
Can **fornicators** or **adulterers** or the **covetous** or **drunkards** rightly condemn homosexuals? Of course not.
iii. Christians err when they excuse homosexuality, and deny that it is sin, but they also err just as badly when they single it out as a sin God is *uniquely* angry with.
e. **And such were some of you**: Paul's point is important: **such were some of *you***. Though these sins characterize those who will not **inherit the kingdom of God**, Christians can never be unloving or uncaring towards them – because they are right where we used to be.
i. Christians should not, and must not say such sins in the lives of those who don't know Jesus are of no concern to God. They are. Instead, they must communicate the message of salvation in Jesus Christ: *He will save His people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21).
ii. At the same time, the point is plain for the Corinthian Christians and for us: **And such *were* some of you**. Paul clearly puts it in the past tense. These things should never mark the life of a Christian, and if they do, they must be immediately repented of and forsaken.
iii. "Security in Christ there is, to be sure, but it is a false security that would justify sinners who have never taken seriously 'but such *were* some of you.'" (Fee)
f. **But you were washed... sanctified... justified**: God's great work for us in Jesus Christ is described in three terms.
i. **You were washed**: We are washed clean from sin by the mercy of God (Titus

3:5). We can have our sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). We are washed by the work of Jesus on the cross for us (Revelation 1:5) and by the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26).

ii. **You were sanctified**: We are set apart, away from the world and unto God, by the work of Jesus on the cross (Hebrews 10:10), by God's Word (John 17:19), by faith in Jesus (Acts 26:18), and by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16).

iii. **You were justified**: We are declared "just" before the court of God, not merely "not guilty," but declared as "just" before Him. We are justified by God's grace through the work of Jesus on the cross (Romans 3:24), by faith and not by our own deeds (Romans 3:28).

iv. God can take the kind of people described in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10 and make them into the kind of people described in 1 Corinthians 6:11! How great is the work of God!

g. **In the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God**: Without trying to present a doctrine of the Trinity, Paul quite naturally – because he knew it was the truth about God – lists the three Persons of the Godhead in connection with this great work of God in the life of the believer.

B. Instruction regarding sexual purity.

1. (12) A principle for sexual purity among Christians: what is permitted is not our only guide for behavior.

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

a. **All things are lawful for me**: In both 1 Corinthians 5 (in the section dealing with the sexual immorality of a certain member of the Corinthian church) and in 1 Corinthians 6 (in the section where certain sinners are described), Paul brought up the issue of the sexual conduct of Christians. Now he will address some of the questions and problems the Corinthian Christians had about what God wanted them to do in regard to sex.

b. **All things are lawful for me**: This was probably a phrase Paul had used in teaching the Corinthian Christians about Christian liberty. We can almost hear Paul telling the Corinthians exactly what he told the Colossians in Colossians 2:16-17: "When it comes to what we eat or drink or on what day we worship the Lord, **all things are lawful for me**. I am at liberty, and I should not let anyone put me under bondage, as legalists are prone to do."

c. **But all things are not helpful**: The Corinthian Christians took the idea **all things are lawful** and applied it to areas Paul, or the Lord, never intended. They used their "liberty" as a license to sin.

i. Specifically, from the reference to the *harlot* in 1 Corinthians 6:15, the point seems to be that the Corinthian Christians thought they had the liberty to use the services of prostitutes. This was culturally accepted in the city of Corinth, and it was accepted in the religious community among the religious pagans, who saw nothing wrong in a "religious" person using prostitutes.

d. **I will not be brought under the power of any**: In this phrase, Paul uses a verb he uses again only in 1 Corinthians 7:4, in the context of a husband and wife

having "authority" over each other's bodies. Paul may be saying **I will not be brought under the power of any*body*** (as in the body of a prostitute).

2. (13-14) A principle for sexual purity among Christians: appetites for food and sex are not the same.

Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

a. **Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods**: The Corinthian Christians probably used this motto to justify giving their bodies whatever their bodies wanted. "My body wants food, so I eat. My body wants sex, so I hire a prostitute. What's the problem?"

b. **The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body**: But Paul will not let them take that slogan, which applies to irrelevant food restrictions, and apply it to sexual immorality.

i. Because of our lustful sexual appetites, it may seem that God *did* make our bodies for sexual immorality. But God did not make our bodies that way; sinful Adam did. We see the wisdom in God's design for the body and for sexual purity when we look at the problems of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. These are the price one pays in the body for using the body in a way the Lord never intended – **the body is not for sexual immorality**.

c. **God will destroy both it and them**: One day God **will destroy** our stomachs, in the sense of being dependent on food and affected by hunger (though there will be food and eating in heaven). Yet, our bodies themselves – in their moral character, relevant to our sexual conduct – will be raised up by the Lord at the resurrection. So what we do with our bodies in regard to food does not affect us in the same way as what we do with our bodies in regard to sex.

3. (15-17) A principle for sexual purity among Christians: our bodies are part of the body of Christ, and so should never be joined to a prostitute.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

a. **Do you not know**: Apparently, many of the Corinthian Christians *did not* know, and thought their sexual conduct with prostitutes had no connection to their relationship with Jesus.

b. **Your bodies are members of Christ**: When an individual Christian commits sexual immorality, it disgraces the entire body of Christ, linking the body of Christ to immorality.

c. **He who is joined to a harlot is one body with her... one flesh**: In their sexual relationship, a husband and wife become "one flesh" in a way that is under God's blessing. In sex outside of marriage, the partners become "one flesh" in a way that

is under God's curse.
i. A person pursuing a casual sexual encounter may not *want* to become one flesh with their partner but in some spiritual sense, they do. Part of their *self* is given to that person, and it means there is less to give to the Lord and to the partner God intends for them. In the Biblical understanding of sex, there is no such thing as "casual sex."
ii. Since we belong to Jesus – body, soul, and spirit – we have no right to give any part of our self away to an "unauthorized" person. "By being joined to her [a prostitute] in *porneia* the believer constitutes someone else, outside of Christ, as the unlawful lord over one's own body." (Fee)
iii. "Sex outside of marriage is like a man robbing a bank: he gets something, but it is not his and he will one day pay for it. Sex within marriage can be like a person putting money into a bank: there is safety, security, and he will collect dividends." (Wiersbe)
d. **He who is joined to the Lord**: In the heat of lustful passion, spiritual things may seem far away. Yet, at the root of most lustful passion is the desire for love, acceptance, and adventure – all of which is far better, and more completely, satisfied in a one-spirit relationship with the Lord instead of with sexual immorality.

4. (18) A command for sexual purity among Christians: Flee sexual immorality.

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.
a. **Flee**: Paul doesn't tell us to be brave and resist the lustful passion of sexual immorality, but to **flee** from its very presence. Many fall because they underestimate the power of lustful passion, or think they will "test" themselves and see how much they can "take."
i. We should follow the example of Joseph, who fled from sexual immorality – even when it cost him something (Genesis 39:7-21).
ii. "Some sins, or solicitations to sin, may be *reasoned* with; in the above cases, if you *parley* you are undone; *reason* not, but FLY!" (Clarke)
b. **Flee sexual immorality**: Paul does not say that Christians should flee sex, only **sexual immorality**. God gave sex as a precious gift to mankind, and uses it powerfully to bond husband and wife together in a true one-flesh relationship. So as Hebrews 13:4 says, the marriage bed is undefiled – the sexual relationship between husband and wife is pure, holy, and good before God.
i. But sexual immorality works against God's good purpose for sex, working against a true, godly one-flesh relationship. Sex outside of marriage can be exciting, but it can't be enriching.
c. **Sexual immorality**: We are reminded Paul uses the Greek word *porneia*, which refers to a broad range of sexual sin. To **flee sexual immorality** means more than not having sexual intercourse with someone we are not married to.
i. It means to flee sexual gratification short of or apart from intercourse with our spouse.
ii. It means to flee sexual gratification or thrills one might find from pornographic

videos, movies, magazines, books, or Internet sites.
d. **Sins against his own body**: Paul isn't saying sexual immorality is *worse* than any other sin, but he does teach that sexual sin has a unique effect on the body. The effect is physical, but it is also moral and spiritual.

5. (19-20) A principle and a command for sexual purity among Christians: glorify God in your body.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

a. **Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit**: A temple is a place sacred to God and pure from immorality. If it is true we are filled with the Spirit, this truth must influence our sexual behavior. And if we commit sexual immorality as Christians, we pollute God's temple.
i. Earlier in 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul wrote that the church as a whole was the **temple of the Holy Spirit**. Now he says the same is true, in a spiritual sense, of individual Christians.
b. **The Holy Spirit who is in you**: Because our body is **the temple of the Holy Spirit**, our bodies belong to God, and not to ourselves: **You are not your own... for you were bought with a price.**
i. Any honest person will take better care of something that doesn't belong to them. Our bodies belong to God because He bought them. We don't have the right to pollute and abuse God's property!
ii. This principle applies to more than our sexual conduct. If our bodies belong to Jesus, we also have no right to be idle with, or wasteful of, what belongs to Him. Our bodies should be put to use glorifying God (**Therefore glorify God in your body**). "Your body was a willing horse when it was in the service of the devil, let it not be a sluggish hack now that it draws the chariot of Christ." (Spurgeon)
c. **The Holy Spirit who is in you**: Because our body is **the temple of the Holy Spirit**, God Himself lives within us. This means we have the strength, the power over the sins of the flesh living within us. We should expect sexual purity from Christians more than from those who are not, because they do not have God living within them as we do.
d. **The Holy Spirit who is in you**: Some Christians think that the devil cannot possess a Christian's spirit or soul, but that a Christian's body can be filled with demons, so that some Christians must have those demons cast out by another person. But Paul makes it clear that our bodies belong to Jesus just as much as our spirits. He is the owner of my body, and He is not subletting to demons.
e. **God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's**: Many old manuscripts end this chapter with the words **glorify God in your body**. The words *and in your spirit* may have been added by a scribe who thought it wasn't "spiritual" enough to end the chapter talking about our bodies glorifying God.
i. Harry Ironside was right when he wrote, "Glorify God in your body and the spiritual side will take care of itself."

1 CORINTHIANS 7 – PRINCIPLES REGARDING MARRIAGE AND SINGLENESS

Audio for 1 Corinthians 7:

1 Corinthians 7:1-16 – Marriage and Divorce
1 Corinthians 7:17-40 – Marriage and Singleness

A. Answer to a question about sexual relations in marriage.

1. (1-2) Paul enlarges on the principle of purity.

Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

a. **Concerning the things of which you wrote to me**: 1 Corinthians 7 begins a section where Paul deals with specific questions asked him in a letter by the Corinthian Christians.

b. **It is good for a man not to touch a woman**: Here, "**touch**" is used in the sense of having sexual relations. This was probably a statement made by the Corinthian Christians, which they asked Paul to agree with. Paul will agree with the statement, but with reservation – the "**nevertheless**" of verse 2.

i. Why would the Corinthian Christians suggest complete celibacy – which is what they mean by **a man not to touch a woman**? They probably figured that if sexual immorality was such a danger, then one could be more pure by abstaining from sex altogether, even in marriage.

ii. "The idea that marriage was a less holy state than celibacy, naturally led to the conclusion that married persons ought to separate, and it soon came to be regarded as an evidence of eminent spirituality when such a separation was final." (Hodge)

c. **Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband**: In light of the danger of sexual immorality (ever present in the Corinthian culture and our own), it is appropriate for husband and wife to **have** each other in a sexual sense.

i. Paul is not commanding the Corinthian Christians to *get* married (an issue he deals with later in the chapter), but a command to *live* as a married person, especially in the sexual sense. Paul means that husbands and wives should continue in sexual relations.

ii. "What miserable work has been made in the peace of families by a wife or a husband pretending to be wiser than the apostle, and too holy and spiritual to keep the commandments of God!" (Clarke)

d. **Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality**: Paul is not saying sex is the *only* reason for marriage, or the *most important* reason for marriage. Paul is simply answering their specific questions about marriage, not trying to give a complete theology of marriage.

i. For more on a complete theology of marriage, see Ephesians 5:21-33 and Colossians 3:18-19.

2. (3-6) The principle of mutual sexual responsibility in marriage.

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.

a. **Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her**: Instead of *a man not to touch a woman*, within marriage a husband must **render to his wife the affection due her**. It is wrong for him to withhold **affection** from his wife.

i. **The affection due her** is an important phrase. Since Paul meant this to apply to every Christian marriage, it shows that *every* wife has affection **due her**. Paul doesn't think only the young or pretty or submissive wives are **due** affection; every wife is **due** affection because she is a wife of a Christian man.

ii. Paul also emphasizes what the woman needs: not merely sexual relations, but **the affection due her**. If a husband has sexual relations with his wife, but without true affection to her, he is not giving his wife what she is **due**.

iii. **Affection** also reminds us that when a couple is unable – for physical or other reasons – to have a complete sexual relationship, they can still have an *affectionate* relationship, and thus fulfill God's purpose for these commands.

b. **And likewise also the wife to her husband**: On the same idea, **also the wife to her husband**: The wife is not to withhold marital affection from her husband. Paul strongly puts forth the idea that there is a *mutual sexual responsibility* in marriage. The husband has *obligations* toward his wife, and the wife has *obligations* toward her husband.

i. **Render to his wife**: The emphasis is on giving, on "I owe you" instead of "you owe me." In God's heart, sex is put on a much higher level than merely the husband's privilege and the wife's duty.

c. **The wife does not have authority over her own body**: In fact, these obligations are so concrete, it could be said that the wife's body does not even *belong* to herself, but to her husband. The same principle is true of the husband's body in regard to his wife.

i. This does not justify a husband abusing or coercing his wife, sexually or otherwise. Paul's point is that we have a *binding obligation* to serve our partner with physical affection.

ii. It is an awesome obligation: out of the billions of people on the earth, God has chosen *one*, and *one alone*, to meet our sexual needs. There is to be no one else.

d. **Do not deprive one another**: Paul rejects their idea that husband and wife could be more holy by sexual abstinence. In fact, harm can come when they **deprive one another**, as they open the door to the tempter (**so that Satan does not tempt you**).

i. The word for **deprive** is the same as **defraud** in 1 Corinthians 6:8. When we deny physical affection and sexual intimacy to our spouse, we *cheat them*.
ii. **Do not *deprive***: Sexual deprivation in marriage has not only to do with *frequency*, but with *romance* also. This is why Paul tells husbands to **render to his wife the affection due her**. Deprivation in either sense gives occasion for the deprived to look elsewhere for fulfillment – and to destroy the marriage.
iii. **For your lack of self-control**: It might be easy to think that self-control is expressed by *abstaining* from sexual relations in marriage, but Paul says that to **deprive one another** is to show a **lack of self-control**, and a lack of self-control that will leave one easily tempted by Satan.
e. **I say this as a concession**: God will permit (reluctantly, **as a concession**) a married couple to abstain from sexual relations for a short time, for the sake of **fasting and prayer**. But if this **concession** is used, it is only to be **for a time**, and then husband and wife must come **together again** in a sexual sense.
i. **Not as a commandment**: God does not command or even recommend abstaining from sex within marriage, but it can be done for a brief time for a specific spiritual reason.
f. The principle in this passage is important. God makes it clear that *there is nothing wrong, and everything right, about sex in marriage*. Satan's great strategy, when it comes to sex, is to do everything he can to *encourage* sex outside of marriage, and to *discourage* sex within marriage. It is an equal victory for Satan if he accomplishes either plan.
i. This can be seen in the way some of the Corinthian Christians thought it was just fine to hire the services of a prostitute (as in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20), and other Corinthian Christians thought it was more spiritual for a husband and wife to never have sexual relations.
ii. A Christian husband and wife must not accept a poor sexual relationship. The problems may not be easily overcome or quickly solved, but God wants every Christian marriage to enjoy a sexual relationship that is a genuine blessing, instead of a burden or a curse.

3. (7-9) Paul recognizes the benefits of singleness, but also of marriage; all is according to how God gifts.

For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.

a. **For I wish that all men were even as I myself**: Paul, at the time of this writing, was unmarried (putting himself among the **unmarried and the widows**). Here he recognizes the benefit of being single, which he will speak more of later in the letter.
i. Though Paul was unmarried when he wrote this letter, he probably had been married at one time. We can say this because we know Paul was an extremely observant Jew and an example among his people (Philippians 3:4-6). In Paul's day,

Jews considered marriage a duty, to the extent that a man reaching 20 years of age without marrying was considered to be in sin. Unmarried men were often considered excluded from heaven and not real men at all.
ii. Also, by Paul's own words, it is likely that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. In Acts 26:10, Paul says *I cast my vote against them*, speaking of the early Christians, and the logical place he would cast a vote is as a member of that great congress of the Jewish people. An unmarried man could not be a member of the Sanhedrin, so Paul was probably married at one time.
iii. So what happened to Paul's wife? The Scriptures are silent. Perhaps she left him when he became a Christian, or perhaps she died some time before or after he became a Christian. But we know that it was likely he was married before, and we know he was not married when writing this letter, and the Book of Acts never shows Paul's wife. Paul was probably well qualified to speak of the relative gifts and responsibilities of both marriage and singleness, because he knew both from his life experience.
b. **Each one has his own gift from God**: Though Paul knew singleness was good for him, he would not impose it on anyone. The important thing is what **gift** one has **from God**, either being gifted to singleness or marriage.
i. Significantly, Paul regards *both* marriage and singleness as gifts from God. Many find themselves in the "grass is greener" trap, with single people wishing they were married and married people wishing they were single. Each state is a gift from God.
ii. To be single or married is a special *gifting* from God. When Paul writes **his own gift**, he uses the same word for *spiritual gifts* in 1 Corinthians 12. Each state, married or single, needs special gifting from God to work.
iii. Paul's understanding that the unmarried state can be a gift is especially striking when we consider the Jewish background of Paul himself and the early church. It was regarded as a sin for a Jewish man to be unmarried. "Among the Jews marriage was not held a thing indifferent, or at their own liberty to choose or refuse, but a binding command." (Trapp) Clarke quotes from an ancient Jewish writing known as the *Gemara*: "It is forbidden a man to be without a wife; because it is written, *It is not good for man to be alone*. And whosoever gives not himself to generation and multiplying is all one with a murderer: he is as though he diminished from the image of God."
iv. While Paul recognizes that some are gifted for marriage, and some are gifted for the unmarried state, no one is "gifted" for sexual immorality! The married must live faithfully to their spouse, and the unmarried must live celibate.
c. **If they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry**: Paul's recommendation to marry is not based on marriage being more or less spiritual, but on very practical concerns, especially relevant to his day (as explained in 1 Corinthians 7:26, 29, 32). A godly sexual relationship within the covenant of marriage is God's plan for meeting our sexual needs.
i. Though Paul preferred the unmarried state for himself, he doesn't want anyone to think that being married was less spiritual, or more spiritual. It is all according to

an individual's gifting. Remember that Paul told Timothy that *forbidding to marry* was a *doctrine of demons* (1 Timothy 4:1-3).
ii. Paul "was aware how powerfully a counterfeit show of purity deceives the godly." (Calvin)
d. **It is better to marry than to burn with passion**: Paul recognizes marriage as a legitimate refuge from pressures of sexual immorality. One should not feel they are immature or unspiritual because they desire to get married so they will no longer **burn with passion**.
i. Paul is *not* speaking about what we might consider "normal" sexual temptation. "It is one thing to burn, another to feel heat... what Paul calls burning here, is not merely a slight sensation, but being so aflame with passion that you cannot stand up against it." (Calvin)
ii. At the same time, if someone has a problem with lust or sexual sin, they should not think that getting married itself solves their problems. Many a Christian man has been grieved to find that his lust for other women did not magically "go away" when he got married.

B. Answers to questions about divorce.

1. (10-11) Divorce and separation for Christian couples.

Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife.
a. **Now to the married**: Remember that in this chapter Paul answers questions written to him from the Corinthian Christians. He has already dealt with the questions about the relative merits of being married or single, and if it is more spiritual to abstain from sex in a marriage relationship. **Now to the...** indicates he is moving to another question, and these questions and answers have to do with marriage and divorce.
b. **To the married**: Here, Paul addresses marriages where both partners are Christians. He will deal with other situations in following verses.
c. **A wife is not to depart from her husband**: The Corinthian Christians wondered if it might be *more* spiritual to be single, and if they should break up existing marriages for the cause of greater holiness. Paul answers their question straight from the heart of **the Lord**: absolutely not!
d. **Even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband**: Paul, in addressing a marriage where both partners are Christians, says that they should not – indeed, can not – break up the marriage in a misguided search for higher spirituality. In fact, if one were to **depart** from their spouse, they must either **remain unmarried or be reconciled**.
i. This connects with the two specific grounds under which God will recognize a divorce: when there is sexual immorality (Matthew 19:3-9) and when a believing partner is deserted by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15). On any other grounds, God will not recognize divorce, even if the state does. If God does not recognize the divorce, then the individual is not free to remarry – they can only be reconciled to their former spouse.

ii. Jesus said the one who divorces for invalid reasons, *and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery* (Matthew 19:9). When Jesus' disciples understood how binding the marriage covenant was, and how it could not be broken (in the sight of God) for just any reason, they responded *If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry* (Matthew 19:10). They understood Jesus perfectly, and so should more people today, before they enter into the covenant of marriage.
iii. Therefore, if a person says "God just doesn't want me to be married to this person anymore" or "God brought someone better to me," they are wrong and not speaking from God at all. God never recognizes a divorce for such reasons.
e. **If she does depart**: A Christian couple may in fact separate for reasons that do not justify a Biblical divorce. It may be because of a misguided sense of spirituality, it may be because of general unhappiness, or conflict, or abuse, or misery, addiction, or poverty. Paul recognizes (without at all encouraging) that one might **depart** in such circumstance, but they cannot consider themselves divorced, with the right to remarry, because their marriage had not split up for reasons that justify a Biblical divorce.
i. These problems may – *perhaps* – justify a separation (**depart**), but the partners are expected to honor their marriage vows even in their separation, because as far as God is concerned, they are still married – their marriage covenant has not been broken for what God considers to be Biblical reasons. They may live as *separate*, but not *single*.
f. **And a husband is not to divorce his wife**: Paul applies the same principle to husbands as to wives, and makes the important distinction between one who might **depart** (separation while still honoring the marriage covenant) and one who might **divorce**. Except for sexual immorality (as Jesus described in Matthew 19:3-9), two Christians never have a valid reason for **divorce**.
i. Just as importantly, Jesus never *commands* divorce in the case of sexual immorality. He carefully says it is *permitted*, and that the permission was given *because of the hardness of your hearts* (Matthew 19:8).

2. (12-16) Divorce and remarriage when a Christian is married to an unbelieving spouse.

But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*. But God has called us to peace. 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*?

a. **But to the rest** indicates Paul is shifting the focus from the group previously addressed – couples where both partners were Christians. Now he speaks to **any**

brother who has a wife who does not believe, and the **woman who has a husband who does not believe**.

b. **I, not the Lord, say**: We should not think Paul is any less inspired by the Holy Spirit on this point. When he says **not the Lord**, he simply means that Jesus did not teach on this specific point, as He had in the previous situation in Matthew 19:3-9. So, if Jesus did not speak on this specific point, Jesus' inspired apostle will!

i. This is a clue that Paul may not have been conscious of the degree of inspiration he worked under as he wrote 1 Corinthians and perhaps other letters. He simply knows that though he based his remarks in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 on what Jesus taught in Matthew 19:3-9 (*yet not I, but the Lord*), he has no specific recorded command from Jesus in the case of a Christian married to an unbelieving spouse. He knew he wrote with God's authority to the Corinthians, but he may not have known he spoke with authority to all the church in all ages, and was used to pen God's eternal Word. But if Paul was not aware of how inspired his words were, they are no less inspired because of that.

c. **Let him not divorce her**: If there were some Christian couples in the Corinthian church who thought they would be more spiritual if they divorced (addressed in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11), what about Corinthian Christians married to unbelievers? "Certainly," thought the Corinthians, "God can't be glorified if I'm married to an unbeliever; for the sake of spirituality, I should divorce them." To these, Paul says **let him not divorce her**.

i. This spiritual concern is a valid – and urgent – reason for not marrying an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14), but it is not a reason for ending an existing marriage with an unbeliever.

d. **For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife**: Why should a Christian try to keep their marriage to a non-Christian together? Because God *can* be glorified in such a marriage, and He may do a work through the believing spouse to draw the unbelieving spouse to Jesus Christ.

i. **Sanctified**, in this context, does not mean that the unbelieving spouse is saved just by being married to a Christian. It simply means that they are *set apart* for a special working in their lives by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of being so close to someone who is a Christian.

e. **Otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy**: Not only does the presence of a believing spouse do good for the unbelieving spouse, it also does good for the children – and great good, because it can be said **now they are holy**.

i. "Until he is old enough to take responsibility upon himself, the child of a believing parent is to be regarded as Christian. The parents 'holiness' extends to the child." (Morris)

ii. This is a beautiful assurance that the children of a Christian parent are saved, at least until they come to an age of personal accountability (which may differ for each child). However, we have no similar assurance for the children of parents who are not Christians. In fact, the sense of the text argues against it. How could Paul

claim it as a *benefit* for a Christian parent to be in the home, if the same benefit automatically applies to the children of non-Christians also? As well, Paul says **otherwise your children would be unclean** – clearly giving the sense that apart from the presence of a Christian parent, the child is not regarded as **holy**, rather as **unclean**.

iii. If the children of non-Christian parents are saved, and do go to heaven – even some of them – it is important to understand that it is not because they are *innocent*. As sons and daughters of guilty Adam, we are each born guilty. If such children do go to heaven, it is not because they are deserving innocents, but because the rich mercy of God has been extended to them as well.

f. **But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart**: Paul has counseled that the Christian partner should do what they can to keep the marriage together. But if the unbelieving spouse refuses to be married, then the marriage can be broken; but this isn't to be initiated or sought by the believer.

i. If the unbelieving spouse should depart, the Christian **is not under bondage** to the marriage covenant. This means they are, in fact, free to remarry because God has recognized their divorce as a valid divorce.

g. **For how do you know**: Paul ends this section with a great deal of hope, because many Christians who are married to unbelievers are discouraged. They should know that with faith and patience, they can look for God to work in their present circumstances, difficult as they might be.

i. Christians married to unbelievers should also know what Peter says in 1 Peter 3:1-6: that your unbelieving spouse will probably not be led to Jesus by your words, but by your godly and loving conduct.

ii. Tragically, much of the early church did not heed God's word to keep marriages together, as much as possible, when married to unbelievers. One of the great heathen complaints against the early Christians was that Christianity broke up families. One of the first charges brought against Christians was "tampering with domestic relationships." (Barclay)

C. An overarching principle: live as you are called.

1. (17) The principle: you can live for God where you are right now.

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.

a. **As the Lord has called each one, so let him walk**: No matter what your station – married, single, divorced, widowed, remarried, whatever – God can work in your life. Instead of thinking that you can or will walk for the Lord when your station changes, walk for the Lord in the place you are right now.

i. This also is a warning about trying to undo the past in regard to relationships. God tells us to repent of whatever sin is there and then to move on. If you are married to your second wife, after wrongfully divorcing your first wife, and become a Christian, don't think you must now leave your second wife and go back to your first wife, trying to undo the past. As the Lord has called you, walk in that place right now.

b. **So let him walk** is also a warning to beware the danger of thinking other people

have it better than you do because of their different station in life. It doesn't matter nearly as much whether you are married, single, divorced, or remarried; what matters more is an on-fire **walk** with Jesus right now.

2. (18-20) An example of this principle from the practice of circumcision.

Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters*. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

a. **Was anyone called while circumcised?** Paul is saying that if you were circumcised when you became a Christian, fine. If you were not circumcised when you became a Christian, fine also. Those things do not matter. What matters is serving the Lord where we are at right now.

i. How could one become **uncircumcised**? "Some Jews, for fear of Antiochus, made themselves uncircumcised, 1 Maccab. 1:16. Others for shame after they were gained to the knowledge of Christ, as here. This was done by drawing up the fore-skin with a surgeon's instrument." (Trapp) "By frequent stretching, the circumcised skin could be again *so drawn over*, as to prevent the ancient sign of circumcision from appearing." (Clarke)

b. **Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing**: Paul's point isn't really about circumcision; that is just an example. Even as being circumcised or uncircumcised is irrelevant when it comes to serving God, so is your current marital state. He could just as easily say, and is saying by analogy, *Married is nothing and unmarried is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters*.

3. (21-24) An example of this principle from the practice of slavery.

Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use *it*. For he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called *while* free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that *state* in which he was called.

a. **Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it**: A slave can please God as a slave. He should not live his life thinking, "I can't do anything for God now, but I sure could if I was a free man." He can, and should, serve God as he is able to now.

b. **But if you can be made free, rather use it**: In saying that a slave can please God, Paul does not want any slave to think God does not *want* him to be free. If he has the opportunity, he should take advantage of it.

c. **Do not become slaves of men**: This is true not only in regard to literal slavery, but spiritually also. We are never to put ourselves under the inappropriate control or influence of others.

i. "Do not follow even good men slavishly. Do not say, 'I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Calvin; I am of Wesley.' Did Calvin redeem you? Did Wesley die for you?

Who is Calvin and who is Wesley but ministers by whom ye believed as the Lord gave unto you? Do not so surrender yourself to any leadership that you rather follow the man than his Master. I will follow anybody if he goes Christ's way, but I will follow nobody, by the grace of God, if he does not go in that direction." (Spurgeon)

d. **Brethren, let each one remain with God in that calling in which he was called**: This principle applies across a broad spectrum – married or unmarried, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free. We can seek God's best and be used by Him right where we are.

i. "Marriage may be a distraction. Sorrow may become a distraction. Joy may become a distraction, or commerce, or the world. Then we are to turn our back upon all these things." (Morgan)

e. **Let each one remain with God in that calling in which he was called**: Of course, this doesn't mean that we are to continue in a sinful course or occupation once we are saved.

i. "That is, supposing that he was in an honest course of life; for we read in the Acts that the conjurers burnt their books, and unlawful courses of life must not be adhered to after men have once given up their names to Christ." (Trapp)

D. Answering questions about marriage among Christians.

1. (25-28) Paul's advice: marriage isn't bad in the sight of God, and singleness has its advantages.

Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy *has made* trustworthy. I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

a. **Concerning virgins**: Paul now will deal with the unmarried, whom he refers to as **virgins**, even though they all might not have been technically virgins — though in Christian homes, they certainly should be.

b. **I have no commandment from the Lord — yet I give judgment**: Again, we are not to think Paul is any less inspired here, but because he deals with life-situations that differ from person to person, he cannot, and will not, give a **commandment**. Yet, he will give inspired advice and principles.

c. **It is good for a man to remain as he is**: Paul, in speaking to the never-married man, recommends that he **remain as he is** – that is, either remaining single or remaining married.

i. Why? **Because of the present distress**. Apparently, there was some kind of local persecution or problem in the city of Corinth, and because of this **distress**, Paul says there are definite advantages to remaining single. Also, because of this **distress**, a married man should also **remain as he is**.

ii. What is the advantage of remaining single? We can easily imagine how in a time of persecution or great crisis, how much more of a burden a wife or a family can be

for someone committed to standing strong for the Lord. We may say, "Torture me, and I will never renounce Jesus." But what if we were threatened with the rape of our wife or the torture of our children? These may seem far away to us, but they were not far away to Christians in the first century.
iii. What is the advantage in remaining married? At a time of great **distress**, your family needs you more than ever. Don't abandon your wife and children now!
iv. "These persecutions and distresses are at the door, and life itself will soon be run out. Even *then* Nero was plotting those grievous persecutions with which he not only afflicted, but devastated the Church of Christ." (Clarke)
d. **Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife**: Paul echoes the same principle laid down in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. God can use us right where we are, and we should not be so quick to change our station in life.
i. With the terms **bound** and **loosed**, Paul uses the vocabulary of the Jewish scribes. When a Jew in those days did not know if and how God's law applied to their situation, they would ask a scribe, and the scribe would declare them **bound** or **loosed** in regard to particular commands.
e. **If you do marry, you have not sinned**: Paul certainly will not *forbid* marriage; yet he tells those who will get married, **nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you**. Paul felt (especially for himself) that the greater advantages were found in being single, yet he knows that *each one has his own gift from God* (1 Corinthians 7:7).
i. Most significantly, Paul never implies that being married or single is more spiritual than the other state. This was the big error of the Corinthian Christians.

2. (29-31) Paul warns against putting roots down too deep in a world that is passing away.

But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away.
a. **The time is short**: Some criticize Paul, or even declare him a false prophet, because he says **the time is short**. But Paul is true to the heart and teaching of Jesus, who told all Christians in all ages to be ready and anticipate His return.
i. Jesus told us all in Matthew 24:44, *Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*. We are to be ready, and to regard the **time** as **short**, not only because Jesus can return at any time, but also because it cultivates a more obedient, on-fire walk with Jesus Christ.
ii. Even without considering the return of Jesus, it is worthwhile and accurate for Christians to live as if **the time is short**. The Psalmist expressed this attitude in Psalm 39:5: *Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor*.
iii. The ancient Greek word for **short** is "*sustello*," meaning "contracted and rolled up, as sails used to be by the mariners, when the ship draws nigh to the harbour."

(Trapp) "*The time* (saith he) *is short*; furled up, like sails when the mariner comes near his port." (Poole) The harbor is near, and the sails are shortened! Get the ship ready for harbor!

b. **Even those who have wives should be as though they had none**: Paul is not encouraging the neglect of proper family duties, but encouraging living as if **the time is short**. It means that we will not live as if our earthly family was all that mattered, but also live with an eye to eternity.

c. **For the form of this world is passing away**: A **time is short** attitude will also not indulge the feelings and things of this world. Weeping, rejoicing, and having possessions must not get in the way of following hard after Jesus.

i. **The form of this world is passing away**: "There is nothing solid and lasting in this world system; it is its nature to pass away. It is folly for believers to act as though its values were permanent." (Morris)

3. (32-35) The unmarried have the opportunity to serve and please God with less distraction.

But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please *her* husband. And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

a. **He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord**: Here, Paul simply recognizes that when a person doesn't have family responsibilities, they are more "free" to serve God. This was the main reason Paul considered the unmarried state preferable for himself.

b. **He who is married cares about the things of the world; how he may please his wife**: Paul does not say this to condemn the married person; in fact, Paul is saying this is how it *should* be for the married person. There is something wrong if a married man does not care for **how he may please his wife**, and something is wrong if a married woman does not care about **how she may please her husband**.

c. **Not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper**: Again, Paul's reason for explaining these things is not to *forbid* marriage, but to put it into an eternal perspective. He isn't putting **a leash** on anyone; he merely shares from his own heart and experience.

i. Significantly, for Paul, the most important thing in life was not romantic love, but pleasing God. For him, he could please God better as single, but another may please God better as married, all according to our calling.

ii. Though Paul insists he does not want his teaching here to be regarded as a noose around anyone's neck, this has happened in the church. Roman Catholics insist on celibacy for all of their clergy, even if they are not gifted to be so. Many

Protestant groups will not ordain or trust the single.
d. **That you may serve the Lord without distraction**: For Paul, being unmarried meant fewer distractions in serving God. Tragically, to many modern single Christians, singleness is a terrible **distraction**! Instead, they should regard their present unmarried state (whether it is temporary or permanent) as a special opportunity to please God.

4. (36-38) Paul deals with another question from the Corinthians: should I arrange a marriage for my daughter?

But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well, but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better.

a. **If any man thinks he is behaving improperly towards his virgin**:
The **man** Paul refers to is the father of a young woman or man of marrying age (**his virgin**). The **behaving improperly** has nothing to do with any kind of improper moral behavior, but with denying his daughter or son the right to marry, based on the way Paul values singleness.
i. Remember that in this ancient culture, a young person's parents had the primary responsibility for arranging their marriage. So based on what Paul has already taught, should a Christian father recommend celibacy to his child?
ii. The term **virgin** includes the young of both sexes.
b. **Let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry**: Paul says it is not wrong for a father to allow his young daughter to marry, even allowing for the desirability of singleness at the present time.
c. **Determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well**: Because singleness does have its benefits, Paul will recommend it, not only to individuals, but also to fathers in regard to the marrying off of their daughters**.**
d. **He who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better**: For Paul, the choice between married and single was not the choice between good and bad, but between better and best. And for Paul, in light of the present circumstances, he regarded singleness as best.

5. (39-40) A final reminder regarding the remarriage of widows.

A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment; and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

a. **If her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married**: Of course, a widow has the right to remarry. But a Christian widow, like any Christian, is really only free to remarry another Christian (**only in the Lord**).
b. **But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment**: At the same time, Paul believes such a widow **is happier if she remains as she is** –

that is, if she remains single. Essentially, Paul wants the widow not to remarry without carefully considering that God might be calling her to celibacy.
i. Again, Paul will affirm celibacy, but not because sex itself is evil (as some of the Corinthian Christians thought). Instead, the unmarried state can be superior because it offers a person (if they are so gifted) more opportunity to serve God.

1 CORINTHIANS 8 – LIVING BY KNOWLEDGE OR BY LOVE

1 Corinthians 8-9 – Claiming Rights and Living by Love

A. A question about meat sacrificed to idols: beginning principles.
1. (1-3) The principles of love and knowledge.
Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.
a. **Now concerning things offered to idols**: Having dealt with their questions about marriage and singleness, Paul now addresses (in 1 Corinthians chapters 8-10) the next of their questions regarding eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols.
b. **Things offered to idols**: The meat offered on pagan altars was usually divided into three portions. One portion was burnt in honor of the god, one portion was given to the worshipper to take home and eat, and the third portion was given to the priest. If the priest didn't want to eat his portion, he sold it at the temple restaurant or meat market.
i. The meat served and sold at the temple was generally cheaper. Then, as well as now, people loved a bargain (including Christians).
c. **Things offered to idols**: The issue raised many questions for the Corinthian Christians: Can we eat meat purchased at the temple meat market? What if we are served meat purchased at the temple meat market when we are guests in someone's home? Can a Christian eat at the restaurant at the pagan temple?
d. **We know that we all have knowledge**: Instead of talking about food, Paul first talks about the principles of **knowledge** and **love**. Christian behavior is founded on love, not knowledge; and the goal of the Christian life is not knowledge, but love.
e. **Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies**: Both **knowledge** and **love** have an effect on our lives in that each of them make something *grow*. The difference between **puffs up** and **edifies** is striking; it is the difference between a *bubble* and a *building*. Some Christians grow, others just swell!
f. **If anyone thinks that he knows anything**: If we think we know it all, we really don't know anything – **he knows nothing yet as he ought to know**. Yet, there is a knowledge that is important: the knowledge God has of those who love Him (**if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him**).
2. (4-6) Understanding the reality of the idols meat is offered to.

Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*.

a. **We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one**: Because there is only One True God, idols are not competing gods. Idols are therefore **nothing in the world**, and are only **so-called gods.**

i. If meat is offered to Zeus, there is no real Zeus. There is **no other God but one**. "He" is only one of the **so-called gods**. "There are many *images* that are supposed to be *representations* of divinities: but these divinities are nothing, the figments of mere fancy; and these images have no corresponding *realities*." (Clarke)

ii. What about Biblical passages which some take to suggest there are other gods? For example, in John 10:34, Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6, in saying *You are gods*. But the judges of Psalm 82 were called "gods" because in their office they determined the fate of other men. Also, in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8-9, God calls earthly judges "gods." In John 10, Jesus is saying "if God gives these unjust judges the title 'gods' because of their office, why do you consider it blasphemy that I call Myself the 'Son of God' in light of the testimony regarding Me and My works?" Jesus is *not* taking the *you are gods* of Psalm 82 and applying it to all humanity or to all believers. The use of *gods* in Psalm 82 was a metaphor.

iii. As well, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul calls Satan *the god of this age*. Certainly, he does not mean Satan is a true god, a rival god to the Lord God. Satan can be called *the god of this age* because he is *regarded* as a god by so many people.

iv. **As there are many gods and many lords** refers to the **so-called gods**. Indeed, in the ancient world, there were many, many different gods – and even gods known as *the unknown god* to cover any gods one might have missed (Acts 17:23).

b. **There is one God, the Father... and one Lord Jesus Christ**: Paul isn't distinguishing Jesus *from* God, as if Jesus were *not* God. When Paul calls Jesus **Lord**, he uses the Greek word *kurios*, and this word would have meant something to Bible reading people in Paul's day.

i. Leon Morris on **Lord**: "This term could be no more than a polite form of address like our 'Sir.' But it could also be used of the deity one worships. The really significant background, though, is its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to render the divine name, Yahweh... Christians who used this as their Bible would be familiar with the term as equivalent to deity."

ii. Certainly, no one can say **through whom are all things, and through whom we live** of anyone other than God.

c. The Corinthian Christians may have reasoned like this: if idols are really nothing, it must mean nothing to eat meat sacrificed to nothing idols, and it must mean nothing to eat in the buildings used to worship these nothing idols. In the following section, Paul will show them a better way.

B. Acting on the principle of love.

1. (7) Not all have the same knowledge.

However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

a. **There is not in everyone that knowledge**: The Corinthian Christians who felt free to eat at the pagan temple may have based their freedom on correct knowledge (knowing that idols are nothing). But **for some**, they have **consciousness of the idol**, and they eat meat sacrificed to the idol **as a thing offered to an idol**.

i. Paul asks the Corinthian Christians who know there is nothing to an idol to remember that not everyone knows this. And if someone believes there is something to an idol, and they eat meat that has been sacrificed to an idol, **their conscience, being weak, is defiled**.

ii. Why is their **conscience** considered **weak**? Not because their conscience doesn't work. Indeed, it does work – in fact, it overworks. Their **conscience** is considered **weak** because it is wrongly informed; their conscience is operating on the idea that there really is something to an idol.

b. **Their conscience, being weak, is defiled**: You can imagine the "free" Corinthian Christians with their superior knowledge saying, "but we're *right*!" And in this case, being right is important but it is not more important than showing love to the family of God.

2. (8) What we eat or do not eat does not make us more spiritual.

But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

a. **Food does not commend us to God**: You aren't *more* spiritual if you know idols are nothing and feel a personal freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols (**neither if we eat are we the better**).

i. In Acts 15:29, the Jerusalem Council sent a letter commanding some churches to (among other things) *abstain from things offered to idols*. But Paul's discussion of the issue here does not contradict what the Jerusalem Council decided in Acts 15. Instead, it shows that the Council's decision was not intended to regulate all the church all the time; it was a temporary arrangement, meant to advance the cause of the gospel among the Jews of that day.

b. **Food does not commend us to God**: On the other hand, **nor if we do not eat are we the worse**. No one is *less* spiritual for abstaining from meat sacrificed to idols.

c. This is the very point where most stumble in issues relevant to Christian liberty (such as movies, drinking, music, or television). They assume that one stance or another is evidence of greater or lesser spirituality.

3. (9-13) What does matter: love towards those in God's family.

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to

eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

a. **Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block**: A Corinthian Christian with "superior knowledge" might feel the personal liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols, but is he exercising **this liberty** in a way that becomes a **stumbling block**?

i. Paul says, "You Corinthian Christians who say you have knowledge are claiming your rights; what about the rights of the weak brother?" **Because of your knowledge, shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?**

ii. "God hath not given people knowledge that they thereby should be a means to harm and to destroy, but to do good, and to save others; it is a most absurd thing for any to use their knowledge, therefore, to the destruction of others." (Poole)

b. **Those who are weak**: Why is the brother who will not eat the meat sacrificed to an idol considered **weak**? Many Christians would consider that one to be the "stronger" Christian. However Paul is not speaking about being weak or strong in regard to self-control, but in regard to knowledge.

c. **A stumbling block to those who are weak**: To influence the **weak brother** to go against his conscience (and thereby **wound their weak conscience**) is actually to **sin against Christ**. The Corinthian Christians who abused their liberty might have thought it was a small matter to offend their weak brothers, but they did not understand they offended Jesus Christ.

i. In doing so, they were actually "building up" their brother to sin! **Emboldened** comes from the words *build up*. Their misuse of liberty was building others up towards sin.

d. **Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat**: Paul makes the principle clear. Our actions can never be based *only* on what we know to be right for ourselves. We also need to consider what is right towards our brothers and sisters in Jesus.

i. It is easy for a Christian to say, "I answer to God and God alone" and to ignore his brother or sister. It is true we will answer to God and God alone, but we will answer to God for how we have treated our brother or sister.

e. **Lest I make my brother stumble**: At the same time, the issue is making a **brother stumble** – and stumble over an issue that has direct relevance to the brother in question. Paul would never allow this principle to be a way for a legalist to make demands and bind a Christian walking in liberty.

i. In Galatians 2, Paul describes a situation where Peter made Gentiles think they had to come under Jewish customs and laws to be saved. Peter did this through his association and approval of some legalists. Paul rebuked Peter strongly because of this. Even if the legalists from a Jewish background had said to the Gentiles, "Your lack of obedience to our customs stumbles us. We are stumbled brothers. You must do what we want," Paul would have replied, "*You* are not

stumbled, because you aren't being tempted to sin through their actions. Your *legalism* is being offended. Out of love, I will never act in a way that might tempt you to sin, but I don't care at all about offending your legalism. In fact, I'm happy to do it!"

ii. "Many persons cover a spirit of envy and uncharitableness with the name of godly zeal and tender concern for the salvation of others; they find fault with all; their spirit is a spirit of universal censoriousness; none can please them; and every one suffers by them. These destroy more souls by tithing mint and cummin, than others do by neglecting the weightier matters of the law. Such persons have what is termed, and very properly too, *sour godliness*." (Clarke)

1 CORINTHIANS 9 – THE RIGHTS OF AN APOSTLE

Audio for 1 Corinthians 9:

1 Corinthians 8-9 – Claiming Rights and Living by Love

A. Paul declares his rights as an apostle.

1. (1-2) Paul defends his status as an apostle.

Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

a. **Am I not an apostle?** Remember the context: Paul addresses the Corinthian Christians about their "right" based on "knowledge" to eat meat sacrificed to idols in a temple restaurant.

i. Paul asks them to let go of their "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols, even as he has let go his own rights as an apostle. But Paul will also use the occasion to defend his apostolic position before the doubting Corinthian Christians.

b. **Am I not an apostle?** Such an obvious truth should hardly need stating. *Of course* Paul was **an apostle**! As obvious as this was, it was doubted and denied by some of the Christians in Corinth.

c. **Am I not an apostle?** The evidence of Paul's true status as an apostle is shown in the following statements:

· **Am I not free?** Paul was not "under authority" to anyone but Jesus Christ, but other Christians were under apostolic authority.

· **Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?** Paul insists that he did not merely see a vision of Jesus, but an authentic appearance of the post-resurrection Jesus.

· **Are you not my work in the Lord?** The proof is in the pudding. The work of God among the Corinthian Christians was evidence enough of Paul's apostolic credentials. In fact, they were **the seal of** [Paul's] **apostleship in the Lord**.

i. Some today, because of visions or experiences they claim to have had, claim to be apostles on the level of Paul. But seeing the resurrected Jesus is not the only qualification of a true apostle. Paul was specifically commissioned as an apostle

when Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus Road (Acts 26:12-18).
d. **If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you**: Although some among the Corinthian Christians did doubt Paul's standing as an apostle, they shouldn't have. The Corinthian Christians had more reason than most to know Paul was a genuine apostle, because they had seen his work up close.
i. This makes the doubt among the Corinthian Christians all the more ironic, and Paul is trying to make them aware of this irony.

2. (3-6) Paul's assertion of rights as an apostle.

My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or *is it* only Barnabas and I *who* have no right to refrain from working?
a. **My defense**: Paul will now assert his rights as an apostle, as if he were a lawyer arguing a case. The words **defense** (*apologia*) and **examine** (*anakrino*) are both legal words, taken from the Roman law court. Paul feels like he's on trial, or that he has already been "found guilty" by the Corinthian Christians.
b. **Do we have no right to eat and drink**: Paul, like all the apostles, had the **right to eat and drink**. It wasn't that the Corinthian Christians questioned Paul's right to eat, but Paul means that he has the **right to eat and drink** at the expense of the churches he served.
c. **Do we have no right to take along a believing wife**: Paul, like all the apostles, had the **right to take along a believing wife**. Again, the Corinthian Christians would not mind him taking along a wife, as long as they did not have to support the apostle and his wife. But Paul makes it clear that he had the right to expect support for not only himself, but for his family, also.
i. **As do the other apostles**: Apparently, most of the other apostles were married, and their wives traveled with them as they did ministry. This is especially interesting concerning Peter (**Cephas**), who was obviously married, yet still considered by the Roman Catholic church to be the first pope, in contradiction to the principle of mandatory celibacy.
d. **Or is it only Barnabas and I**: Most of the other apostles received support from the churches they ministered to. Paul and Barnabas were unique in this regard, choosing to work and support themselves, so no one could accuse them of preaching for a money motive.
i. We might think this would make Paul and Barnabas *more* respected in the sight of the Corinthian Christians, but curiously, it made them *less* respected. It was almost as if the Corinthian Christians said, "If Paul and Barnabas were real apostles, we would support them; but since they are not supported, we suppose they aren't real apostles."

3. (7-14) Why Paul has the right to be supported by those he ministers to.

Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same

also? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat *of the things* of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings of* the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

a. **Who ever goes to war at his own expense**: In an army, the soldiers are supported. The farmer is fed by the field he works in (**Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?**). The shepherd is supported by the sheep he cares for (**who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?**). Therefore, it should not seem strange to the Corinthian Christians that Paul has the right to be supported by the people he ministers to.

b. **Does not the law say the same also?** Paul's right is also stated in the Mosaic Law. He appeals to Scripture, not only human illustrations (**Do I say these things as a mere man?**).

i. In Deuteronomy 25:4, God commanded **You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain**. This law simply commanded the humane treatment of a working animal. In those days, grain was broken away from its husk by an ox walking on it repeatedly (usually in a circle). It was cruel to force the ox to walk over all that grain, yet to **muzzle** him so he couldn't eat of it.

ii. **Is it oxen God is concerned about?** The principle of Deuteronomy 25:4 is much more important than providing for the needs of oxen. God establishes the principle that a minister has the right to be supported by the people he is ministering to. As Wiersbe says, "Since oxen cannot read, this verse was not written for them."

iii. The law about oxen stated a principle that had greater application. However, "We must not make the mistake of thinking that Paul means to explain that commandment allegorically; for some empty-headed creatures make this an excuse for turning everything into allegory, so that they change dogs into men, trees into angels, and convert the whole of Scripture into an amusing game." (Calvin)

c. **That he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partakers of this hope**: It would be cruel to starve those who are providing and preparing your food. To do so would take away all their hope. It makes them feel abused and unappreciated.

d. **If we have sown spiritual things**: Paul here makes it plain that it is right for the *spiritual* work of God's ministers to be repaid with the *material* support of the people they minister unto.

e. **If others are partakers of this right**: It wasn't that the Corinthian Christians

refused to support *anyone* in ministry. No, **others are partakers of this right**. The problem with the Corinthian Christians was they refused to support Paul, and thought less of him because he did not receive it.

f. **Nevertheless we have not used the right... lest we hinder the gospel of Christ**: Just as strongly as Paul affirms his right to be supported by the people he ministers unto, he will also affirm his right to not use that right, if using it might **hinder the gospel of Christ**.

i. Here we see Paul's real heart. Paid or not paid, it did not matter to him. What mattered was the work of the gospel. Was it more effective for the gospel if Paul should receive support? Then he would receive it. Was it more effective for the gospel if Paul should work to support himself? Then he would do that. What mattered was that the gospel not be hindered in any way.

ii. If Paul was willing to deny himself such an important right for the good of the gospel and the Corinthian Christians, then should not also the Corinthian Christians deny their "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols for the same good?

g. **The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel**: This summary statement is conclusive. Some might say, "Yes, the apostles had the right to be paid, but no one today has that right." But this *command* from the Lord means that anyone who preaches the gospel has the right to be supported by those he preaches to.

i. Should modern ministers *assert* or *release* their right to be supported? They should do whichever will serve the gospel and the church better. But if a minister does take money for support, he should work hard to earn that money.

ii. "If a man who does not labour takes his maintenance from the Church of God, it is not only a domestic theft but a sacrilege. He that gives up his time to this labour has a *right* to the support of himself and his family: he who takes more than is sufficient for this purpose is a covetous hireling. He who does nothing for the cause of God and religion, and yet obliges the Church to support him, and minister to his idleness, irregularities, luxury, avarice, and ambition, is a *monster* for whom human language has not yet got a *name*." (Clarke)

h. **The Lord commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel**: We have no record of those specific words of Jesus, but in two places He states the principle. In Matthew 10:10 (*for a worker is worthy of his food*), and in Luke 10:8 (*Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you*).

B. Paul's desire to leave his rights unclaimed.

1. (15-18) Paul's reward: to preach without relying on the support of any man.

But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it *would be* better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I

preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

a. **I have used none of these things**: Paul had the right to be supported, but he did not use that right.

b. **Nor have I written these things**: In writing this, Paul was not "hinting" for support by the Corinthian Christians. He shows them the value, and the reasons, for giving up one's own rights.

c. **It would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void**: Paul's boasting wasn't that he preached the gospel. He *had* to do that (**for necessity is laid upon me**); instead, his **boasting** was that he was able to do it without asking his hearers for support.

i. Remember that Greek culture, which the Corinthian Christians approved so much, looked down its nose on all manual labor. Even though the Corinthian Christians seemed to think *less* of Paul because he worked with his own hands to support himself, it did not embarrass Paul at all. He will *boast* about it!

d. **Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!** Paul's ministry was not just a matter of choice or personal ambition; it was something he was called to, something he had to do. He did not just have "preacher's itch." He was called to preach and felt compelled to fulfill that call.

e. **If I do this willingly**: Some are not supported by the ministry, but it has nothing to do with *choice*, it is just because of their circumstances. But if one does not receive support **willingly**, then they have **a reward**. However, if it is **against my will** that I am not supported, then **I have been entrusted with a stewardship**.

f. **I may present the gospel of Christ without charge**: In Paul's day, there were a lot of religious entrepreneurs, who were out to preach any message to get money. Paul was happy to distance himself from these by never taking an offering so no one would think he might **abuse** [his] **authority in the gospel**. This was Paul's **reward**.

i. We may not ever be faced with the same decision Paul faced – to accept or deny support for the good of the gospel. But we each have a critical question to answer: what rights are *you* willing to sacrifice for the cause of Jesus?

2. (19-23) Paul's flexibility in ministry.

For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 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, that I might win those *who are* under the law; to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.

a. **I am free from all men... that I might win the more**: Paul was free to do what he wanted, but bringing people to Jesus was more important to him than using his freedom selfishly.

b. **To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews**: To outside observers, it might have looked like Paul's life was inconsistent, but he consistently pursued one goal: to win people to Jesus.
i. In Acts 21:23-26, Paul participated in Jewish purification ceremonies, which he knew were not necessary for his own life, but he hoped would help build a bridge of ministry to the Jews. As well, in Acts 16:3 Paul had Timothy circumcised – again, not because it was necessary, but because it could be helpful in getting ministry done among the Jews.
ii. "To the Gentiles he behaved himself as if he himself had been a Gentile, that is, forbearing the observances of the Levitical law, to which the Gentiles had never any obligation at all." (Poole)
iii. "Paul sought to win people to Jesus Christ by being sensitive to their needs and identifying with them. We should try to reach people where they are today and expect to see changes later." (Smith)
c. **I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some**: We should not think Paul changed his doctrine or message to appeal to different groups (he denies this in 1 Corinthians 1:22-23), but he would change his behavior and manner of approach.
i. "This passage has often been looked to for the idea of 'accommodation' in evangelism, that is, of adapting the *message* to the language and perspective of the recipients. Unfortunately, despite the need for that discussion to be carried on, this passage does not speak directly to it. This has to do with how one *lives* or *behaves* among those whom he wishes to evangelize." (Fee)
ii. "Let those who plead for the system of *accommodation* on the example of St. Paul, attend to the *end* he had in view, and the *manner* in which he pursued that *end*. It was not to *get money, influence,* or *honour*, but to *save* SOULS! It was not to get *ease* but to increase his *labours*. It was not to *save his life*, but rather that it should be a *sacrifice* for the good of *immortal souls!*" (Clarke)
d. **Now this I do for the gospel's sake**: Paul was willing to offend people over the gospel, but he wanted to offend them *only* over the gospel.

3. (24-27) Paul's attitude: an athlete's attitude.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. And everyone who competes for *the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

a. **I run... I fight**: Sporting events were big in Paul's day as well as in our own. This was especially meaningful to the Corinthians, because their city was the center for the Isthmian Games, second in prestige to the ancient Olympics.
i. Paul often uses figures from arena competition (at least twelve different references in his letters), including examples of runners, boxers, gladiators, chariot racers, and trophies.

b. **Run in such a way that you may obtain it**: Paul tells us to train and compete as athletes who really want to win. Without effort, nothing can be won in a sporting event.
c. **Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things**: To compete as an athlete, one must be **temperate**. This term refers to the manner in which Roman athletes had to train for ten months before being allowed in the games.
i. An athlete must refuse things that may be fine in themselves, but will hinder the pursuit of his goal. Even so, the Corinthians must refuse things that are fine in themselves (like meat sacrificed to idols), because having them may hinder the pursuit of the important goal: **an imperishable crown**, a heavenly reward that will never pass away.
d. **I discipline my body**:**Discipline** is a weak translation. The ancient Greek word means "to strike under the eye; to give a black eye." Paul didn't want his body to lord it over his entire being.
i. **Bring it into subjection** literally means *to lead about as a slave*. Paul made sure that his body was the servant, and his inner man was the master. The desires of his body were not going to rule over his entire self.
ii. But Paul did not think the body itself was evil; after all, it belongs to Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:20); nor would he agree with later ascetics who punished their bodies in a quest for super-holiness. Through the centuries, Christians known as *flagellants* would literally whip, beat, and torture themselves in a misguided attempt to fulfill this verse. Usually, these Christians thought they could pay for their sins through such self-torture, and they refused to recognize that Jesus paid all of the penalty of their sin.
e. **Lest when I have preached to others**: Paul sees himself as both a herald of the games (who announced the rules), and as a participant. Paul told others the rules of the game, and he had to follow the rules himself.
i. **Preached**: "Refers to the *office* of the… *herald*, at these games, whose business it was to proclaim the conditions of the games, display the prizes, exhort the combatants, excite the emulation of those who were to contend, declare the terms of each contest, pronounce the names of the victors, and put the crown on their heads." (Clarke)
f. **Lest… I myself should become disqualified**: In this context, **disqualified** probably doesn't refer to the loss of salvation (no Greek's citizenship was revoked upon losing), but the loss of reward.
i. **Disqualified**: "Signifies such a person as the… *judges of the games*, reject as not having deserved the prize. So Paul himself might be rejected by the great Judge; and to *prevent* this, he *ran*, he *contended*, he *denied himself*, and *brought his body into subjection* to his spirit, and had his spirit governed by the Spirit of God." (Clarke)

1 CORINTHIANS 10 – IDOLATRY THEN AND NOW

Video for 1 Corinthians 10:

Real Fear – 1 Corinthians 10

Audio for 1 Corinthians 10:

1 Corinthians 10 – Idolatry Then and Now

A. Israel's bad example.

1. (1-5) Israel in the Exodus: blessed with many spiritual experiences, yet they were disqualified.

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.

a. **Moreover, brethren**: 1 Corinthians 10 carries on the subject introduced in 1 Corinthians 8, and continued in chapter 9: what should the Corinthian Christians think and do in regard to meat which has been sacrificed to idols?

i. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul established two principles. First, an idol really is nothing, and it was fine for Corinthian Christians who understood this to act according to this knowledge, in regard to themselves. Second, for Christians love is more important than knowledge. So even though I may "know" eating meat sacrificed to an idol is all right for myself, if it causes my brother to stumble, I won't do it, because it isn't the loving thing to do.

ii. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul showed how important it is for Christians to give up their "rights." Just as Paul gave up his "right" to be supported by his own preaching of the gospel, so some of the Corinthian Christians must sometimes give up their "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols, based on the principle of love towards a weaker brother. In the end of chapter 9, Paul showed how a Christian must be willing to give up some things – even "good" things – for the sake of winning the race God has set before us, otherwise we will *become disqualified* (1 Corinthians 9:27) in the competition of the Christian life.

b. **I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers**: Paul wrote about the need to finish what God has set before us, and how dangerous it is to refuse to give up something that gets in the way of finishing. Now, he will use Israel's experience in the Exodus from Egypt to illustrate this principle.

c. **All our fathers**: Think of all the blessings Israel had in the Exodus from Egypt!

i. **Our fathers passed through the cloud**: The cloud of Shekinah glory overshadowed Israel throughout their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. During the day, the cloud sheltered them from the brutal desert sun, and during the night, it burned as a pillar of fire. It was a constant, ready reminder of God's glory and presence (Exodus 13:21-22).

ii. **All passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses**: All Israel came through the Red Sea and saw God's incredible power in holding up the walls of the sea so they could cross over on dry ground. Then they saw God send the water

back to drown the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:21-31). This was not only an amazing demonstration of God's love and power, but also a picture of baptism – by "passing through water," all of Israel was identified with Moses, even as by "passing through water," a Christian is identified with Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4).

iii. **All ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink**: All of Israel was sustained by God's miraculous provision of food and drink during their time in the wilderness (Exodus 16:35 and 17:6). This was a remarkable display of God's love and power for Israel, and a pre-figuring of the spiritual food and drink we receive at the Lord's table (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

iv. Israel even had ancient versions of the two Christian sacraments we receive to this day: baptism and communion. The word *sacrament* was used for the oath of allegiance that the soldiers of the Roman legion took to their emperor. The early Christians considered communion and baptism to be an "oath of allegiance" unto Jesus Christ.

v. **For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ**: Israel even had the presence of Jesus Christ with them in the wilderness! Here, in identifying the **Rock that followed them**, Paul builds on a rabbinical tradition that said Israel was supplied with water by the same rock all through the wilderness, a rock that **followed them**. Some Bible scholars today debate as to if the **rock** followed Israel, or if the **water** followed Israel (as in a stream). The point is the same: Jesus Christ was present with Israel in the wilderness, providing for their needs miraculously. What blessing, what privilege!

d. **But with most of them God was not well pleased**: Despite all these blessings and spiritual privileges, the Israelites in the wilderness did not please God. In light of all those blessings, gratitude should have made them *more* pleasing to God, but they were not.

i. **Most of them**: This is a hard-hitting understatement. Only two men from the adult generation that left Egypt came into the Promised Land (Joshua and Caleb). **Most** indeed!

e. **For their bodies were scattered in the wilderness**: The displeasure of God with the Israelites was evident because they never entered into the Promised Land, but died in the wilderness instead. For all their blessings and spiritual experiences, they never entered into what God really had for them.

f. **With most of them God was not well pleased**: Paul's point hits hard: the Corinthian Christians were probably taking all sorts of liberties (like feasting in pagan temples, stumbling their brothers), thinking that they were "safe" because of past blessings and spiritual experiences (especially baptism and communion). So Paul warns them to beware, because just as Israel was blessed and had spiritual experiences, they still perished – and so some of the Corinthian Christians might also!

i. "It seems as if the Corinthians had supposed that their being made partakers of the ordinances of the Gospel, such as *baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*, would secure their salvation, notwithstanding, they might be found partaking of idolatrous feasts; as long, at least, as they considered an *idol to be nothing in the*

world." (Clarke)

2. (6-10) Avoiding Israel's bad example.

Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

a. **Now these things became our examples**: We can, and should, learn from Israel's failure in the wilderness. How did Israel fail?

b. **That we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted**: They failed in that they could not say "no" to their desires, and so we must not **lust after evil things as they also lusted**. The Corinthian Christians who insisted on eating meat sacrificed to idols, even though they led other Christians into sin, just couldn't say "no." They said, "the meat is so good" or "it is such a bargain" but they could not say "no" out of love for God and love for a brother.

c. **And do not become idolaters as were some of them**: Israel failed to keep their focus on God, and they started giving themselves to idolatry (as in Exodus 32:1-6 and Numbers 25:1-3). Some of the Corinthian Christians not only got too close in their association with idols; they also made an idol out of their own "knowledge" and their own "rights."

d. **Nor let us commit sexual immorality as some of them did**: Israel, in their idolatry, surrendered to the temptation of sexual immorality. **Rose up to play** (quoted from Exodus 32:6) is a tasteful way to refer to gross immorality among the people of Israel. We know the Corinthian Christians were having trouble with sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18-20), and the context here suggests it is connected with their selfish desire to please themselves, expressed in insisting on the "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

i. "The verb translated *play* suggests sex-play in Hebrew… and therefore we are probably to understand drunken orgies." (Cole, in his commentary on Exodus)

ii. **And in one day twenty-three thousand fell**: This number presents some difficulty. The quotation from Exodus 32:6 sets the context there, and in Exodus 32:28 tells us *about three thousand men of the people fell that day*. Perhaps there were more that died which the Scriptures do not record, or there were 20,000 *women* who died in the aftermath of the golden-calf incident, or some think Paul has jumped ahead to another time when Israel's sexual immorality during the Exodus brought God's judgment upon them (Numbers 25:9). In the Numbers passage, we are told that 24,000 died from the judgment of God, but perhaps it was 23,000 who died **in one day**.

iii. "What a wonderful book is the Bible, written at intervals during a period of fifteen hundred years, when such apparitions of inaccuracy as this must be seized upon to impeach its infallibility!" (Hodge)

e. **Nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed**

by serpents; nor complain: Numbers 21:4-9 describes the incident where, in response to the complaining of the people, God sent *fiery serpents among the people*. Again, their complaining hearts show them to be self-focused and more concerned with their own desires than God's glory – the same issues causing trouble with the Corinthian Christians, who will not yield their right to eat meat sacrificed to idols for the sake of another brother.

f. **And were destroyed by the destroyer**: Because of the warning in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, it seems the Corinthian Christians believed they were "safe" from the danger of being **destroyed** (as the Israelites were **destroyed**) because of past spiritual experiences or accomplishments. But Paul's warning stands: "If it happened to Israel, it can happen to you. Be on guard."

i. The Corinthian Christians seem to have regarded this issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols and thereby stumbling their brother as a "small" issue. Paul wants them and us to know that it reflects a selfish, self-focused heart, which is the kind of heart God destroyed among the Israelites in the wilderness. It may have been a relatively small symptom, but it was a symptom of a great and dangerous disease.

3. (11-13) Summary of the lesson from Israel's history: standing strong against temptation.

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

a. **All these things happened to them as examples**: Since we are those **upon whom the ends of the ages have come**, we can and should take warning from the bad example of Israel. We have a greater responsibility, because we can learn from Israel's mistakes.

b. **Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall**: For the Corinthian Christians to resist the temptation to be selfish and self-focused, they must first understand they are vulnerable. The one who **thinks he stands** will not stay on guard against temptation, so he may easily **fall**.

i. Temptation works like rocks in a harbor; when the tide is low, everybody sees the danger and avoids it. But Satan's strategy in temptation is to raise the tide, and to cover over the dangers of temptation. Then he likes to crash you upon the covered rocks.

ii. "The highest saint under heaven can stand no longer than he depends upon God and continues in the obedience of faith. He that ceases to do so will fall into sin, and get a darkened understanding and a hardened heart." (Clarke)

c. **No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man**: We often want to excuse our particular tempting circumstances as "very unique" and a "special exception," but God reminds us that our temptation is not unique. Many other men and women of God have faced the same or similar temptation, and have

found the strength in God to overcome the temptation.
i. Others before you have found strength in the Lord to overcome your same temptation – and worse. So, you can be victorious – in the strength of Jesus, not in your own strength. We fight temptation with Jesus' power, like the girl who explained what she did when Satan came with temptation at the door of her heart: "I send Jesus to answer the door. When Satan sees Jesus, he says, 'OOPS, sorry, I must have the wrong house.'"
d. **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**: God has promised to supervise all temptation that comes at us through the world, the flesh or the devil. He promises to limit it according to our capability to endure it – according to our capability as we rely on Him, not our capability as we rely only on ourselves.
i. Satan would destroy us in a minute if God would let him, even as he wanted to destroy Job (Job 1:6-12) and Peter (Luke 22:31), but God will not let him. Like a mom who keeps her child from the candy aisle in a store, knowing the child couldn't handle that temptation, God keeps us from things we can't handle. But what we can and can't handle changes over the years.
e. **With the temptation will also make the way of escape**: God has promised to not only *limit* our temptation, but also to provide a **way of escape** in tempting times. He will never force us to use **the way of escape**, but he will **make the way of escape** available. It's up to us to take God's **way of escape**.
i. The **way of escape** isn't the same as mere "relief" from the pressure of temptation, which some people find by *giving in to the temptation*! There is often a wrong way to relieve a temptation, and we will often face *the same temptations over and over again* until we show Satan and our flesh we are **able to bear it**.
ii. Barclay says the word for **a way of escape** is really *a mountain pass*, with the idea of an army being surrounded by the enemy, and then suddenly seeing an escape route to safety. Like a mountain pass, the **way of escape** isn't necessarily an easy way.
f. **Make the way of escape**: The **way of escape** does not lead us to a place where we escape all temptation (that is heaven alone). **The way of escape** leads us to the place where we **may be able to *bear* it**.
i. We are reminded that to be tempted is not sin, but to entertain temptation or surrender to temptation is sin. When we **bear** temptation, Satan often condemns us for being tempted, but that is condemnation from Satan the Christian does not need to accept.
ii. At a market, a little boy standing by some candy looked like he was going to put some in his pocket and walk out the door. A clerk watched the boy for a long time, and finally spoke to him. "Looks like you're trying to take some candy," the clerk said. The boy replied, "You're wrong, mister. I'm trying *not* to." For the time being, he was **able to bear it**.
B. Back to the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols: what about eating in the restaurant of a pagan temple?

1. (14) The principle stated: flee from idolatry.

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

a. **Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry**: In the original language, there is an article before idolatry, literally saying ***the* idolatry**. Paul is specifically referring to the idolatry at the pagan temples.

b. **Flee from idolatry**: Though the Corinthian Christians may have the liberty to buy meat at the pagan temple butcher shop and prepare it in their own homes, they should **flee from idolatry** in regards to the restaurant of the pagan temple. Using the example of Israel, and their lapse into idolatry, Paul tells the Corinthian Christians not to participate in the dinners served at the pagan temple.

2. (15-22) The reason why: what goes on at the pagan temple is not as innocent as it may seem.

I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

a. **I speak as to wise men**: Since the Corinthian Christians tended to pride themselves on their "wisdom," Paul challenges them – if they are truly wise – to carefully consider what he says here.

b. **The cup of blessing… Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?** Paul's point may seem obscure to us, but it was plain to someone in that ancient culture. Just as the Christian practice of communion speaks of unity and fellowship with Jesus, so these pagan banquets, given in the honor of idols, spoke of unity with demons who took advantage of misdirected worship. To eat at a pagan temple banquet was to have fellowship at **the altar** of idols.

i. The word **partakers** is the same word (*koinonia*) for **communion** in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and **fellowship** in 1 Corinthians 10:20.

ii. In the thinking of that part of the ancient world, to eat at the same table with someone indicated friendship and fellowship with that person. Since you ate of **one bread**, that made you **one body**, because you both shared of the same food at the same table. So to eat at the table of a pagan temple restaurant was not as innocent as it seemed.

iii. The **cup of blessing** was the last cup presented in the Passover ceremony; this was the cup that Jesus blessed at the Last Supper, and the one interpreted as "the new covenant in my blood." When early Christians took communion, they were aware of its connection to Passover and with the Last Supper of Jesus with His disciples.

c. **What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?... they sacrifice to demons**: Paul has already acknowledged *an idol is nothing in the world* (1 Corinthians 8:4). Does he now say that idols are actually demons? No. But he does say demonic spirits take advantage of idol worship to deceive and enslave people. Without knowing it, idol worshippers are glorifying demons in their sacrifice.

d. **You cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons**: When Paul speaks of **the Lord's table**, he uses the term to contrast with "tables" used for pagan idol meals. An ancient invitation to such a meal reads "Chairemon invites you to a meal at the table of the lord Serapis in the temple of Serapis, tomorrow the fifteenth from nine o'clock onwards." If it *means* something to eat at **the Lord's table**, then it *means* something to eat at the **table of demons**.

i. Roman Catholics have used this passage to support the idea of the Mass as a sacrifice for sins. But it is reading far too much in the text to say that the Christian meal (communion) must be a sacrifice (as it is claimed to be in the Mass) because it is compared to the meal connected with pagan sacrifices and Jewish sacrifices. The emphasis and the similarity regard the *meal*, not the *sacrifice*.

e. There may be two Corinthian ideas Paul wants to answer:

i. The Corinthian Christians thought, "Since an idol is not real, it doesn't matter what we eat, and it doesn't matter where we eat it." Paul answers by agreeing that an idol is in itself nothing (1 Corinthians 8:4), but now explains that demons take advantage of man's ignorant and self-serving worship.

ii. The Corinthian Christians thought, "As long as we participate in the Lord's Table, we are safe in Him." Paul answers that they disgrace the Lord's table when they fellowship with idols.

f. **Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy**: The unwitting fellowship of some of the Corinthian Christians with demons, by participating in the dinners at the pagan temples, will **provoke the Lord to jealousy**. He has a right over all our worship, and has a right to be offended if we give our fellowship to demons.

i. It doesn't matter that the Corinthian Christians didn't *intend* to worship demons at these heathen feasts in pagan temples. If a man puts his hand into the fire, it doesn't matter if he *intends* to burn himself or not, he is burned just the same.

ii. If a man dates a woman, and they get serious about their relationship, what will happen if he takes up the same kind of relationship with another woman? What will the first woman think? The man cannot simply say, "Well, I still give attention to you!"

g. **Are we stronger than He?** The Corinthian Christians claimed the right to eat at pagan temples because they were such strong Christians, but are they stronger than God is?

C. Back to the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols: what about eating the same meat somewhere else?

1. (23-24) A principle to build on: don't just avoid what is harmful, but pursue what is good.

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful

for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's *well*-being.

a. **All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful**: The Corinthian Christians focused on their own "rights" and "knowledge" and only asked one question: "*What's the harm to me?*" Instead of only asking that question, they needed to also ask, "*What good can this be for me?*"

i. Just because something is *permitted* does not mean it is *beneficial*. The Corinthians did not seek the **helpful** things, or the things that would **edify**. Essentially, instead of wanting to go forward with Jesus as much as they could, they wanted to know how much they could get away with and still be Christians. That's the wrong approach!

b. **Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being**: As the Corinthian Christians asked the question "*What's the harm to me*," they did not consider how their actions harmed others.

i. Just because something is fine for *me* does not mean I should do it. My own "rights" or what I know to be permitted for myself are not the standards by which I judge my behavior. I must consider what is the loving thing to do towards my brothers and sisters in Jesus.

2. (25-30) Practical guidelines.

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for "the earth *is* the Lord's, and all its fullness." If any of those who do not believe invites you *to dinner*, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth *is* the Lord's, and all its fullness." "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another *man's* conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks?

a. **Eat whatever is sold in the meat market**: How can Paul say this in light of what he said in 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 (*the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons... I do not want you to have fellowship with demons... you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons*)? Simply because the *meat itself* isn't "infected by demons," and can thus be eaten. Paul's warnings in 1 Corinthians 10:15-22 have to do with the *atmosphere of fellowship with demons* at the pagan temple, which is to be avoided, not the food itself.

i. The sacrifices lost their religious character when sold in the meat market, so it was permitted to eat meat that may have been sacrificed to an idol at a private table.

b. **Asking no questions**: At the butcher shop, some of the meat was sacrificed to idols, and some of it was not. Paul says, "If you aren't going to partake of the atmosphere of the pagan temple, the meat itself doesn't matter. Don't even ask, and it won't even bother you."

i. This is directed towards those Corinthian Christians who had *consciousness of the idol... and their conscience, being weak, is defiled* (1 Corinthians 8:7). Paul

says, "Don't even ask!"
ii. What if one of the brothers with a weak conscience objects saying, "Wait a minute! That meat was sacrificed to an idol"? Paul responds by quoting, *The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness* (Psalm 24:1). The cow belonged to the Lord when it was on the hoof, and it belongs to the Lord now that it is on the barbecue!
The *food* wasn't the issue, the *idol worshipping atmosphere* was the issue.
iii. This quotation from Psalm 24:1 was used as a Jewish blessing at mealtimes. Paul says it applies to this food, also.
c. **If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner... eat what is set before you**: If an unbeliever invites you to dinner, don't get into a debate about the meat with them. Don't ask, and it won't bother you.
i. Notice that Paul *does not* prohibit socializing with non-Christians, he only prohibits the meal of fellowship at the pagan temples.
d. **But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it**: Here, Paul has in mind the setting where a Christian is *warned* about the food by his unbelieving host, or a Christian host with a sensitive conscience. In that case, it is clear the person *thinks* it is wrong for Christians to partake of meat sacrificed to idols, so don't eat it – for the sake of conscience, **not your own, but that of the other**.
e. **But if I partake with thanks** – that is, if I can eat with a clear conscience, and offending no one else's conscience – **why am I evil spoken of**? Since the food itself is not the problem, no one should judge another Christian who can eat meat sacrificed to idols, as long as they don't violate their own conscience or someone else's.
i. It may seem that Paul is being inconsistent, but he is being very consistent according to one principle: liberty within the limits of love.

3. (31-33) Concluding principle: Do all to the glory of God.

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.
a. **Do all to the glory of God**: The purpose of our lives isn't to see how much we can get away with and still be Christians; rather, it is to glorify God. If the Corinthian Christian would have kept this principle in mind from the beginning in this issue, how much easier it would have made everything!
b. **Give no offense**: An **offense** is an occasion to stumble, leading someone else into sin. Paul says none of our behavior should encourage another to sin.
i. Paul is not talking about offending the legalism of others, something he was not shy about doing (Galatians 5:11-12).
c. Paul's desire regarding men was **that they may be saved**. More often than we think, low conduct in Christian living is connected to little regard for the lost. Paul's concern was **not seeking** [his] **own profit**, but that all **may be saved**.

1 CORINTHIANS 11 – CONCERNING WOMEN, AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 – Men and Women in the Church
1 Corinthians 11:17-34 – How to Take Communion

A. Instruction concerning women in the worship service.
1. (1) A call to follow the example of Paul.
Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.
a. **Imitate me**: Paul knew he followed Jesus, so he did not hesitate to tell the Corinthian Christians to **imitate** his walk with the Lord. He knew the Corinthian Christians needed examples, and he was willing to be such an example.
i. Paul simply did what he told his young associate Timothy to do: *Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity* (1 Timothy 4:12).
ii. How few today are willing to say what Paul said! Instead, because of compromise and ungodliness, we are quick to say, "Don't look at me, look at Jesus." While it is true we must all ultimately look to Jesus, every one of us should be an example of those who look to Jesus.
iii. In the specific context, it is a little difficult to know if Paul's words here relate to the context before or after. Does Paul refer back to 1 Corinthians 10, and therefore mean, "Follow my example as I seek to bless others instead of pleasing myself," or does Paul refer to what is to follow in 1 Corinthians 11, and therefore mean, "Follow my example as I respect God's order and authority in the church"? Though he most likely connects it with what went before in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul was a good example in both cases.
b. **Just as I also imitate Christ**: Paul knew he was an example, and a good example at that. He also knew that it was not "Paul" who was a worthy example, but "Paul the follower of Jesus" who was the example.
i. This also sets a limit and a direction on the way we imitate others. **Just as I also imitate Christ** has the idea of "follow me as much as you see me following Jesus."
2. (2-3) The principle of headship.
Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.
a. **I praise you brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions**: Paul again speaks sarcastically to the Corinthian Christians. In fact, they did not **remember** Paul **in all things**; they disregarded him as they saw fit. Additionally, they did not **keep the traditions** as they should have.
i. **Keep the traditions** is a scary phrase to many Christians. It brings forth the idea that Christians are to be bound by ancient, outdated traditions in their conduct

and worship. But the **traditions** Paul **delivered** to the Corinthian Christians were simply the teachings and practices of the apostles, received from Jesus. Paul was not talking about ceremonies and rituals, but about basic teaching and doctrine.

b. **The head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is man, and the head of Christ is God**: With these words, Paul sets a foundation for his teaching in the rest of the chapter. Simply put, Paul makes it clear that God has established principles of order, authority, and accountability.

i. **Head** is an important word in this chapter. Some consider **head** to mean nothing more than *source*, in the sense that the *head* of a river is its *source*. Though this word can mean this, Paul is not simply saying, "Man came from Jesus, woman came from man, and Jesus came from God." Though that simple understanding is true, it goes much deeper, because in Biblical thinking a *source* has inherent authority. If something comes from me, there is some appropriate authority I have over it.

ii. In its full sense, **head** has the idea of *headship* and *authority*. It means to have the appropriate responsibility to lead, and the matching accountability. It is right and appropriate to submit to someone who is our **head**.

iii. With this understanding, we see Paul describes three "headship" relationships: Jesus is **head of every man**; man is the **head of woman**, and **God** (the Father) is **head of Christ**. Because Paul connects the three relationships, the principles of headship are the same among them.

c. **The head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is man, and the head of Christ is God**: Therefore, women in the Church have two options in their attitude towards their head: They imitate the kind of attitude men have towards Christ, showing a rebelliousness that must be won over; or women can imitate the kind of attitude Christ displayed towards God the Father, loving submission to Him as an equal.

i. The idea of headship and authority is important to God. In His great plan for the ages, one great thing God looks for from man is *voluntary submission*. This is what Jesus showed in His life over and over again, and this is exactly what God looks for from *both* men and women, though it will be expressed in different ways.

ii. It is essential to understand that *being under authority does not equal inferiority*. Jesus was totally under the authority of God the Father (John 5:19 and 8:28), yet He is equally God (John 1:1, 8:58, and 10:30). When God calls women in the church to recognize the headship of men, it is not because women are unequal or inferior, but because there is a God-ordained order of authority to be respected.

3. (4-6) The application of the principle of headship among the Corinthian Christians.

Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.

a. **Dishonors his head... dishonors her head**: Because of this order of authority, it is inappropriate for men to pray under a head covering, and inappropriate for women to pray without a head covering.
b. **His head covered... her head uncovered**: The idea of a *head covering* was important in this (and many other) ancient cultures. To wear the head covering (or *veil* in some translations), was a public symbol of being under the authority and protection of another.
i. "It was a *custom*, both among the Greeks and Romans, and among the Jews an express *law*, that no woman should be seen abroad without a *veil*. This was, and is, a common custom through all the east, and none but public prostitutes go without veils." (Clarke)
ii. In some cultures today, wearing a hat or some other kind of head covering is a picture of humility and modesty. In the same way, the head covering had an important cultural meaning among the ancient Corinthians.
iii. "The use of the word 'veil,'... is an unfortunate one since it tends to call to mind the full veil of contemporary Moslem cultures, which covers everything but the eyes. This is unknown in antiquity, at least from the evidence of paintings and sculpture." (Fee)
c. **Praying or prophesying, having his head covered**: For a man to do this said by his actions, "I am not in authority here. I am under the authority of others." Because God has established that *the head of woman is man* (1 Corinthians 11:3), it dishonors Jesus (**his head**) for a man to say this by wearing of a head covering.
d. **Who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered**: For a woman to do this said by her actions "I am not under authority here." And because God has established that *the head of woman is man* (1 Corinthians 11:3), it dishonors the men (**her head**) for a woman to say this by refusing to wear a head covering.
i. Under these words of Paul, women are free to pray or prophesy, but only when as they demonstrate that they are under the authority of the male leadership of the church.
e. **That is one and the same as if her head was shaved**: If a woman refuses to demonstrate being under authority, she may as well be shaved of her hair (**let her also be shorn**). In some ancient cultures, the shaving of a woman's head was the punishment given to an adulteress.
i. Having a woman's head shorn or shaved meant different things in different cultures. In Jewish law, it was the mark of adultery (Numbers 5:11-31). In the Greek world, it could be the mark of a prostitute or lesbian.
f. **If it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered**: Among the Corinthian Christians, there were probably certain "spiritual" women who declared that since Jesus, they did not need to demonstrate with a hairstyle or head covering that they were under anyone's authority. In essence, Paul says to these women, "If you are going to forsake your head covering, go all the way and shave your head, and identify yourself with the women of the world, in all their shame."
4. (7-10) Why is it important to respect the principle of headship in the

church?
For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on *her* head, because of the angels.
a. **For a man indeed ought not to cover his head**: The reason first stated is found in 1 Corinthians 11:3 – *the head of woman is man*. God has established an order of authority, the principle of male headship, both in the church (1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2) and the home (Ephesians 5:23).
b. **He is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man**. A second reason is found in the order of creation: God created Adam first, and gave Him responsibility over Eve.
i. Since one reason for male headship is the order and manner in which God created man and woman – something which was present before the fall – this passage makes it clear that before and after the fall, God has ordained there be a difference in the roles between genders, even in the church. The fall did not cause the difference in gender roles (in the church and in the home), and the difference in roles is not erased by our new life in Jesus.
ii. Trapp on **woman is the glory of the man**: "Either because he may glory in her, if she be good; or because she is to honour him, and give glory to him." Clarke also observes: "As the man is, among the creatures, the representative of the glory and perfections of God, so that the fear of him and dread of him are in every beast of the field… so the woman is, in the house and family, the representative of the power and authority of the man." Poole adds: "*But the woman is the glory of the man*, created for the honour of the man, and for his help and assistance, and originally made out of man, so as man may glory of her, as Adam did of Eve, Gen. Ii. 23, *This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.*"
iii. **Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man**: Simply put, Adam was not created for Eve, but Eve was created for Adam – and this principle applies to every "Adam" and every "Eve" through history. Genesis 2:18 declares God's intention in creating Eve: *I will make him a helper comparable to him*. Eve was created to be a helper to Adam, meaning that Adam was "head" over Eve, and she was called to share and help *his* vision and agenda. Genesis 2:22 says, *He brought her to the man*. Adam was not brought to Eve, but Eve was brought to Adam – her head. It is an idea offensive to the spirit of our age, but the Bible in this passage clearly teaches that (in the church and in the home) man was not made for the benefit of woman, but woman for the benefit of man. "*For the man*, signifies to serve and help the man." (Poole)
c. **Because of the angels**: A third reason God has established male headship in the church is the presence of **angels** in corporate worship.
i. Angels are present at any assembly of Christians for worship and they note any departure from reverent order. Apparently, angels are offended by any violation of propriety.

ii. Passages such as this remind us that our struggle is bigger than ourselves. God has eternal things to teach the universe through us (Ephesians 3:10-11, 1 Corinthians 4:9, and 1 Peter 1:12).
iii. John Stott, commenting on Ephesians 3, explains the broader idea: "It is as if a great drama is being enacted. History is the theatre, the world is the stage, and the church members in every land are the actors. God himself has written the play, and he directs and produces it. Act by act, scene by scene, the story continues to unfold. But who are the audience? They are the cosmic intelligences, *the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*."
iv. "And so it teaches us, that the good angels, who are ministering spirits for the good of God's elect, at all times have a special ministration, or at least are more particularly present, in the assemblies of people for religious worship, observing the persons, carriage, and demeanour; the sense of which ought to awe all persons attending those services, from any incident and unworthy behaviour." (Poole)
d. Significantly, none of these three reasons are culture-dependent. The order and manner of creation and the presence of angels do not depend on culture. We cannot say, "Paul said this just because of the thinking of the Corinthian culture or the place of women in that culture." The principles are eternal, but the *out-working* of the principles may differ according to culture.
e. In this, we see God has established a clear chain of authority in both the home and in the church, and in those spheres, God has ordained that men are the "head," that is, that they have the place of authority and responsibility.
i. Our culture, having rejected the idea in a difference in *role* between men and women, now rejects the idea of *any difference* between men and women. The driving trends in our culture point towards men who are more like women, and women who are more like men – and styles, clothes, perfumes, and all the rest are pushing this thought.
ii. The Bible is just as specific that there is no *general* submission of women unto men commanded in society, only in the spheres of the home and in the church. God has not commanded in His word that men have exclusive authority in politics, business, education, and so on.
iii. It also does not mean that every woman in the church is under the authority of every man – ridiculous! Instead it means that those who lead the church – pastors and ruling elders – must be men, and women must respect their authority, not because of their gender, but because of their office.
iv. The failure of men to lead in the home and in the church, and to lead in the way Jesus would lead, has been a chief cause of the rejection of male authority, and is inexcusable.
v. Some feel this recognition and submission to authority is an unbearable burden; that it means, "I have to say that I'm inferior, I'm nothing, and I have to recognize this other person as superior." Not at all! Inferiority or superiority has nothing to do with it. Remember the relationship between God the Father and God the Son – they are completely equal in their being, but have different roles when it comes to

authority.
vi. Some may say that the church cannot work, or cannot work well, unless we get along with the times and put women into positions of spiritual and doctrinal authority in the church. From the standpoint of what works in our culture, they may be right. But how can such a church say they are led by the word of God?
f. The issues of headship and submission should be seen in their broader context, not just as a struggle between men and women, but as a struggle with the issue of authority in general. Since the 1960's, there has been a massive change in the way we see and accept authority.
i. Citizens do not have the same respect for government's authority; students do not have the same respect for the teacher's authority; women do not have the same respect for men's authority; children do not have the same respect for parent's authority; employees do not have the same respect for their employer's authority; people do not have the same respect for the police's authority; and Christians no longer have the same respect for church authority.
ii. It's important to ask: have the changes been good? Do we feel safer? Are we more confident in our culture? Have television and other entertainment gotten better or worse? In fact, our society is presently in, and rushing towards, complete anarchy – the state where no authority is accepted, and the only thing that matters is what I want to do.
iii. It is fair to describe our present moral state as one of anarchy. There is no moral authority in our culture. When it comes to morality, the only thing that matters is what one wants to do. And in a civil sense, many neighborhoods in our nation are given over to anarchy. Do you think that government's authority is accepted in gang-infested portions of our inner city? The only thing that matters is what one wants to do.
iv. We must see the broader attack on authority as a direct Satanic strategy to destroy our society and millions of individual lives. The devil is accomplishing this with two main attacks: first, the *corruption* of authority; second, the *rejection* of authority.
v. These ideas of authority and submission to authority are so important to God that they are part of His very being. The First Person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Father*; the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Son*. Inherent in those titles is a relationship of authority and submission to authority. The Father exercises authority over the Son, and the Son submits to the Father's authority – and this is in the very nature and being of God! Our failure to exercise Biblical authority, and our failure to submit to Biblical authority, isn't just wrong and sad, it sins against the very nature of God. Remember 1 Samuel 15:23: *For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft*.

5. (11-12) Headship in light of the interdependence of men and women.

Nevertheless, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.

a. **Nevertheless**: On top of all Paul has said about male headship in the church, it

would be wrong to consider headship as the *only* dynamic at work between men and women in the church. They must also remember **neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man**. Men and women need each other, so there is no place for a "lording over" of the men over the women.

i. "Even after he has stressed the subordination of women, Paul goes on to stress even more directly the essential partnership of man and woman. Neither can live without the other. If there is subordination, it is in order that the partnership may be more fruitful and lovely for both." (Barclay)

b. **For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman**: Though Paul has recognized the order of creation, and related it to the principle of male headship in the church, he is also careful to remember **even so man also comes through woman**. There is a critical interdependence that must be recognized, within the framework of male headship in the church and in the home.

i. "But on the other side, since the creation of the first man, all men are by the woman, who conceives them in her womb, suckles them at her breasts, is concerned in their education while children, and dandled upon her knees; the man therefore hath no reason to despise and too much to trample upon the woman." (Poole)

ii. Therefore the man who rules in the church or in the home without love, without recognizing the important and vital place God has given women, is not doing God's will.

iii. "A man who can only rule by stamping his foot had better remain single. But a man who knows how to govern his house by the love of the Lord, through sacrificial submission to the Lord, is the man who is going to make a perfect husband. The woman who cannot submit to an authority like that had better remain single." (Redpath)

iv. G. Campbell Morgan recalls the story of the older Christian woman who had never married, explaining "I never met a man who could master me." She had the right idea.

6. (13-16) Appealing to experience, nature, common sense, and apostolic authority.

Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God.

a. **Judge among yourselves**: Paul appeals to something the Corinthian Christians should be able to figure out on their own.

b. **Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?** Here, Paul speaks to those Christians who come from a Jewish environment. In the Jewish community, even *men* covered their heads while praying. It was therefore inconceivable for **a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered**. Their own experience taught them that women should observe the custom of the head

covering when the church meets.
c. **Does not even nature itself teach**: In both Jewish and Greek cultures, short hair was common for men. Therefore it was **a dishonor** for a man to wear long hair, because it was considered feminine.
i. From as long as we have known, women have generally worn their hair longer than men have. In some cultures and at some times, men have worn their hair longer than other times, but no matter how long men have worn their hair women in general have always worn their hair longer.
ii. Based on this verse, many people have thought that it is a sin for a man to wear long hair, or at least hair that is considered long by the culture. But long hair in itself can be no sin; after all, Paul apparently had long hair for a time in Corinth as a part of a vow (Acts 18:18). But, the vow would not have meant anything if long hair was the norm; that's what Paul is getting at.
iii. While it is true that it is wrong for a man to take the appearance of a woman (Deuteronomy 22:5), longer hair on a man is not necessarily an indication of this. It is far better for most preachers to be concerned about the length of their sermons instead of the length of people's hair.
d. **Her hair is given to her for a covering**: Because women wear their hair longer than men do, Paul thinks of this longer hair as "nature's veil." If nature has given women long hair as a covering, that in itself points to the woman's need to be covered (according to the ancient Corinthian custom).
e. **If anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom**: In this appeal to apostolic authority, Paul tells the Corinthian Christians to not be **contentious**, especially because the other **churches of God** have adopted their custom according to God's truth.
B. Instruction concerning observance of the Lord's Supper.
1. (17-19) Introduction to the problem.
Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.
a. **You come together not for the better but for the worse**: Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians the way he might write to many congregations today. When they **come together**, it is **not for the better but for the worse**! It was to their credit that they gathered together (something neglected by too many Christians today, in disobedience to Hebrews 10:25); but sadly, it was **not for the better but for the worse**.
b. **I hear that there are divisions among you**: A large part of the problem with the gatherings of the Corinthian Christians was that there were **divisions among** them, something Paul had heard and could believe, knowing the history and the character of the Corinthian Christians.
i. Paul already spoke to the problem of **divisions among** the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. There, the approach was more theological. Here, the

approach is more practical, dealing with the problem of division as it shows itself in the Corinthian Christians during their gatherings.
c. **There must also be factions**: We usually think of **factions** and **divisions** among Christians as nothing but a problem. But Paul reveals a purpose God has in allowing **factions**: **that those who are approved may be recognized among you**. God allows **factions** so that, over time, those who really belong to God would be made evident.

2. (20-22) The bad conduct of the Corinthian Christians at their common meal.

Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? 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 do not praise *you*.

a. **When you come together in one place**: In this, Paul refers to the early church custom of combining the love-feast (like a shared-dish supper) and the Lord's Supper.
i. Because the risen Jesus so often ate with His disciples, it made sense to the early church that eating together went together with celebrating the Lord's Supper.
b. **Each one takes his own supper ahead of the others, and one is hungry and another is drunk**: Sadly, the Corinthian Christians acted selfishly at their common meals. Their selfish conduct at the common meal disgraced their observance of the Lord's Supper.
i. In the modern church, the Lord's Supper is commonly celebrated in an atmosphere of dignity. But the Corinthian Christians came from a culture where the pagans commonly had wild, riotous banquets given in honor of a pagan god. This is how it might not seem so strange to the Corinthian Christians to even get **drunk** at a church common meal.
c. **One takes his supper ahead of the others... one is hungry**: Why would some be **hungry** at the church common meals? Because among the Corinthian Christians, some were more wealthy than others, and the poorer ones were being neglected (**Or do you... shame those who have nothing?**).
i. In that day, at common meals, it was expected that the "upper class" would receive better and more food than the "lower class." This cultural custom was carried over into the church, and the Christians weren't really sharing with one another. At the *agape* feast, the rich brought more food and the poor brought less food; but in Corinth they were not sharing the food fairly.
ii. Ancient culture, much more than modern American culture, was extremely class conscious. It was respect of these class divisions that grieved Paul so much.
iii. **Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God**: Paul's message is both strong and plain – "If you want to eat or drink selfishly, do it at home!"
d. **Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you**: Using repetition, Paul makes it

clear: **I do not praise you** is repeated three times in this brief section. The apostle is not happy with the Corinthian Christians at this point.

3. (23-26) How to conduct the true Lord's Supper.

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

a. **For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you**: Paul didn't just make this up, he received it from the Lord. It came to him from the Lord either personally or through the other apostles.

i. "Some think that Paul received this from the Lord by immediate revelation... Others think that he received it from St. Luke's writings (for the words are quoted according to his Gospel). Others think he received it from some other of the apostles. Certain it is, that he did receive it from the Lord; how, is uncertain." (Poole)

b. **On the same night in which He was betrayed**: Paul, in remembering the events of the night before Jesus' crucifixion, recalls that Jesus was not only executed by a foreign power, He was **betrayed** by His own.

c. **And when He had given thanks**: In theology, and in church custom, the Lord's Supper is often called the *eucharist*. This word comes from the ancient Greek phrase used here for **given thanks**.

d. **He broke it and said**: In conducting a communion service, Paul puts the emphasis on remembering Jesus, on what He said about the meaning of His own death for us.

i. We remember the Last Supper was actually a Passover meal, when Jesus, together with the disciples, according to Biblical commands and Jewish traditions, celebrated the remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egypt to the Promised Land, beginning in the book of Exodus.

ii. The breaking of bread and the drinking of wine were important parts of the Passover celebration. Jesus took these important pictures and reminders of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and added to them the meanings connected with His own death on the cross for us.

e. **This is My body**: In taking the bread, we are called to remember Jesus' **body broken for you**. The Passover meal featured unleavened bread, made without yeast both because yeast is a picture of sin and corruption in the Bible, and because in bread, yeast needs time to work – and in their haste to leave Egypt, the Israelites had no time to let their bread rise.

i. The unleavened bread used at a Passover meal had the scorch-mark "stripes" and holes from baking that looked like "pierce" marks. In the same way, the body of Jesus was **broken for** us. He was without sin (as the bread had no leaven), and

His body bore stripes and was pierced (as the bread appeared to be).
ii. The Puritan commentator Matthew Poole found it meaningful that Paul used the terms **bread** and **cup**, and not the words *body* and *blood*. "From hence it appears, that the bread and wine is not (as papists say) transubstantiated, or turned into the very substance of the flesh and blood of Christ, when the communicants eat it and drink it. It is still the same bread and cup it was."
f. **This cup is the new covenant in My blood**: In receiving the cup, we are called to remember the blood of Jesus and the **new covenant**. The Passover meal featured several cups of wine, each with a different title. The cup Jesus referred to was known as the *cup of redemption*, and Jesus added to the idea of redemption from slavery in Egypt the idea that His blood confirmed a **new covenant** that changed our relationship with God.
i. What mere man could have the audacity to institute a new covenant between God and man? But here, Jesus founds a *new covenant*, sealed with blood, even as the old covenant was sealed with blood (Exodus 24:8).
ii. What is the **new covenant** all about?
· It is about an inner transformation, that cleanses us from all sin: *For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more* (Jeremiah 31:34).
· It is about God's Word and will *in* us: *I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts* (Jeremiah 31:33).
· It is about a new, close, relationship with God: *I will be their God, and they shall be My people* (Jeremiah 31:33).
iii. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, we can have a new covenant relationship with God. But many Christians live as if there is no inner transformation. They live as if there is no cleansing from sin. They live as if there is no word and will of God in our hearts. They live as if there is no new and close relationship with God.
g. **You proclaim the Lord's death till He comes**: While the Lord's Supper does look back to what Jesus did on the cross, it also looks forward to the coming of Jesus, and the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).
i. In Matthew 26:29, Jesus spoke of His longing expectation for the day when He would take communion with His people in heaven, which is the ultimate Lord's Supper.
h. **You eat this bread and drink this cup**: The precise *nature* of the bread and the cup in communion has been the source of great theological controversy.
i. The Roman Catholic Church holds the idea of *transubstantiation*, teaching that the bread and the wine *actually* become the body and blood of Jesus.
ii. Martin Luther held the idea of *consubstantiation*, teaching the bread remains bread and the wine remains wine, but by faith they are the same as Jesus' actual body. Luther did not believe in the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, but he did not go far from it.
iii. John Calvin taught that Jesus' presence in the bread and wine was real, but only spiritual, not physical. Zwingli taught that the bread and wine are mere symbols that represent the body and blood of Jesus. When the Swiss Reformers

debated the issue with Martin Luther at Marburg, there was a huge contention. Luther insisted on some kind of physical presence because Jesus said *this is My body*. He insisted over and over again, writing it on the velvet of the table, *Hoc est corpus meum* – "this is My body" in Latin. Zwingli replied, "Jesus also said I am the vine," and "I am the door," but we understand what He was saying. Luther replied, "I don't know, but if Christ told me to eat dung I would do it knowing that it was good for me." Luther was so strong on this because he saw it as an issue of believing Christ's words, and because he thought Zwingli was compromising, he said he was of *another spirit* (*andere geist*).

iv. Scripturally, we can understand that the bread and the wine are not *mere* symbols, but they are powerful pictures to partake of and to enter into as we see the Lord's Supper as the new Passover.

i. **You proclaim the Lord's death until He comes**: **Proclaim** is the same word translated "**preach**" in other places. When we take communion, we preach a sermon to God Himself, to the Devil and all his allies, and to the world who watches.

i. "As you break bread and bow your heart before Him, what sort of sermon are you preaching? Often we have broken bread together around the Lord's table, and then we have gone out to do just what those disciples did – we have denied Him." (Redpath)

4. (27-28) How to prepare your conduct in receiving the Lord's Supper.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

a. **Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord**: Paul warns the Corinthian Christians to treat the Lord's Supper with reverence, and to practice it in a spirit of self-examination. However, this is not written with the thought of excluding ourselves from the table, but of preparing us to receive with the right heart.

i. The King James Version of 1 Corinthians 11:27 has caused some misunderstanding in this regard: *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.* The word *unworthily* has made some Christians believe they have to "make themselves worthy" to receive communion, or if they have sinned they were unworthy to come and remember what Jesus did on the cross for them.

ii. This is a serious misunderstanding, because if *anyone* needs to remember the work of Jesus on the cross, it is the one who has sinned! When we are repentant, our sin should drive us *to* our Savior, not away from Him. However, if a Christian is in sin, and stubbornly unrepentant, they are mocking what Jesus did on the cross to cleanse them from their sin.

iii. We can never really make ourselves "worthy" of what Jesus did for us on the cross. He did it because of His great love, not because some of us were so worthy. As we take the bread and cup, we should not stare at the floor or struggle to

achieve some sort of spiritual feeling. We should simply open our heart to Jesus and recognize His presence with us – in fact, *in us*!

b. **Let a man examine himself**: Again, not in a morbid display of self-checking to see if we are worthy of what Jesus did for us; but in an honest appraisal to see if, as we receive communion, we are conducting ourselves in a way honoring to the Lord.

i. The idea is plain: **examine** yourself, but then **let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup**. The idea is not to keep people away from the table of communion, but to prepare them to receive it in the right way.

5. (29-32) The potential results of being guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

a. **Eats and drinks judgment to himself**: Irreverent conduct at the Lord's Supper invites God's corrective discipline; so we should **judge ourselves** so **we would not be judged**. If we will discipline ourselves, the Lord will not need to with His hand of correction.

i. The words "**not discerning the Lord's body**" are used by Roman Catholics to support their doctrine of *transubstantiation*. Their thinking is, "See, the Corinthians did not understand they were actually receiving the real body and the real blood of Jesus, and that is why they were guilty." But this is a very narrow foundation that a huge building has been built upon. It is just as easy – and just as valid – to see **the Lord's body** as a reference to the church family, and it was the lack of respect and love for the church family that caused the problems of selfishness among the Corinthian Christians.

b. **For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep**: The judgment is significant. Evidently, among the Corinthian Christians, some experienced illness and some had even died as a result of God's corrective discipline.

i. In writing **eats and drinks judgment**, Paul does not refer to *eternal* judgment, but to *corrective* judgment. There is no article "the" before "judgment," so it is not *the* judgment. This chastening is not a judge condemning a criminal; it is a father correcting disobedient children.

ii. As mentioned in 1 John 5:16, there is *sin leading to death*, and Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5 seem to be examples of this. Apparently, a believer *can* sin to the point where God believes it is just best to bring them home, probably because they have in some way compromised their testimony so significantly that they should just come on home to God.

iii. However, it is certainly presumptuous to think this about every case of an untimely death of a believer, or to use it as an enticement to suicide for the guilt-ridden Christian. Our lives are in God's hands, and if *He* sees fit to bring one of His

children home, that is fine.
c. **We are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world**: This makes it clear Paul knew none of the Corinthian Christians, even those who died as a result of God's corrective judgment, had lost their salvation. They were chastened so that they would **not be condemned with the world.**
6. (33-34) Summary: how to act at the church common meal.
Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.
a. **Wait for one another**: It isn't just good manners, it shows love towards others. If you **wait for one another**, then everyone gets enough to eat, instead of some being gorged and others going home hungry.
b. **If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home**: Don't "pig out" at the church common meal, because it might mean someone else doesn't get enough to eat. If you are that hungry, **eat at home**!
c. **Lest you come together for judgment**: Because of this simple selfishness, the Corinthian Christians brought the judgment of God upon themselves, just for the sake of food! Paul wants to put it all in perspective and remind them that it isn't worth it at all.
d. **And the rest I will set in order when I come**: Paul knows he isn't dealing with the whole issue here. There is more to say, but Paul will leave it for another time. Wouldn't we love to know all that is behind these words, what the **rest** of it was about?

1 CORINTHIANS 12 – DIVERSITY AND UNITY IN SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 – The Holy Spirit and the Gifts He Gives
1 Corinthians 12:12-31 – Diversity and Unity in the Gifts of the Spirit

A. The Holy Spirit is the source of the gifts.

1. (1-3) Introduction to the topic of spiritual gifts.

Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.
a. **Now concerning spiritual gifts**: The word "**gifts**" is added by the translators. Literally, Paul now addresses *spirituals*, after discussing all the areas of Corinthian carnality. But adding **gifts** is justified by the context.
i. Clarke defines **spiritual gifts** as "*Gracious endowments*, leading to *miraculous* results… these all came by the extraordinary influences of the Holy

Spirit."
b. **I do not want you to be ignorant**: The Corinthian Christians are given a reminder that is good for us, also. Perhaps we are **ignorant** of things regarding **spiritual gifts**, and we should not be.
i. Paul, in his letters, names three things he does not want Christians to be ignorant of:
· Don't be ignorant of God's plan for Israel (Romans 11:25).
· Don't be ignorant of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1).
· Don't be ignorant about the Second Coming of Jesus and the eternal state (1 Thessalonians 4:13).
Sadly, many Christians are **ignorant** on these exact points.
c. **You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols**: Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to remember that their past of pagan idolatry did not prepare them for an accurate understanding of **spiritual gifts**. He did not want them **to be ignorant**, but because they were **Gentiles**, they came to the issue of **spiritual gifts** as **ignorant.**
i. Our past teaching and experiences have perhaps built a poor understanding of the Holy Spirit and His gifts. It is easy for us to take our materialistic or superstitious views into our understanding of spiritual gifts.
d. **Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed**: Here, Paul lays down a broad principle for discerning matters regarding **spiritual gifts** – judge things by how they relate to Jesus Christ. Does a supposed spiritual gift glorify Jesus? Does it promote the true Jesus or a false one?
i. Jesus made it plain, saying that when the Holy Spirit would come, *He will testify of Me* (John 15:26), and *He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you* (John 16:14). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not to promote Himself or any man, but to glorify and represent Jesus. We can, therefore, trust that the true ministry of the Holy Spirit will be according to the nature of Jesus.
2. (4-6) Diversity and unity of the gifts.
There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.
a. **There are diversities of gifts**: Paul will go on to list some nine spiritual gifts in the following verses, and more in other places. There is indeed a diversity of gifts! Yet there is only one Giver, who works through the diverse gifts.
b. **Diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit**: The **gifts** are diverse, the **ministries** are different, and the **activities** are diverse. But it is all the same **Spirit**, the same **Lord**, the same **God** doing the work through the **gifts**, the **ministries**, and the **activities**.
i. **Ministries** probably has in mind the different "gifted offices" in the church, such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers, as Paul also described in Ephesians 4. Paul's point is clear: though there are different offices, it is **the same Lord** granting the offices and directing the service.

ii. The Greek word for **activities** is *energemata*, where we get our words *energy, energetic,* and *energize* from. It is a word of active, miraculous power. **Activities** is the same word as *working* in 1 Corinthians 12:10 (*the working of miracles*). **Differences of activities** means that God displays and pours out His miraculous power in different ways, but it is always the same God doing the work.

c. **Gifts**, **ministries**, **activities**: What are the differences between **gifts**, **ministries**, **activities**, and *the manifestation of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 12:7)? All of these are **gifts**. Some **gifts** are **ministries** – standing offices or positions in the church. Some **gifts** are **activities** – miraculous events or outpourings at a particular time and place (such as the *manifestation of the Spirit* mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:7).

i. "Habits and powers, by which men performed holy offices in the church, or wrought miracles, are called *gifts*. The acts or exercise of these powers are called *administrations* and *operations*. These latter differ one from another, as the former signify standing and continuing acts in the church; *operations*, rather signify miraculous events, such as healing the sick without the application of miraculous means, speaking with diverse tongues, [and so forth]." (Poole)

d. **Gifts**, **ministries**, **activities**: It is easy for us to focus on our own "little area" of **gifts**, **ministries**, or **activities** and believe that those who have other **gifts**, **ministries**, or **activities** are not really walking or working with God. Yet the one God has a glorious diversity in the way He does things. We should never expect it to be all according to our own emphasis and taste.

e. **Spirit, Lord, God**: This passage also declares the Trinity in a typical, subtle New Testament flow. The gifts are the work of the Holy **Spirit**, the **Lord** Jesus, and Father **God**.

3. (7-11) The varieties of the manifestations of the Spirit.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

a. **The manifestation of the Spirit is given**: The Holy Spirit is always present in and among Christians. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, *He may abide with you forever* (John 14:16). However, at some times the Spirit's presence is more *apparent* than at other times. There are times when He may choose to *manifest* Himself, that is, to make Himself apparent.

i. However, we should never think the Holy Spirit is "more" present when He is manifested through the gifts. The Holy Spirit is always *present* with believers, but at times He is more *apparent* through the **manifestation of the Spirit**.

b. **Given to each one for the profit of all**: The purpose of the **manifestation of the** Spirit is to benefit the whole church family, not just a particular individual.

c. **The manifestation of the Spirit**: As Paul begins to mention different **manifestations of the Spirit**, he begins by mentioning **the word of wisdom**. This is the unique ability to speak forth the wisdom of God, especially in an important situation, as shown in Stephen (Acts 7) and Paul (Acts 23).

d. **The word of knowledge**: The unique ability to declare knowledge that could only be revealed supernaturally, as shown in Jesus (Matthew 17:24-27) or Paul (Acts 27:10, 27:23-26). When Charles Spurgeon was saved, it was at the preaching of a man who directed a portion of his sermon right to young Spurgeon, and who supernaturally spoke right to where Spurgeon's heart was. This is another example of **the word of knowledge**.

i. We do well to understand the difference between the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. One may have great knowledge, even supernatural knowledge, yet have no wisdom from God in the application of that knowledge.

ii. As well, we must always use discernment in receiving a word of knowledge, remembering that God is not the only source of supernatural knowledge. Even if a word is true, it does not mean that it is from God and that the one speaking the word is truly representing God.

e. The gift of **faith**: Though faith is an essential part of every Christian's life, the *gift* of **faith** is the unique ability to trust God against all circumstances, as Peter did when he walked out of the boat onto the water (Matthew 14:22-33). Another mighty example of the gift of faith was the Christian leader and philanthropist George Mueller, who in nineteenth century England provided for thousands of orphans completely by prayer, without ever asking for donations.

f. **Gifts of healings**: This is God's healing power, either *given* or *received*, and has been repeatedly documented in the New Testament and since.

i. Adam Clarke on **gifts of healings**: "The power which at particular times the apostles received from the Holy Spirit to cure diseases; a power which was not always resident in them; for Paul could not cure Timothy, nor remove his own thorn in the flesh; because it was given only on extraordinary occasions, though perhaps more *generally* than many others."

g. **Working of miracles**: Literally *dynameis,* or "acts of power." This describes when the Holy Spirit chooses to "override" the laws of nature (as a pilot might use manual controls), working in or through an available person.

i. Gifts of healing and working of miracles often operate in conjunction with the gift of faith, as in Acts 3:1-8. These things are not done on the whim of the individual, as if the power to heal or work miracles was at their permanent disposal. Instead, they operate as an individual is prompted by God and given the faith to perform such a work (another example of this is in Acts 14:8-10).

h. **Prophecy**: The telling-forth of God's message in a particular situation, always in accord with His Word and His current work. Sometimes this has the character of foretelling the future, as in Acts 21:10-11 and Acts 27:21-26.

i. Oftentimes, people who believe the miraculous gifts have been removed from the church, wish to define **prophecy** as "preaching." Though this is common, it is inaccurate. There is a Greek word for preaching, and a Greek word for divinely-

inspired speech. Paul uses the word for divinely-inspired speech, not preaching. Although good, Spirit-anointed preaching will often use the spontaneous gift of **prophecy**, it is inaccurate to define **prophecy** as "good preaching."

i. **Discerning of Spirits**: The ability to tell the difference between true and false doctrine, and between what is of the Holy Spirit and what isn't (Acts 8:18-23 and 16:16-18).

i. Satan appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He deceives with a false, tempting message (Genesis 2:16-3:5). There can be lying spirits in the mouths of prophets (1 Kings 22:21-23 and 2 Chronicles 18:20-22). Satan can speak right after God speaks (Matthew 16:23). Sometimes people who seem to say the right things are really from the devil (Acts 13:6-12 and 16:16-18). It is important to test the word of anyone who claims to speak from God (1 John 4:1-3). Satan can work deceiving miracles (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 and Revelation 13:11-14). The devil will try to infiltrate the church with false teachers (Jude 4 and 2 Peter 2:1-2). How we need the gift of discernment in the church today!

j. **The gift of tongues** is a personal language of prayer given by God, whereby the believer can communicate with God beyond the limits of knowledge and understanding (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). Language is an agreement between parties, where it is agreed that certain sounds represent certain objects or ideas. When using the gift of tongues, we agree with God that as the Holy Spirit prays through us, though we may not understand what we are praying, God does.

i. Tongues have an important place in the devotional life of the believer, but a small place in the corporate life of the church (1 Corinthians 14:18-19), especially in "public" meetings (1 Corinthians 14:23).

ii. When tongues *are* practiced in the corporate life of the church, it is to be carefully controlled, and never without an interpretation given by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:27-28).

iii. The ability to pray in an unknown tongue is not a gift given to every believer (1 Corinthians 12:20).

iv. The ability to pray in a tongue is *not* the evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit; this emphasis has led people to seek the gift of tongues (and to counterfeit it) merely to prove to themselves and others that they really are filled with the Holy Spirit.

v. Many people believe the gift of tongues died with the apostles. Curiously, many of these define the gift of tongues as merely the ability to speak in other languages for the purpose of spreading the gospel in other languages. But that need has not changed one bit since the days of the apostles. Instead, the Bible clearly says that the gift of tongues is meant for an individual's communication with God, not with man (1 Corinthians 14:2). Even on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples spoke in tongues, they were not preaching to the crowd (Peter did that in the Greek language which was common to them all). Rather, they were praising God (*speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God*, Acts 2:11), and the crowd at the day of Pentecost heard the disciples excitedly praise God.

vi. Often, those who speak in tongues today are mocked by those who deny the

gift with the accusation that they are speaking "gibberish." Acts 2 is wrongly used to support this, because Acts 2 tells us that those speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost were speaking intelligible languages understood by others. But it does not tell us that *all* of the 120 or so who spoke in tongues spoke in languages that could be understood. And we should not assume that those who were not immediately understood by the bystanders spoke "gibberish," as tongues are referred to with derision. They may have praised God in a language completely unknown, yet human (what would the language of the Aztecs sound like to Roman ears?), or in a completely unique language given by God and understood by Him and Him alone. After all, communication with God and not man, is the purpose of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:2). The repetition of simple phrases, unintelligible and perhaps nonsensical to human bystanders, does not mean such speech is "gibberish." Praise to God may be simple and repetitive, and part of the whole dynamic of tongues is that it bypasses the understanding of the speaker (1 Corinthians 14:14), being understood by God and God alone.

k. The gift of **the interpretation of tongues**: This gift allows the **gift of tongues** to be of benefit for those other than the speaker, as they are able to hear and agree with the tongue-speaker's words to God.

l. Though in these verses we tend to focus on the list of gifts, Paul does not. Since he does not give a detailed description of each gift, it is probable that the Corinthian Christians were familiar with them all. What Paul emphasized is that each of these is **by** or **through the same Spirit**, repeating the idea five times and concluding with the statement, "**But one and the same Spirit works all these things**."

i. Apparently, the tendency for division among the Corinthian Christians had made them think separately or competitively about the gifts. Perhaps the "tongues speakers" thought themselves superior to the "prophesiers," as if the gifts had come from two different gods! Paul emphasizes to them that **one and the same Spirit works all these things**, so they should reflect that same unity among themselves.

m. **Distributing to each one individually as He wills**: Here is another reason for unity, and a reason against any sense of superiority regarding the gifts. They are distributed not according to the will of man, but as the Spirit of God wills – as **He wills**.

i. As they are given as **He wills**, and sometimes if not often, the will and wisdom of God is different than our will and wisdom (Isaiah 55:8-9), we should never assume the gifts are distributed as we would distribute them.

ii. Often, we assume spiritual gifts are given because a person is especially spiritually mature or closer to God, but this may not be the case at all. We should never assume that *giftedness* is connected to *maturity*. God can and does, for His own glory and purpose, distribute spiritual gifts to those who are not especially spiritually mature or close to Him. This is why spiritual giftedness is never the criteria for positions of leadership among Christians, but Christian maturity and character are (1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9). God can grant anyone

remarkable spiritual gifts in a moment, but character and maturity take time to build.

n. If the Spirit distributes **to each one individually as He wills**, why would He choose to give a particular gift at a particular moment? The larger reasons may not be apparent, but the goal of the Holy Spirit's work is always to glorify Jesus and to build His nature and character in us. The Spirit's goal is never to amaze or confuse, but to build the fruit of the Spirit, and He will *use* or *not use* any gift He thinks right towards that end.

o. **Distributing as He wills**: Though the manifestations of the Spirit are given as the Spirit wills, the believer still must receive them with faith. He distributes and we receive, and the receiving and exercising of the gifts is often very natural.

B. Are some of these gifts of the Holy Spirit no longer given to the Church today?

1. This is an issue that has greatly divided the body of Christ, both theologically, and spiritually. There are some who think those who believe all the gifts are for today (usually called "Charismatics" or "Pentecostals") are deceived by Satan. There are others who think those who believe some of the gifts are no longer given are unspiritual and dead in their walk with God.

a. Often, Calvary Chapel churches are respected for their Biblical balance when it comes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their place in church life. Calvary Chapels have sometimes been rightly seen as "too Pentecostal for the Baptists and too Baptist for the Pentecostals"; we have been called "Pentebaptist" or "Bapticostal."

b. However, balance is meaningless unless it is a *Biblical* balance. We don't want to strike a *balance* between heresy and truth.

2. First, we must understand the issue. Virtually no Christian believes all the gifts have ceased in the church today. All Christians believe the gifts of teaching and administration are given and needed in the church today. It is the gifts that have a miraculous nature which are in dispute.

a. Therefore, many people divide up the gifts into different categories: communicative, administrative, miraculous. Then, they often say the miraculous gifts died out with the apostles or when the New Testament came together. Yet it is important to observe that such divisions and categories *are not Biblical*. Nowhere does any Biblical writer categorize the gifts in such a way, and then say some categories of gifts will remain but others will cease.

b. So, more accurately, the question would be: "Are *all* of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for today? Are some of them no longer being given by God?" Those who teach against the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit definitely believe they have the gift of teaching, and they believe God still gives that gift today.

3. What does the Bible say about the continuation of all the gifts of the Spirit?

a. Jesus made a promise in Mark 16:17-18: *And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover*.

i. This is a simple and straightforward promise, in context, given to those who are involved in spreading the gospel – they will be unstoppable, and God will even use miraculous means to protect them and make them effective.
b. Acts 2:33, 39: *Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear… For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call*. The promise of the Holy Spirit – specifically including miraculous gifts – is a promise made to all generations.
c. 1 Corinthians 14:12: *Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel*. The purpose for spiritual gifts, even miraculous gifts, is the building up of the body of Christ and individual Christians; that need remains today.
d. The natural, consistent testimony of the New Testament is that the miraculous gifts described in the New Testament have not been retracted. No one with a fresh reading of the Scriptures could ever come to such an understanding.
i. There is no indication that miraculous gifts would die out when the apostles died.
ii. There is no distinction made between "sign gifts" or "miraculous gifts" and other gifts in the New Testament; they come always and only as a package.
iii. Little is said about the continuation of all the gifts because it was a given among the apostles. One might just as well ask, "Where is the Scriptural evidence that someone can be saved beyond the time of the apostles?" One would be hard pressed to find one conclusive verse to refute the argument, because it was simply assumed.

4. Why do some Christians believe some gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer given by God today?

a. They have a wrong understanding of history, and they believe that historically, the miraculous gifts actually did cease when the apostles died (or perhaps even before).
b. They have a wrong understanding of 1 Corinthians 13:8, which says that tongues *will cease* (explained in the notes on 1 Corinthians 13).
c. They have a wrong understanding of Hebrews 2:3-4, which says that God bore witness with signs and wonders and various miracles by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The idea is that the only *real* reason miracles and gifts were given was to authenticate revelation, and there is no longer a need for that. As well, it is explained that there were three main areas of revelation (the times of Moses, Elijah and Elisha, and New Testament times), and that for the most part, miracles only happened then because God needed to authenticate revelation.
i. But if miracles only happened around certain times of revelation, then there is a substantial amount of revelation that is unaccounted for by miracles – everything from Judges through Song of Solomon.
ii. If miracles do authenticate revelation, then we are in trouble, because false prophets can and do perform authenticating miracles (Exodus 7:11-12, 7:22, 8:7, Deuteronomy 13:1-3, and 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

iii. The primary purpose of miracles, especially as they are seen in the New Testament, was *not* to authenticate God's messengers, though that is a secondary purpose. The primary purpose of miracles was to humbly meet the needs of people.
iv. In Matthew 12:38-40, Jesus condemned those who sought to authenticate revelation by miraculous signs; He offered them no other sign other than His own resurrection. In John 2:18-19, Jesus provided *one* miraculous sign to the seeking: His resurrection. In John 6:29-36, after the feeding of the 5,000, people followed Jesus just to receive more miraculous bread, and Jesus rebuked them for their refusal to believe in Him and to see what Jesus had already done. And in 1 Corinthians 1:22, when Paul notes that the Jews request a sign, he doesn't mean it in a positive sense!
v. Miracles are an insufficient evidence of authentic revelation. They can always be explained away by the unbelieving heart, and the unbelieving heart will always be asking for more miracles to "prove." *But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him* (John 12:37).
vi. We agree that miracles have a purpose in impressing unbelievers and believers with the power of God, but that is clearly their secondary purpose. If this were the primary purpose of miracles, one could argue that since we have the completed revelation of God's word, we would no longer need miracles to authenticate further revelation.
d. They make a wrong application of the truth that things like speaking in tongues have demonic counterparts, and are not unique to Christianity. This is certainly true and recognized by Scripture; however, the existence of a counterfeit tends to *prove* the existence of the genuine, not deny it.
5. Does the history of Christianity demonstrate that some of the gifts passed away? If so, when and how?
a. Although the issue is finally settled with what the Bible says, the voice of history is also compelling. Those who believe the miraculous gifts ceased claim the testimony of history supports them.
i. For example, John MacArthur writes in his book *The Charismatics*: "By the second century the apostles were gone and things were changed. Alva McClain said, 'When the church appears in the second century, the situation as regards the miraculous is so changed that we seem to be in another world'... The apostolic age was unique and it ended. History says it, Jesus says it, theology says it, and the New Testament itself attests to the fact."
b. But history has another testimony, and if we will just let history speak, it will tell us. Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian all speak to the existence of miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit in their own day.
c. Actually, the idea that the miraculous gifts from God ceased with the apostles didn't arise in the church until the middle of the fourth century (A.D. 350 or so and on). Later, at the end of the fourth century and into the Middle Ages, the gifts were said to have ceased, and they were certainly neglected. But that wasn't God's desire. It was the result of people who convinced themselves that the supernatural

working of the Holy Spirit was too "dangerous" for the institutional church. Other factors were also involved. But if you would have gone up to a Christian in A.D. 250 and told him, "We all know that the miraculous gifts ceased with the apostles," he would probably tell you, "You don't know what you are talking about."

C. The diversity and unity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1. (12-14) The fact of unity: believers all belong to a greater unit, the body of Jesus Christ.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

a. **All the members of that one body, being many, are one body... for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**: The "body-like" unity of Christians is not a goal to achieve; it is a fact to be recognized. Paul clearly says **we *were* all baptized into one body**.

i. Passages like this have led many to regard baptism as sort of the "initiation ceremony into the community of Christians." While this may be *an aspect* of baptism, it is not the main point. The main idea behind Christian baptism is the identification of the believer – his "immersion" in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-5). The idea that baptism is primarily the initiation ceremony into the church has led to, and reinforced, unbiblical ideas such as the baptism of infants (upon the thinking, "who wants to exclude them from the church?").

ii. But here, Paul does not have in mind *water* baptism as much as *Spirit* baptism: **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**. Paul here is writing of the common "immersion" all believers have in the Holy Spirit and in Jesus, a common "immersion" which brings them into **one body**.

b. **One body... many members**: Paul uses the brilliant illustration of the human body to relate the working of the community of Christians. Even as every cell in a human body is linked by a common root (a common DNA code), yet the parts of our body (**members**) look different, are treated differently, work differently, and accomplish different purposes. Even so, there is great diversity in the body of Jesus Christ, both in appearance and function, yet each member has a common root and a common goal.

c. **Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free**: Because of the fact of the "body" dynamic, the dividing lines created by the Corinthian Christians were strictly artificial. Jew, Greek, slave, free, did not matter anymore, because they were all in **one body**.

2. (15-20) Elaboration on the illustration of a body.

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of

them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they *were* all one member, where *would* the body *be*? But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body.

a. **If the foot should say**: If the **foot** felt or declared itself not part of the body because it was **not a hand**, the foot would be both foolish and mistaken. Diversity does not disqualify one from the body.

i. Here, Paul puts the question in the mouth of the one who feels *excluded* from the body. It is as if some of the Corinthian Christians said, "I don't have this certain spiritual gift. I guess I'm not part of the body of Jesus Christ." After all, *hands* and *eyes* seem more important and more "glamorous" than *feet* and *ears*. So Paul wants these Christians who felt excluded to know they are indeed members of the body, and their sense that they are not is just as foolish as the **foot** or the **ear** that feels excluded.

ii. Yet the same principle can be stated towards those who want to *exclude others* from the body. Paul could have just as well said, "The hand cannot say the foot is not of the body because it is not a hand." Paul wants Christians who might exclude others because they don't appreciate their place in the body to recognize the fact of unity.

b. **If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?** Not only is this diversity in the body of Jesus Christ *acceptable*, it is *essential*. The body cannot work properly if all are hands or if all are eyes. The body must have different parts and gifts, or it would not work together effectively as a body.

c. **Just as He pleased**: Why is the foot a foot and the hand a hand? Because it pleased the Designer to make it so. So the hand can take no "pride" in being a hand, and the foot can take no "shame" in being a foot. Each serves the pleasure of the Designer.

i. In the design, we see the wisdom of the Designer: *everybody has something*; but *nobody has everything*.

3. (21-26) Continued elaboration, showing that the less "glamorous" parts of the body are just as important.

And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*.

a. **And the eye cannot say to the hand**: Now Paul writes to those tempted to pride and a sense of superiority because of their gifts or place in the body. They cannot say to such parts, **"I have no need of you."**

b. **Those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary**: Often,

we consider a part of our body unnecessary or of low importance, until it is hurt – then we realize how important it is! The hand or the eye may *seem* to be more important, and may have more "glamour" in its position, but it is not more necessary or important than other parts of the body.

c. **Less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor**: The parts of our bodies normally covered by clothes are often considered **less honorable**, but we give them **greater honor** by clothing them so carefully.

i. Clarke on the **less honorable** parts: "Seem to mean the principle *viscera*, such as *heart, lungs, stomach,* and *intestinal canal*. These, when compared with the *arms* and *limbs*, are comparatively *weak*; and some of them, considered in *themselves*, *uncomely* and less honourable; yet these are more essential to life than any of the others."

ii. Even so, **God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it**: If someone feels they are a "hidden" or "unglamorous" member of the body of Jesus Christ, God knows how to bestow honor upon them.

d. **That there should be no schism in the body**: Seen from God's perspective, with the illustration of the body, there is never any reason for **schism in the body**. The "pride" of the "honorable" member is checked, as is the "shame" of the "less honorable" member.

e. **That the members should have the same care for one another**: Paul's theological point about the nature of the body of Jesus Christ has now come to a very practical application. The Corinthian Christians should **care for one another** because they are all part of the same body.

i. The parts of the body work together. The eyes and ears do not only serve themselves, but the whole body. The hands do not only feed and defend themselves, but the whole body. The heart does not only supply blood to itself, but serves the whole body. Sometimes there is a part of our body that only lives to serve itself. It doesn't contribute anything to the rest of the body, and everything it gets it uses to feed and grow itself. We call this *cancer*.

ii. "I want every member of this church to be a worker. We do not want any drones. If there are any of you who want to eat and drink, and do nothing, there are plenty of places elsewhere, where you can do it; there are empty pews about in abundance; go and fill them, for we do not want you. Every Christian who is not a bee is a wasp. The most quarrelsome persons are the most useless, and they who are the most happy are peaceable, are generally those who are doing most for Christ." (Spurgeon)

f. **The same care for one another**: Paul could have, and some today think he should have, just come out and said "**care for one another**" and ignore the spiritually true foundation for such caring. "Come on, Paul. Don't bother us with theology. Just tell us what to do." But Paul wants more than a *result* from the Corinthian Christians; he also wants them to have *understanding*. He also knows that ultimately, the best results are based on understanding!

g. **And if one member suffers**: The **care for one another** mentioned in the previous verse is now explained. It means to have a heart towards, and sympathy

with, our fellow members, though they be different.

4. (27-31) God distributes gifts and callings according to His pleasure.

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. *Are* all apostles? *Are* all prophets? *Are* all teachers? *Are* all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

a. **You are the body of Christ, and members individually**: Paul sums up his previous point. Even as a human body is a unified whole with many different parts, so also is the body of Jesus Christ. Now Paul will write about the different parts of the body.

i. "We could call one *eye*, because of his *acute observation* of men and things, and *penetration* into cases of conscience and Divine *mysteries*. Another *hand*, from his *laborious* exertions in the Church. Another *foot*, from his industrious *travels* to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ crucified: and so of others." (Clarke)

b. **Apostles**: These are "special ambassadors" of the church. Paul and others in his day had a unique apostolic authority, which will never be repeated because the foundation of the church has already been set (Ephesians 2:20). However, God still has His "special ambassadors" in the church today, though not with the same authority as the original apostles.

c. **Prophets**: These are those particularly called to speak forth for God with the gift of prophecy. There was a unique, foundational authority to this gift as well (Ephesians 2:19-20). However, God raises up those to speak to the church and the world with a special blessing and power.

i. However, if one will either claim or receive the *title* of "prophet" today, let them be held to the standard of a prophet: 100% accuracy, in every word (Deuteronomy 18:20-22).

d. **Workers of miracles**: Those used of God to do miracles. Yet, the Biblical pattern is for miracles to be done on the Holy Spirit's initiative, not the initiative of the individual.

e. **Helps**: This has in mind those who help, or assist, others in doing the work of the Lord. The term was used in Jewish context in this way: "The *Levites* were termed by the Talmudists *helps of the priests*." (Clarke)

i. Spurgeon on those with the gift of **helps**: "It strikes me that they were not persons who had any official standing, but that they were only moved by the natural impulse and the divine life within them to do anything and everything which would assist either teacher, pastor, or deacon in the work of the Lord. They are the sort of brethren who are useful anywhere, who can always stop a gap, and who are only too glad when they find that they can make themselves serviceable to the church of God in any capacity whatever."

ii. In John Bunyan's book *Pilgrim's Progress*, "Help" came to Christian when he was

mired in the "Slough of Despond." That is often when the gift of helps is most useful. "Dear, very dear to us, must ever be the hand that helped us out of the depth of the mire where there was no standing; and while we ascribe all the glory to the God of grace, we cannot but love most affectionately the instrument he sent to be the means of our deliverance." (Spurgeon)

iii. Spurgeon also describes the qualities of someone who is effective in the gift of **helps**:

· A tender heart to really care.
· A quick eye to see the need.
· A quick foot to get to the needy.
· A loving face to cheer them and bless them.
· A firm foot so you will not fall yourself.
· A strong hand to grip the needy with.
· A bent back to reach the man.

iv. An old Puritan preacher once did a great sermon on this text: *And Bartholomew* (Matthew 10:3). His point was that Bartholomew is never mentioned by himself, but always with the phrase *and Bartholomew*. He is always spoken of doing something good with someone else. He was never the leader, but always a helper.

f. **Do all speak with tongues?** Paul's plain meaning is that the gift of tongues is *not* for every believer, just as the gifting of **apostles**, **prophets**, **teachers**, working of **miracles** or **healings** and so forth are not for every believer. Great damage has been done in the church by promoting tongues as necessary to really live as a Christian, or as *the* evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence. This has caused many to seek the gift of tongues, or to "fake" the gift of tongues, often only to assure one's self or others that they are indeed filled with the Holy Spirit.

i. Since tongues is a communicative gift, used in speaking to God, the gift of tongues should be desired when the individual feels a lack in their ability to communicate with God. When one feels hindered in their ability to talk to God using their given language, they can and should ask God for the empowering to communicate with God in a language which He understands, but which surpasses their understanding. If someone feels satisfied with their ability to communicate with God, there is really no need for the gift of tongues, and it should not be desired until one does want a communication with God which goes beyond understanding.

g. **Earnestly desire the best gifts**: Though the Holy Spirit gives the gifts, it is good and proper for us to desire them, and to ask for them, all in submission to the plan of God.

h. Paul will explain the **more excellent way** in 1 Corinthians 13, with a focus on love, not the gifts themselves. The gifts are merely ways we can express and receive love from God and love to one another. They are the "containers," and what is in the container – love – is far more important. "A shopful of barrels enrich not, unless full of commodities." (Trapp)

1 CORINTHIANS 13 – AGAPE LOVE

1 Corinthians 13 – Agape Love

G. Campbell Morgan wrote that examining this chapter is like dissecting a flower to understand it. If you tear it apart too much, you lose the beauty. Alan Redpath said one could get a spiritual suntan from the warmth of this chapter.

A. The supremacy of love.
1. (1-2) Love is superior to spiritual gifts in and of themselves.
Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift* of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
a. **Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels**: The Corinthians were enamored with spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of **tongues**. Paul reminds them even the gift of **tongues** is meaningless without love. Without love, a person may speak with the gift of tongues, but it is as meaningless as **sounding brass or a clanging cymbal**. It is nothing but empty noise.
i. "People of *little religion* are always *noisy*; he who has not the love of God and man filling his heart is like an *empty wagon* coming *violently* down a *hill*: it makes a *great noise*, because there is *nothing in it*." (Josiah Gregory, cited in Clarke)
b. **Tongues of men and of angels**: The ancient Greek word translated **tongues** has the simple idea of "languages" in some places (Acts 2:11 and Revelation 5:9). This has led some to say the gift of **tongues** is simply the ability to communicate the gospel in other languages, or it is the capability of learning languages quickly. But the way **tongues** is used here shows it can, and usually does, refer to a supernatural language by which a believer communicates to God. There is no other way to understand the reference to **tongues of... angels**.
i. In Paul's day, many Jews believed angels had their own language, and by the Spirit, one could speak it. The reference to **tongues of... angels** shows that though the genuine gift of tongues is a legitimate language, it may not be a "living" human language, or may not be a human language at all. Apparently, there are angelic languages men can speak by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
ii. Poole has a fascinating comment, suggesting that the **tongues of... angels** describes how God may speak to us in a non-verbal way: "Angels have no tongues, nor make any articulate audible sounds, by which they understand one another; but yet there is certainly a society or intercourse among angels, which could not be upheld without some way amongst them to communicate their minds and wills to each other. How this is we cannot tell: some of the schoolmen say, it is

by way of impression: that way God, indeed, communicates his mind sometimes to his people, making secret impressions of his will upon their minds and understandings." Poole was not correct in his suggestion that angels can't speak – in many places in the Bible, angelic beings speak, both in heaven, and on earth. Yet, it is interesting to consider angels may have capacities for communication that we do not have, and will not have until believers are glorified in their resurrection bodies.

c. **Prophecy**, **knowledge**, and **faith** to do miracles are likewise irrelevant apart from love. The Corinthian Christians missed the *motive* and the *goal* of the gifts, making them their own goal. Paul draws the attention back to **love**.

i. Paul, quoting the idea of Jesus, refers to **faith** which **could remove mountains** (Matthew 17:20). What an amazing thing it would be to have faith that could work the impossible! Yet, even with that kind of faith we are **nothing** without **love**.

ii. A man with that kind of faith can move great mountains, but he will set them down right in the path of somebody else – or right on somebody else – if he doesn't have love.

iii. It isn't an issue of love versus the gifts. A church should never be forced to choose between love and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul is emphasizing the focus and goal of the gifts: love, not the gifts for their own sake.

iv. "Possession of the *charismata* is not the sign of the Spirit; Christian love is." (Fee)

d. **Have not love**: Paul uses the ancient Greek word *agape*. The ancient Greeks had four different words we could translate **love**. It is important to understand the difference between the words, and why the apostle Paul chose the Greek word *agape* here.

i. *Eros* was one word for love. It described, as we might guess from the word itself, *erotic* love. It refers to sexual love.

ii. *Storge* was the second word for love. It refers to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child, or between family members in general.

iii. *Philia* is the third word for love. It speaks of a brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. It might be described as the highest love of which man, without God's help, is capable of.

iv. *Agape* is the fourth word for love. It is a love that loves without changing. It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting repayment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected. *Agape* love gives and loves because it wants to; it does not demand or expect repayment from the love given. It gives because it loves; it does not love in order to receive. According to Alan Redpath, we get our English word *agony* from *agape*. "It means the actual absorption of our being in one great passion." (Redpath) Strictly speaking, *agape* can't be defined as "God's love," because men are said to *agape* sin and the world (John 3:19 and 1 John 2:15). But it can be defined as a sacrificial, giving, absorbing kind of love. The word has little to do with emotion; it has much to do with self-denial for the sake of another.

v. We can read this chapter and think that Paul is saying that if we are unfriendly, then our lives mean nothing. But *agape* isn't really friendliness; it is self-denial for the sake of another.

2. (3) The most dramatic renunciations of self are, in the same way, profitless without love.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

a. **Bestow all my goods to feed the poor**: This is what Jesus told the rich young ruler to do (Matthew 19:16-30), and he refused. But even if the rich young ruler had done what Jesus said, yet had **not love**, it would have been of no profit.

b. **Though I give my body to be burned**: Even if I lay my life down in dramatic martyrdom, apart from love, it is of no profit. Normally, no one would doubt the spiritual credentials of someone who gave away everything they had, and gave up their life in dramatic martyrdom. But those are not the best measures of someone's true spiritual credentials. Love is the best measure.

i. There were some early Christians so arrogant as to think that the blood of martyrdom would wash away any sin. They were so proud about their ability to endure suffering for Jesus, they thought it was the most important thing in the Christian life. It is important, but not the *most* important. Without **love, it profits me nothing**. Even if it is done willingly (Poole notes "and not be dragged to the stake, but freely give up myself to that cruel kind of death"), without **love, it profits me nothing**.

ii. Some believe the burning referred to here is not execution, but branding as a criminal or as a slave for the sake of the gospel. The more likely sense is execution, but it really matters little, because the essential meaning is the same – great personal sacrifice.

iii. As well, some ancient Greek manuscripts have *if I give up my body that I may glory* instead of **though I give my body to be burned**. Again, the meaning is the same, and the difference is really minor.

iv. Many Christians believe the Christian life is all about *sacrifice* – sacrificing your money, your life, for the cause of Jesus Christ. Sacrifice is important, but without love it is useless, **it profits me nothing**.

c. Each thing described in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 is a good thing. *Tongues* are good, *prophecy* and *knowledge* and *faith* are good, *sacrifice* is good. But love is so valuable, so important, that apart from it, every other good thing is useless. Sometimes we make the great mistake of letting go of what is best for something else that is good, but not the best.

B. The description of love.

"Lest the Corinthians should say to the apostle, What is this love you discourse of? Or how shall we know if we have it? The apostle here gives thirteen notes of a charitable person." (Poole)

1. (4a) Two things love is: longsuffering and kind.

Love suffers long *and* is kind.

a. **Love**: At the beginning, we see **love** is described by *action* words, not by lofty

concepts. Paul is not writing about how love feels, he is writing about how it can be seen in action. True love is always demonstrated by action.

b. **Love suffers long**: Love will endure a long time. It is the heart shown in God when it is said of the Lord, *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). If God's love is in us, we will show longsuffering to those who annoy us and hurt us.

i. The ancient preacher John Chrysostom said this is the word used of the man who is wronged, and who easily has the power to avenge himself, but will not do it out of mercy and patience. Do you avenge yourself as soon as you have the opportunity?

c. Love **is kind**: When we have and show God's love, it will be seen in simple acts of kindness. A wonderful measure of kindness is to see how *children* receive us. Children won't receive from or respond to unkind people.

2. (4b-6) Eight things love is not: not envious, not proud, not arrogant, not rude, not cliquish, not touchy, not suspicious, not happy with evil.

Love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.

a. **Love does not envy**: Envy is one of the least productive and most damaging of all sins. It accomplishes nothing, except to hurt. Love keeps its distance from envy, and does not resent it when someone else is promoted or blessed. Clarke describes the heart which **does not envy**: "They are ever willing that *others* should be preferred before *them*."

i. Is **envy** a small sin? Envy murdered Abel (Genesis 4:3-8). Envy enslaved Joseph (Genesis 37:11, 28). Envy put Jesus on the cross: *For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy* (Matthew 27:18).

ii. "Many persons cover a spirit of envy and uncharitableness with the name of godly zeal and tender concern for the salvation of others; they find fault with all; their spirit is a spirit of universal censoriousness; none can please them; and every one suffers by them. These destroy more souls by tithing mint and cummin, than others do by neglecting the weightier matters of the law. Such persons have what is termed, and very properly too, *sour godliness*." (Clarke)

b. **Love does not parade itself**: Love in action can work anonymously. It does not have to have the limelight or the attention to do a good job, or to be satisfied with the result. Love gives because it loves to give, not out of the sense of praise it can have from showing itself off.

i. Sometimes the people who seem to work the hardest at **love** are the ones the furthest from it. They do things many would perceive as loving, yet they do them in a manner that would **parade itself**. This isn't love; it is pride looking for glory by the appearance of love.

c. **Love... is not puffed up**: To be **puffed up** is to be arrogant and self-focused. It speaks of someone who has a "big head." Love doesn't get its head swelled; it

focuses on the needs of others.
i. Both to **parade itself** and to be **puffed up** are simply rooted in pride. Among Christians, the worst pride is *spiritual* pride. Pride of *face* is obnoxious, pride of *race* is vulgar, but the worst pride is pride of *grace*!
ii. William Carey is thought by many to be the founder of the modern missionary movement. Today, Christians all over the world know who he was and honor him. He came from a humble place; he was a shoe repairman when God called him to reach the world. Once when Carey was at a dinner party, a snobbish lord tried to insult him by saying very loudly, "Mr. Carey, I hear you once were a shoemaker!" Carey replied, "No, your lordship, not a shoemaker, only a cobbler!" Today, the name of William Carey is remembered, but nobody remembers who that snobbish lord was. His love showed itself in not having a big head about himself.
d. **Love… does not behave rudely**: Where there is love, there will be kindness and good manners. Perhaps not in the stuffy, "look at how cultured I am" way of showing manners, but in the simply way people do **not behave rudely**.
e. **Love… does not seek its own**: Paul communicates the same idea in Romans 12:10: *in honor giving preference to one another*. Also, Philippians 2:4 carries the same thought: *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*. This is being like Jesus in a most basic way, being an *others-centered* person instead of a *self-centered* person.
i. "Love is never satisfied but in the welfare, comfort, and salvation of *all*. That man is no Christian who is solicitous for his own happiness alone; and cares not how the world goes, so that himself be comfortable." (Clarke)
f. **Love… is not provoked**: We all find it easy to be **provoked** or to become irritated with those who are just plain annoying. But it is a sin to be **provoked**, and it isn't love. Moses was kept from the Promised Land because he became **provoked** at the people of Israel (Numbers 20:2-11).
g. **Love… thinks no evil**: Literally this means "love does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received." Love will put away the hurts of the past instead of clinging to them.
i. One writer tells of a tribe in Polynesia where it was customary for each man to keep some reminders of his hatred for others. These reminders were suspended from the roofs of their huts to keep alive the memory of the wrongs, real or imagined. Most of us do the same.
ii. Real love "never supposes that a good action may have a bad motive… The original implies that he does not *invent* or *devise* any evil." (Clarke)
h. **Love… does not rejoice in iniquity**: It is willing to want the best for others, and refuses to color things against others. Instead, love **rejoices in the truth**. Love can always stand with and on truth, because love is pure and good like truth.

3. (7) Four more things love is: strong, believing, hopeful, and enduring. Spurgeon calls these four virtues love's four sweet companions.

Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
a. **All things**: We might have hoped Paul would have chosen any phrase but

this! **All things** covers everything! We can all *bear some things*, we can all *believe some things*, we can all *hope some things*, and we can all *endure some things*. But God calls us farther and deeper into love for Him, for one another, and for a perishing world.

i. "You must have fervent charity towards the saints, but you will find very much about the best of them which will try your patience; for, like yourself, they are imperfect, and they will not always turn their best side towards you, but sometimes sadly exhibit their infirmities. Be prepared, therefore, to contend with "all things" in them." (Spurgeon)

ii. "Love does not ask to have an easy life of it: self-love makes that her aim. Love denies herself, sacrifices herself, that she may win victories for God, and hers shall be no tinsel crown." (Spurgeon)

b. **Love... bears all things**: The word for **bears** can also be translated *covers*. Either way, Paul brings an important truth along with 1 Peter 4:8: *And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."*

i. "Love covers; that is, it never proclaims the errors of good men. There are busybodies abroad who never spy out a fault in a brother but they must hurry off to their next neighbour with the savoury news, and then they run up and down the street as though they had been elected common criers. It is by no means honorable to men or women to set up to be common informers. Yet I know some who are not half so eager to publish the gospel as to publish slander. Love stands in the presence of a fault, with a finger on her lip." (Spurgeon)

ii. "I would, my brothers and sisters, that we could all imitate the pearl oyster. A hurtful particle intrudes itself into its shell, and this vexes and grieves it. It cannot eject the evil, and what does it do but *cover* it with a precious substance extracted out of its own life, by which it turns the intruder into a pearl. Oh, that we could do so with the provocations we receive from our fellow Christians, so that pearls of patience, gentleness, long-suffering, and forgiveness might be bred within us by that which has harmed us." (Spurgeon)

c. **Love... believes all things**: We never believe a lie, but we never believe evil unless the *facts* demand it. We choose to believe the best of others.

i. "Love, as far as she can, believes in her fellows. I know some persons who habitually believe everything that is bad, but they are not the children of love... I wish the chatterers would take a turn at exaggerating other people's virtues, and go from house to house trumping up pretty stories of their acquaintances." (Spurgeon)

d. **Love... hopes all things**: Love has confidence in the future, not pessimism. When hurt, it does not say, "It will be this way forever, and even get worse." It hopes for the best, and it hopes in God.

e. **Love... endures all things**: Most of us can *bear all things*, and *believe all things*, and *hope all things*, but only for a while! The greatness of *agape* love is it keeps on bearing, believing, and hoping. It doesn't give up. It destroys enemies by turning them into friends.

i. "If your brethren are angry without a cause, be sorry for them, but do not let

them conquer you by driving you into a bad temper. Stand fast in love; endure not some things, but all things, for Christ's sake; so you shall prove yourself to be a Christian indeed." (Spurgeon)

4. The best way to understand each of these is to see them in the life of Jesus.

a. We could replace the word *love* with the name *Jesus* and the description would make perfect sense. We can easily say, *Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy...* and make it through the whole chapter.

b. We can measure *our* spiritual maturity by seeing how it sounds when we put our name in place of the word *love*. Does it sound totally ridiculous or just a "little" far-fetched?

c. There is a reason why Paul put this chapter in the midst of his discussion of spiritual gifts. Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to remember that giftedness is not the measure of maturity, the display of love is.

C. The permanence of love.

1. (8-10) Love will outlive all the gifts.

Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

a. **Love never fails**: Paul addresses the over-emphasis the Corinthian Christians had on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He shows they should emphasize love more than the gifts, because the gifts are temporary "containers" of God's work; love is the work itself.

b. Therefore, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are appropriate for the present time, but they are not permanent. They are imperfect gifts for an imperfect time.

c. **That which is perfect**: Paul says when **that which is perfect has come**, then the gifts will be "discontinued." But what is **that which is perfect**? Though some that believe the miraculous gifts ceased with the apostles say it refers to the completion of the New Testament, they are wrong. Virtually all commentators agree **that which is perfect** is fulfilled when we are in the eternal presence of the Perfect One, when we are with the Lord forever, either through the return of Christ or graduation to the eternal.

i. The ancient Greek word for **perfect** is *telos*. Considering the way the New Testament uses *telos* in other passages, it certainly seems to speak about the coming of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:8, 15:24, James 5:11, Revelation 20:5, 20:7, 21:6, and 22:13).

d. **Whether there are tongues, they will cease**: Many who believe the miraculous gifts ended with the apostles (such as John MacArthur) claim since the verb **will cease** is not in the passive, but in the middle voice, it could be translated, *tongues will stop by themselves*. Their analysis sounds scholarly, but is disregarded by virtually all scholars of ancient Greek.

i. Even if this translation is correct, it does *nothing* to suggest *when* tongues will cease. John MacArthur claims, "tongues ceased in the apostolic age and that

when they stopped, they stopped for good." But this passage *doesn't* tell us "tongues will stop by themselves," and it tells us tongues **will cease** only when **that which is perfect has come**.
ii. John Calvin thought the **will cease** spoke of the eternal state. "But when will that perfection come? It begins, indeed, at death, because then we put off many weaknesses along with the body." (Calvin)
e. **Whether there are tongues, they will cease**: In his use of **will fail** and **will cease** and **will vanish away**, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is not trying to say that **prophecies**, **tongues**, and **knowledge** have different fates. He is simply writing well, saying the same thing in three different ways. They will end, but **love never fails**.
i. "There is virtually no distinction between the two Greek verbs that describe the termination of both prophecies and tongues. True, the verb with prophecies is in the passive voice (believers are the implied agents), while the verb with tongues is interpreted as the active voice. The difference is only a stylistic change and nothing more." (Kistemaker)
f. **We prophesy in part**: This is airtight evidence prophecy is not the exact same thing as preaching, or even "inspired" preaching. Who can listen to a preacher drone on and on, and say they only **prophesy in part**? It seems like a lot more than a **part**!
i. "Preaching is essentially a merging of the gifts of teaching and exhortation, prophecy has the primary elements of prediction and revelation." (Farnell, cited in Kistemaker)
2. (11-12) Illustrations of the temporary nature of the gifts and the permanence of love.
When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.
a. **When I was a child**: Childish things *are* appropriate for children, and the gifts *are* appropriate for our present time. But the gifts of the Holy Spirit will not be appropriate forever.
i. Paul is not trying to say that if we are spiritually mature, we will not need spiritual gifts. But he does say that if we are spiritually mature, we will not over-emphasize spiritual gifts, especially at the expense of love.
b. **For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face**: When we can fully see Jesus (not as in a poorly reflected image), the need for the gifts will have vanished, and so the gifts will pass away. The gifts of the Holy Spirit will be overshadowed by the immediate presence of Jesus. When the sun rises, we turn off the lesser lights.
c. **Face to face**: Paul uses this term to describe complete, unhindered fellowship with God. 1 John 3:2 tells us when we get to heaven, *we shall see Him as He is*. There will be no more barriers to our relationship with God.
i. In Exodus 33:11, it says *the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks*

to his friend. In Exodus 33, *face to face* is a figurative expression, meaning free and open fellowship. Moses had not – and could not – see the actual face of God the Father in His glory. This is the sense in which John says *No one has seen God at any time* (1 John 4:12). In the spiritual sense which Moses had a **face to face** relationship with God, we can have a free and open relationship with God. But in the ultimate sense, it will wait until **then**, when we are united with Jesus in glory.
ii. In a passage like Numbers 12:8, where the Lord says of Moses, *I speak with him face to face*, the phrase *face to face* is a figure of speech, telling of great and unhindered intimacy. Moses' face was not literally beholding the literal face of God, but he did enjoy direct, intimate, conversation with the Lord. But the **face to face** Paul speaks of here is the "real" **face to face**.
d. **For now we see in a mirror**: This speaks again to the perfect fellowship with God we will have one day. Today, when we look in a good mirror, the image is clear. But in the ancient world, mirrors were made out of polished metal, and the image was always unclear and somewhat distorted. We see Jesus now only in a dim, unclear way, but one day we will see Him with perfect clarity. We will **know just as I also am known**.
i. The city of Corinth was famous for producing some of the best bronze mirrors in antiquity, but at their best, they couldn't give a really clear vision. When we get to heaven, we will have a really clear vision of the Lord.
i. We couldn't handle this greater knowledge on this side of eternity. "If we knew more of our own sinfulness, we might be driven to despair; if we knew more of God's glory, we might die of terror; if we had more understanding, unless we had equivalent capacity to employ it, we might be filled with conceit and tormented with ambition. But up there we shall have our minds and our systems strengthened to receive more, without the damage that would come to us here from overleaping the boundaries of order, supremely appointed and divinely regulated." (Spurgeon)
e. **Then I shall know just as I also am known**: God knows everything about me; this is how **I also am known**. But in heaven, I will know God as perfectly as I can; I **will know just as I also am known**. It doesn't mean I will be all knowing as God is, but it means I will know Him as perfectly as I can.
i. Heaven is precious to us for many reasons. We long to be with loved ones who have passed before us and whom we miss so dearly. We long to be with the great men and women of God who have passed before us in centuries past. We want to walk the streets of gold, see the pearly gates, see the angels around the throne of God worshipping Him day and night. However, none of those things, precious as they are, make heaven really "heaven." What makes heaven really heaven is the unhindered, unrestricted, presence of our Lord, and to **know just as I also am known** will be the greatest experience of our eternal existence.
ii. "The streets of gold will have small attraction to us, the harps of angels will but slightly enchant us, compared with the King in the midst of the throne. He it is who shall rivet our gaze, absorb our thoughts, enchain our affection, and move all our sacred passions to their highest pitch of celestial ardour. We shall see Jesus." (Spurgeon)

f. **Now I know in part**: The gifts of the Holy Spirit are necessary and appropriate for this present age, when we are not yet fully mature, and we only **know in part**. There will come a day when the gifts are unnecessary, but that day has not come yet.

i. Clearly, the time of fulfillment Paul refers to with **then face to face** and **then I shall know just as I also am known** speaks of being in the glory of heaven with Jesus. Certainly, that is the **that which is perfect** spoken of in 1 Corinthians 13:10 as well. According to the context, it can't be anything else.

3. (13) A summary of love's permanence: love abides forever.

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

a. **And now abide faith, hope, love, these three**: The three great pursuits of the Christian life are not "miracles, power, and gifts"; they are **faith**, **hope**, and **love**. Though the gifts are precious, and given by the Holy Spirit today, they were never meant to be the focus or goal of our Christian lives. Instead, we pursue **faith**, **hope**, and **love**.

i. What is your Christian life focused on? What do you really want more of? It should all come back to **faith**, **hope**, and **love**. If it doesn't, we need to receive God's sense of priorities, and put our focus where it belongs.

b. Because **faith**, **hope**, and **love** are so important, we should expect to see them emphasized throughout the New Testament. And we do:

i. *Remembering without ceasing your work of **faith**, labor of **love**, and patience of **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.* (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

ii. *But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of **faith** and **love**, and as a helmet the **hope** of salvation.* (1 Thessalonians 5:8)

iii. *For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the **hope** of righteousness by **faith**. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but **faith** working through **love**.* (Galatians 5:5-6)

iv. *Who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your **faith** and **hope** are in God. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere **love** of the brethren, **love** one another fervently with a pure heart.* (1 Peter 1:21-22)

v. *Since we heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of your **love** for all the saints; because of the **hope** which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.* (Colossians 1:4-5)

vi. *For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him **until that Day**. Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in **faith** and **love** which are in Christ Jesus.* (2 Timothy 1:12-13)

c. **But the greatest of these is love**: Love is greatest because it will continue, even grow, in the eternal state. When we are in heaven, **faith** and **hope** will have fulfilled their purpose. We won't need **faith** when we see God face to face. We won't need to **hope** in the coming of Jesus once He comes. But we will

always **love** the Lord and each other, and grow in that **love** through eternity.
d. **Love** is also the greatest because it is an attribute of God (1 John 4:8), and faith and hope are not part of God's character and personality. God does not have **faith** in the way we have **faith**, because He never has to "trust" outside of Himself. God does not have **hope** the way we have **hope**, because He knows all things and is in complete control. But God is love, and will always be love.
i. Fortunately, we don't need to choose between **faith**, **hope**, and **love**. Paul isn't trying to make us choose, but he wants to emphasize the point to the Corinthian Christians: without **love** as the motive and goal, the gifts are meaningless distractions. If you lose love, you lose everything.

1 CORINTHIANS 14 – TONGUES, PROPHECY AND PUBLIC WORSHIP

1 Corinthians 14:1-19 – The Gifts of Tongues and Prophecy

1 Corinthians 14:20-40 – The Gifts in Public Worship

A. The contrast between tongues and prophecy.
1. (1) The guiding principles.
Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.

a. **Pursue love**: Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, brilliantly declared the preeminence of love for Christians in 1 Corinthians 13. Now, since love is the greatest, we must **pursue** it.

b. **Desire spiritual gifts**: There was nothing wrong with the Corinthian Christians' **desire** for spiritual gifts. But they made a godly **desire** into an obsessive pursuit, when the main *pursuit* for Christians should be **love**.

c. **Especially that you may prophesy**: In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul spoke of prophecy and the gift of tongues only in the context of the other gifts of the Spirit. Now, he will focus on the gifts of prophecy and tongues, and how they should function in church body life. Obviously, in the Corinthian church, there was an over-emphasis on tongues and an under-emphasis on prophecy.

d. **That you may prophesy**: What does it mean for someone to **prophesy**? Many who believe miraculous gifts are no longer given by God regard prophecy as simply "inspired preaching," and not "inspired" in a direct way.
i. Paul will tell us much more about prophecy in this chapter. Yet, we know he does not mean prophecy is *identical* to preaching, because there was an ancient Greek word available for "preaching" (*kerusso*), and Paul did not use this ancient Greek word.

ii. "Preaching is essentially a merging of the gifts of teaching and exhortation, prophecy has the primary elements of prediction and revelation." (Farnell, cited in Kistemaker)

2. (2-3) Prophecy and tongues contrast in whom they speak to.

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

a. **He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God**: With the gift of tongues, the speaker addresses **God**, not **men**. Disregard of this principle leads to one of the most significant misunderstandings regarding the gift of tongues – believing tongues is a supernatural communication "man to man" instead of "man to God."

i. If we misunderstand this, we misunderstand Acts 2 and think the disciples preached to the crowd in tongues on the day of Pentecost. Instead, they spoke to God and the multi-national crowd overheard their praise to God. Acts 2:11 says, *we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God*. Later, Acts 10:46 describes the hearing of the gift of tongues: *they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God*.

ii. If we misunderstand this, we misunderstand what really happens when someone attempts to interpret a tongue and addresses his or her message to men. A true interpretation of the gift of tongues will be addressed to God, not men. It will be a prayer, praise, or some other communication to God.

iii. If we misunderstand this, we can be led to believe the gift of tongues is just the ability to speak another language, and all Paul means here is interpreting the preacher's sermon in someone's native tongue. But no one needs to interpret the preacher's sermon for God's sake.

iv. If we misunderstand this, we can misuse the gift of tongues, using it in a way that draws unnecessary attention to ourselves. God does not give anyone the gift of tongues for the direct sake of others (though indirectly others are edified), but for that believer and God alone.

b. **He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God**: Because this simple statement is so devastating to the idea that tongues is just a human language spoken for human benefit, many of those who believe the miraculous gifts have passed have trouble with this verse. Some even try to claim Paul speaks *sarcastically* here and that he *criticizes* the Corinthian Christians for using

the gift of tongues to speak to God instead of men.

i. Paul uses plenty of sarcasm in the Corinthian letters, but certainly not here. If we can say Paul means the exact *opposite* of the plain meaning of the words here, we are on dangerous ground. Why not apply the same interpretive principle ("he really means the opposite of what he seems to be saying") to other passages of Scripture?

c. **For no one understands him**: Paul recognized that normally, when someone spoke in tongues, no one else could understand him. The reason is simple: with the gift of tongues, the *intention* is to speak to *God* and not *man*. Therefore, it is fine if **no one understands him**, because God understands him.

i. The exception to **no one understands him** is when the tongue is publicly interpreted. Even then, it is not the tongue itself that is understood, but the interpretation of the tongue.

d. **In the spirit he speaks mysteries**: When the tongues' speaker cannot be understood, it does not mean it isn't really language, or that they are merely speaking "gibberish"; It means they speak **in the spirit** and that they speak **mysteries**.

i. Many have done linguistic analysis of people speaking in tongues and have "concluded" they are not speaking a "real" language, but just jabbering in "gibberish." Of course, it sounds like nonsense to human ears, because it was never intended for human ears. We should expect it to sound like nonsense, because Paul plainly says, **in the spirit he speaks mysteries**.

ii. However, this does not mean that all intelligible speech is the legitimate gift of tongues. Some, not understanding the gift, may imitate it, or fake it, just to "prove" something.

iii. Does **in the spirit** refer to the *speaker's* spirit or to the *Holy* Spirit? It could be either one, because both are true. The translators of the New King James Version believe it to be the *speaker's* spirit, because they used a lower-case "s" in **spirit**.

e. **But he who prophesies speaks... to men**: In contrast to the gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy is directed **to men**. It is God speaking supernaturally (often "naturally supernaturally") through people to people.

f. **But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men**: Not only is the gift of prophecy directed towards men, it is also largely *positive* in its character. Often, when a "negative" word is spoken, it is not truly a word from God at all, or it is a word meant only for the individual, not for

someone else.

i. **Edification** is "building up." It is a construction term, and speaks of our being "built up" in the Lord. A word of prophecy will *build someone up*, not tear him or her down.

ii. **Exhortation** is encouragement. It is like the speech from the coach in the locker room before the big game, rallying the team to go out and perform as they were trained to perform. A word of prophecy will *encourage* someone, not discourage him or her.

iii. **Comfort** has the idea of not only consoling, but also *strengthening*. It doesn't just cry with someone hurting, it puts its arms around them and strengthens them to carry the load. A word of prophecy will *strengthen*, not weaken someone.

3. (4-5) Prophecy and tongues contrast in whom they edify.

He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

a. **He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself**: Some have wrongly thought Paul says this as a criticism. Their idea is that Paul meant something like this: "You selfish Corinthian Christians! You use tongues to only edify yourself, when you should use it to edify others!" This is wrong. Paul is simply stating the nature of the gift of tongues. Since *he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God* (1 Corinthians 14:2), it follows that it is a gift primarily for *self*-edification, not *church* edification.

b. **He who prophesies edifies the church**: Because prophecy can be understood by all, a true word of prophecy builds up everyone.

c. **I wish you all spoke with tongues**: Paul was *positive* about the gift of tongues! Because of the tone of this chapter, it is easy to think he was "down" on the gift of tongues. Not at all; Paul valued the gift of tongues in his own life. In 1 Corinthians 14:18, Paul wrote *I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all*. This passage shows that Paul also wanted other Christians to speak **with tongues**.

i. Why did Paul **wish you all spoke with tongues**? No doubt, because he knew the value of it in his own life. Paul was able, when *in the spirit he* spoke *mysteries*, to unburden his soul before God in a way beyond human language and intellect. He could pray, praise, and intercede beyond his ability to understand and articulate. Paul wanted every Christian to know this same blessing.

d. **But even more that you prophesied**: As good as the gift of tongues is, Paul sees prophecy as better for the church as a whole. Why? Because **He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church**. And the focus here is **that the church may receive edification** more than the individual.

i. Paul's context in 1 Corinthians 14 is more focused on what the Corinthian Christians do when they come together as a church than on what they do in their own devotional life. There are things that are fine for a Christian to do in their own devotional life, which may be disruptive, annoying, or self-exalting for a Christian to do in a church meeting. The gift of tongues is one of those things. Since Paul focuses on when the Corinthian Christian comes together as a church, it is clear why he regards the gift of prophecy as **greater**.

ii. However, if one were to ask Paul, "Which is **greater** for one's devotional life: the gift of tongues or the gift of prophesy?" He would no doubt say "the gift of tongues," because who do you prophesy to when you are alone with the Lord in your prayer closet?

4. (6) In Paul's ministry, he spoke so all could profit.

But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?

a. **If I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you**: Paul recognized the gift of tongues was valuable for himself, because in 1 Corinthians 14:18 he wrote *I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all*. But it was not valuable for him to speak to others with the gift of tongues. They could not understand him, so they could not be edified.

b. **Unless I speak to you either by a revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?** Here, Paul describes different ways he might communicate which would be edifying to others.

i. **Revelation**: Paul may speak of his own awareness of unique inspiration as an apostle. There may have been times when Paul *knew* with apostolic authority His words were directly and infallibly from God.

ii. **Knowledge**: Paul may speak of his own knowledge, or by supernatural knowledge given by the Holy Spirit. Whichever, the **knowledge** was communicated in the language common to all, so all could **profit**.

iii. **Prophesying**: Paul knew he could speak by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,

with a sense his thoughts and words were guided and blessed by the Holy Spirit.

iv. **Teaching**: Paul could also **profit** others by speaking to them from the Scriptures themselves, **teaching** them as was his pattern in the churches he founded (Acts 15:35, 18:11, 28:31).

5. (7-9) Examples demonstrating the importance of speaking so all can profit.

Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

a. **Unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?** Musical instruments must use a certain pitch and beat to communicate a song. If they do not, the music is not accessible to the listener. Sounds come forth, but they cannot be understood. The same is true for a **trumpet** that **makes an uncertain sound**. It is of no profit for others.

i. It may feel good for a child to bang on a piano, and they may like the sound, but for anyone else, it is unpleasant. Even so, someone talking to God with the gift of tongues may be blessed, but no one else is. Therefore, if someone is going to make an **uncertain sound** (speak in tongues unto God), let them do so unto themselves, and not among others.

b. **For you will be speaking into the air**: Speaking in tongues at a meeting of the church benefits no one else; it is simply putting sounds into the air, not words and ideas into the minds and hearts of others.
i. It may satisfy curiosity to hear someone else speak in tongues, but it does not edify spiritually. We may think it is "neat" to hear others speak in tongues, but that is more of a soulish curiosity than a spiritual edification.

6. (10-11) All languages can be understood if one knows the meaning.

There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them *is* without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me.

a. **None of them is without significance**: Language itself is a gift from God. We can communicate with language because we are made in the image of God.

b. **So many kinds of languages in the world**: Modern linguists know man could not have invented language, any more than we could have invented our own circulatory system. Most modern linguists who reject God believe language is so unique that it "must" have been part of a unique evolutionary process. It's far more logical to believe God created man with this unique capability, as part of creating man in His own image.

i. Language could not be the product of man putting together sounds all by himself. For example, there are many universal human sounds (like the "raspberry" sound) which are not part of any human language. If man invented language on his own, it would make sense for *some* language to use that sound.

ii. Language is so complex because languages exist as whole systems, not as small parts put together. Most modern linguists believe all languages come from one original language.

c. **So many kinds of languages in the world**: Knowing language is a gift from God, and all languages have meaning, we can trust that if we speak in the gift of tongues, God understands, even if no one else – including ourselves – can.

7. (12-14) Why the nature of the gift of tongues makes it less usable for edifying the whole church.
Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel. Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.

a. **Let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel**: The goal must be *mutual benefit* at church meetings. If there must be tongues, there must be interpretation, so there can be edification.
i. If tongues are directed to God, how can a legitimate interpretation be edifying to others? The same way our reading of Psalms can edify. The prayer, praise, or plea of another unto God can identify powerfully with our own heart before God, and we can agree with what someone else says to God.

b. **Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret**: Here, Paul points to a way of giving the *interpretation* of the tongue, without necessarily speaking forth the *tongue itself*. He suggests the tongues'
speaker *himself* prays **that he may interpret**. Then, the *uncertain sound* of 1 Corinthians 14:8 need never be public, yet the whole church is edified by the interpretation of the tongue.

c. **My spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful**: Speaking in tongues

communicates with God on a spiritual level, passing by our **understanding**. My **understanding** does not benefit when I speak in tongues (it **is unfruitful**), but **my spirit prays**.

i. In saying **my spirit prays**, Paul again emphasizes the essential function of the gift of tongues: to communicate to God and not to man.

ii. For some, this bypassing of the **understanding** is undesirable. They never want to relate to God except by and through their understanding. While we value our intellect and understanding, and while we dedicate ourselves to loving God with all of our mind (Matthew 22:37), we also appreciate the limitations of our understanding, and thank God for a way to relate to Him that goes beyond intellect.

iii. If someone is perfectly satisfied with their ability to relate to God through their **understanding**, they really have no need for the gift of tongues. But if the day comes when they desire to relate to God beyond their ability to understand, they should seek God for the gift of tongues.

iv. If our **understanding is unfruitful**, then how does one actually speak in tongues? Everyone's experience may be slightly different, but generally, we can make some observations.
· It doesn't happen as one just opens their mouth and God "takes over" their tongue.
· It doesn't happen as they begin to wiggle their tongue and God "takes over."
· It doesn't happen as they are told to repeat a nonsense word or phrase faster and faster until God "takes over."

v. Actually, the language of tongues works much like languages we understand. A word or a sound occurs to our mind, and we vocalize that word or sound. In the gift of tongues, one simply continues to speak the words and sounds coming into their mind, trusting God is prompting them, and He understands what they say, and that in the Spirit what we say is perfectly appropriate for the moment.
vi. Is it possible that one could speak in tongues, and without knowing, say the most horrible blasphemies? No, it is not possible. Paul began this whole section on spiritual gifts with the principle: *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed* (1 Corinthians 12:3). Also, Jesus reminded us: *For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!* (Luke 11:10-13) We don't need to fear we will find Satan when we sincerely seek God.

vii. We can also remember another general principle relating to the gifts of the Holy Spirit: *And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets* (1 Corinthians 14:32). The Holy Spirit does not make us do strange, bizarre things. He will never make someone shout in tongues, or speak in tongues in a strange manner, though they may do it on their own initiative. But they should never credit or blame the Holy Spirit for what they have added.

8. (15-19) The result: when and when not to use the gift of tongues.

What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

a. **I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, I will also sing with the understanding**: Paul will use the gift of tongues, both in prayer and in song, and he will use it often. **Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding... than ten thousand words in a tongue**. Therefore, Paul's use of tongues was focused in his devotional life with the Lord.

i. Paul here makes reference to how we can **sing in the spirit**. God can give us the freedom to exercise the gift of tongues in a melodic way, so it flows in with worship. However, based on the principles in this chapter, if this is done, it should never be done in a way that would draw attention to itself or distract others.

b. **Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks**: If no one understands my blessing of the Lord, if no one understands my thanks to God, they can't say **"Amen"** with me. When I am gathered together with other believers, I can't just do my own thing and say, "Well, it blesses me." I must have a concern for others, also.

i. Apparently, it was the custom in the early church to say **"Amen"** when someone else prayed, and perhaps during a message. "It was very frequent in primitive times to express their approbation in the public assemblies by *Amen*. This practice, soberly and piously conducted, might still be of great use in the Church of Christ." (Clarke)

ii. According to Clarke, some ancient Jews thought it very important to say **"Amen,"** to the point where "they even promised the remission of all sins, the annihilation of the sentence of damnation, and the opening of the gates of paradise, to those who fervently say *Amen*."

iii. There is certainly nothing wrong with an **"Amen"** from the congregation today, as long as it is consistent with *everyone* being blessed, not just the one saying it!

c. **You indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified**: Paul is completely consistent in his emphasis on tongues being directed to God. Just in this passage, he points out what we do with the gift of tongues: we **pray**, we **sing**, we **bless**, and we **give thanks**. All of these we do unto the Lord, not unto man, with the gift of tongues.

d. **I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all**: In this we see that Paul saw great value in the gift of tongues for his own devotional life before the Lord: Yet, when he gathered with other Christians, his concern was to be a blessing, not with getting a blessing.

9. (20-25) The gift of tongues and unbelievers at church meetings.

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. In the law it is written:
"With *men* of other tongues and other lips
I will speak to this people;
And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,"
says the Lord. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

a. **Do not be children in understanding**: In their selfish desire to edify themselves at the expense of others in the meeting, the Corinthians showed themselves to be **children**, and selfishly immature. Paul points them to a higher call.

b. **In the law it is written**: Paul here quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12. In Isaiah 28, the prophet Isaiah announces judgment to the people of Israel. They did not receive the word of the prophets who spoke to them in Hebrew, so now they will hear the voice of **men with other tongues and other lips**. The Assyrian invaders spoke a

language the Israelites could not understand, and it was an example of judgment to the Israelites. **"And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me" says the Lord**.

c. **Therefore tongues are for a sign**: In the Isaiah 28 passage, tongues were a sign of judgment upon the Israelites. Foreigners who spoke in unknown tongues invaded their country. Paul is saying that today also, **tongues are for a sign**.

i. In Isaiah 28, the strange tongues were not a blessing, but a curse. Paul is warning, "Take heed that it be not the case *now*: that, by dwelling on the gift, ye forget the Giver; and what was designed for you as a blessing, may prove to you to be a curse... God may curse your blessings." (Clarke)

d. **Not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe**: Here, the straight reading of the text presents one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. In the straight reading of the text, Paul is plainly saying tongues is a sign **to unbelievers**, and prophecy is a sign **for those who believe**.

i. The problem comes when we see what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:23-25. First, that if unbelievers hear tongues in a meeting, they will not be blessed, but will **say that you are out of your mind**. Second, if unbelievers hear prophecy and are convicted in their hearts, their reaction may be to **worship God and report that God is truly among you**. So, in 1 Corinthians 14:23-25, Paul seems to indicate that tongues are *not* beneficial in ministering to unbelievers, while prophecy *is* beneficial to unbelievers. So, how then can tongues be a sign **to unbelievers**, and prophecy be a sign better suited **for those who believe**? There seems to be a contradiction between 1 Corinthians 14:22 and 1 Corinthians 14:23-25.

ii. Perhaps Paul is saying that tongues are indeed a sign to unbelievers, but not a positive sign. They are a sign of judgment, as the unknown tongues of the Assyrians were in Isaiah's day. In this way, tongues indeed are a **sign** to **unbelievers**, but it is a sign that condemns them as they regard tongues speakers as being out of their minds.

iii. Others have thought that the real problem here is an error made by someone who copied the verse very early in the history of the Bible. For example, respected translator J.B. Phillips thinks an ancient scribe mixed up Paul's word order in 1 Corinthians 14:22, and the verse should read: *That means that tongues are a sign of God's power, not for those who are unbelievers but to those who already believe. Preaching the word of God, on the other hand, is a sign of God's power to those who do not believe rather than to believers*. It is important to note that Phillips does not believe the Holy Spirit made an error, but he believes that a copier of what the Holy Spirit inspired made the error.

e. A good principle of understanding the Bible is always to interpret what is hard to understand in light of what is easier to understand. 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 seems easier to understand, because it is easy to see how an unbeliever hearing Christians speaking in tongues might **say that you are out of your mind**. It is also easy to see that prophecy could convict the heart of an unbeliever, causing them to repent, and to **worship God and report that God is truly among you**. So, while we may not exactly understand what Paul means by **tongues are a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers**, we know he does not mean tongues "minister" to or edify unbelievers. Tongues do nothing to bring the unbeliever closer to God; they may instead turn him off.

i. We also can understand that this is not the *primary* reason for the gift of tongues. They are not *mainly* intended by God to be a sign to unbelievers. Even assuming that is what Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, originally wrote, Paul has much more to say about the role of tongues in the believer's personal communication with God. Perhaps Paul is saying something like this: "If you insist on speaking in tongues in your church meetings, instead of in your own personal devotional life, the only good that comes from that use of tongues is that is a sign of judgment to unbelievers. Because they think you are crazy when they hear you speaking in tongues, it simply shows they don't understand the things of God and are headed towards judgment. But how much better if you were to emphasize prophecy instead of tongues, then everyone could be blessed, believer and unbeliever together!"

f. **And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed**: This can be done through the gift of prophecy, either by an "evident" word of prophecy, or by a spontaneous word of prophecy "hidden" in the message of the teacher or preacher. Many come to a unique conviction from the Holy Spirit in this manner.

B. Applying these principles to public worship.

1. (26) A general principle to guide gatherings of the church: let all things be done for edification.

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

a. **Whenever you come together**: Paul is writing here, as in the previous portion of the chapter, of the conduct of the Corinthian Christians when they **come together** for fellowship and the Word.

b. **Each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has**

an interpretation: Paul sees the gathering of the church as a time when people come to *participate* and to *give* to one another, not merely to passively receive.

i. We can easily picture how this dynamic would work among the Corinthian Christians. They would, out of necessity, meet in small groups in different homes. There would be many "house churches" scattered all over the city of Corinth. As they would meet in these small groups, there would be a freedom and a responsibility to not only receive but to give. So, one might give by reading or singing a **psalm**. Another might offer a word of **teaching**. Someone might pray in **a tongue**, along with **an interpretation**. Still someone else might have **a revelation**, a word from God's heart and mind to the gathered church. In a small, home-fellowship type setting, this is how the church should work together.

ii. When more people are gathered together, this "everybody shares something with everyone else" becomes more difficult. Among ten people, ten can share something with all the other ten. But among thirty, or sixty, or a hundred people, there isn't time to allow everyone to share something with everyone else. Plus, in a larger group, the "I want to feel important by talking to everybody" dynamic is much more present. It can be there among ten people, but how much more among a hundred people! This is why so many are blessed and find great spiritual growth through a home group, because it provides a perfect context for the "everyone shares something with everyone else" idea. The hunger for this has also led to the great growth of the home church or house church movement in our generation.

iii. At the same time, there are potential pitfalls in this approach. It is easy for people of poor doctrine or weak character to dominate the group. It is easy for the group to focus not on the truth of the word, but on how one "feels" about the word. Spurgeon once described a man coming from such a gathering, and meeting a friend. "How was the meeting?" the one asked. The other answered, "Oh, it was wonderful. No one knew anything and we all taught each other!"

iv. It is safe to say that when it comes to the "house church" or "larger church" issue there is no "right" or "wrong." God has used both, is using both, and will use both. Both are essential and greatly needed for the health and the strength of the whole body of Christ today.

v. At the same time, the *heart* of "everyone shares something with everyone else" can take place in a larger church gathering. But it is more expressed in "everyone shares something with *someone* else." It says, "I am coming to church, but not only to receive a blessing. I am coming to give a blessing to someone, and I will ask God for an opportunity to bless someone today." This way of thinking can make the fifteen minutes before a church meeting, and the thirty minutes after, the *best and most exciting time of ministry*. It is a big mistake for anyone to think, "If I'm not up on the platform, I can't minister to someone else today." Instead,

they should be on the lookout for opportunities to pray with people, encourage people, help people, meet people, and love people every time they come to church.

c. **Let all things be done for edification**: The goal of coming together as a church is not to be entertained, nor even to be "pleased" with a "blessing." We gather **for edification**, for the spiritual building up we need to live lives that glorify Jesus Christ outside the walls of the church. As Paul said in Ephesians 4:12, the goal is the *equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*. Our Christian lives are lived on the outside, and we come to be strengthened, built up, and equipped when we come together as a church family.

i. **Let all things be done for edification** also looks *outward*. It doesn't mean, "let everything be done for *my* edification." It means, "let everyone come to church with a heart to build up someone else."
ii. "Spiritual self indulgence is a monstrous evil; yet we see it all around. On Sunday these loafers must be well fed. They look out for such sermons as will feed their souls. The thought does not occur to these people that there is something else to be done besides feeding." (Spurgeon)

2. (27-28) Instructions for speaking in tongues publicly.

If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

a. **If anyone speaks in a tongue**: Clearly, Paul will not *prohibit* speaking in tongues in a church meeting, though we remember he primarily has in mind the meeting of house churches. He will not prohibit it, because if the tongue has an interpretation, there is a potential for blessing others. Yet, he will not encourage it either.
b. So, tongues in a church meeting are to be carefully regulated.

· **Two or three at the most**: If you must speak in tongues at your church meetings, do not do much of it. Don't focus on tongues.

· **Each in turn**: more than one person should not be speaking in tongues to the congregation at any one time.

· **And let one interpret**: don't speak in tongues at all – even **two or three at the most** or **each in turn** – if you will not have an interpretation.

i. Speaking in tongues in a church meeting that does not observe these Scriptural guidelines is wrong. It might be well motivated, it might be done with a good heart,

but it is still wrong, because it goes against the plain teaching of the Bible.

ii. How do some churches justify their practice of all speaking in tongues at the same time, rather loudly and demonstratively? Many make a false distinction between *speaking in tongues* and using a *prayer language*.

They would say *Paul regulates speaking in tongues here*, but using your *prayer language* is nowhere regulated. This is a false distinction, and an excuse for not obeying the Scriptures.

iii. What about occasions where it seems that many spoke in tongues at the same time, and without interpretation, such as on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2? We could say that in their enthusiasm and excitement, they went beyond Scriptural order. No harm came of it, although in Acts 2 the unbelievers did believe the tongue speakers were drunk. We must never be too afraid of a little occasional excess, which can always be gently guided into Scriptural order. If we are too afraid of it, we will never be freely led by the Holy Spirit, and instead have the "order" of a dead body. It is "safe," but there is no life.

c. **If there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church**: Paul here makes it plain that the gift of tongues is under the control of the person with the gift. They are not "compelled" by the Holy Spirit to speak out in tongues. If there is **no interpreter** present, the tongues' speaker is fully able to **keep silent in church**.

i. **Keep silent in church** also reminds us Paul is speaking about the use of the gift of tongues in a church meeting, not in one's own personal devotional life.

d. **Let him speak to himself and to God**: In one sense, the issue isn't whether a person can speak in tongues during a church meeting. The issue is if they can speak *publicly* in tongues during a church meeting. They are always free to speak in tongues **to himself and to God**.

i. Again, **to God** reminds us of the audience of the gift of tongues: God, not men. Though tongues is said to be **a sign** for men (1 Corinthians 14:22), it does not mean it is ever *addressed* to men, or primarily intended for men. When one speaks in tongues, they speak **to God**.

3. (29-33) Prophecy must also be conducted in order.

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

a. **Let two or three prophets speak**: Even as tongues are to be regulated in meetings of the church, so is the gift of prophecy. The whole meeting should not be given over to prophecy, but only **two or three** should speak at any given meeting.

i. Though Paul is far more positive about the use of the gift of prophecy in church meetings than the use of the gift of tongues, he still believes prophecy should be regulated. The gifts of the Spirit are never to be made the focus of congregational life. Worship and the Word are the focus, and the gifts flow under God's direction around the focus of worship and the Word.

b. **Let the others judge**: Even as prophets speak, others are to judge. No "word from the Lord" should be received without careful consideration by the leadership of the church present at the meeting. As John said in 1 John 4:1, *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world*.

i. Indeed, Paul wrote in Galatians 1:8, *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed*. Even if an *angel from heaven* came with a message, it must be tested and judged.

ii. What are the standards a prophecy should be judged by? First, it should be judged according to God's established, revealed word. God will never contradict Himself. Also, He will not give the same gift of perfectly hearing Him He gave to the apostles and prophets who wrote the New Testament and gave the foundation for the church (Ephesians 2:20). It is wrong to assume anyone perfectly hears God, so it is also wrong to put too much trust and faith in a prophecy. It is probably a bad idea to record them, and meditate on them. Thank God for the *edification and exhortation and comfort* prophecy brings (1 Corinthians 14:3), but don't let it eclipse God's eternal Word.

iii. Tom Stipe, in the forward to the book *Counterfeit Revival*, speaks to this problem of prophecy eclipsing the Word:

After only a couple of years, the prophets seemed to be speaking to just about everyone on just about everything. Hundreds of... members received the 'gift' of prophecy and began plying their trade among both leaders and parishioners. People began carrying around little notebooks filled with predictions that had been delivered to them by the prophets and seers. They flocked to the prophecy conferences that had begun to spring up everywhere. The notebook crowd would rush forward in hopes of being selected to receive more prophecies to add to their prophetic diaries...

Not long after 'prophecy du jour' became the primary source of direction, a trail of devastated believers began to line up outside our pastoral counseling offices. Young people promised teen success and stardom through prophecy were left picking up the pieces of their shattered hopes because God had apparently gone back on His promises. Leaders were deluged by angry church members who had received prophecies about the great ministries they would have but had been frustrated by local church leaders who failed to recognize and 'facilitate' their 'new anointing.'

After a steady diet of the prophetic, some people were rapidly becoming biblically illiterate, choosing a 'dial-a-prophet' style of Christian living rather than studying God's Word. Many were left to continually live from one prophetic 'fix' to the next, their hope always in danger of failing because God's voice was so specific in pronouncement, yet so elusive in fulfillment. Possessing a prophet's phone number was like having a storehouse of treasured guidance. Little clutched notebooks replaced Bibles as the preferred reading material during church services.

iv. There is another standard to judge prophecy by: the standard of agreement. 2 Corinthians 13:1 states a principle repeated at least six times in the Bible:

By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.

God will confirm His Word to the heart of the leadership present at the meeting. Therefore, a "prophecy" may be judged as not from God, not because it contradicted the Scriptures, but because the leadership judged that it simply wasn't what the Lord wanted to say to the church body at that time.

v. What should be done with someone who speaks forth a prophecy and it is judged to be not from God? Given the environment at most church meetings, the church leadership should gently say that they don't bear witness with that word. And, the person, given they have the right heart, should never be branded a "false prophet" or a danger. They may have simply taken something meant just for them, or just for another individual and said it to the whole group. Or, they may have not said all God wanted them to say, or added to what God wanted to say, and that substantially changed the message. If a person has a right heart, they should be encouraged to keep stepping out in faith and trusting God that He wants to use them. Of course, if a person has a wrong heart or chronically speaks wrong words of prophecy, they need to be confronted.

vi. But rightly used, the gift of prophecy can be a great blessing in a church. Not only will it operate spontaneously through the preaching, but it will also come through members of the church family. In the late second and early third century,

early church leader Tertullian (160-215) describes how it worked in their church services:

We have now among us a sister whose lot it has been to be favored with sundry gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's Day in the church; she converses with angels, and sometimes even with the Lord; she both sees and hears mysterious communications; some men's hearts she understands, and to those who are in need she distributes remedies. Whether it be in the reading of the Scriptures, or in the chanting of psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or in the offering up of prayers, in all these religious services matter and opportunity are afforded to her of seeing visions... After the people are dismissed at the conclusion of the sacred services, she is in the regular habit of reporting to us whatever things she may have seen in her vision; for all her communications are examined with the most scrupulous care, in order that their truth may be probed. . . the apostle most assuredly foretold (1 Corinthians 12:1-11) *that there were to be Spiritual gifts in the Church.* (Tertullian, "Treatise on the Soul," chapter 9 – *Ante Nicean Fathers, Volume III*, page 188)

vii. This writing from Tertullian seems to describe an exercise of spiritual gifts, which is both dynamic and tempered with Biblical balances. We note an individual who prophesies. She hears the Lord's voice, sees visions, and is speaking forth words of knowledge and encouragement. Of special note, her "revelations" are not shouted out in the midst of the congregational meeting, but are meekly presented to the church leadership after the general assembly is adjourned. The church leadership does not incredulously receive her sayings, but judges them with wisdom and discretion. God can still speak this way.

c. **Let the first keep silent... you can all prophesy one by one... the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets**: Here, Paul makes it plain that no one is "overwhelmed" by prophecy. They are still in control of the exercise of the gift, even when the Holy Spirit is moving upon them. The Holy Spirit does not take control like a demon does in demonic possession!

i. How do we explain the actions of those that shout and writhe and jump or act weird, supposedly under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Often, they are actually resisting the Holy Spirit, and this leads to stress, which finds an outlet in strange actions.

d. **That all may learn and be encouraged**: This is the goal. The gifts are merely servants to this purpose. The purpose is never to have a tongue or a prophecy at a meeting. You can have a hundred tongues, or a thousand prophecies, but if no one learns or is encouraged, there is no point to it. And if God chooses to bring the learning and encouragement apart from showing the gift of prophecy or tongues,

that is up to Him. We judge the success of a meeting not by if tongues or prophecy were present, but by if God's people learned, were encouraged, and were built up and equipped.

e. **God is not the author of confusion**: If there is confusion and disorder at a church meeting, it isn't from God. God may do things we don't understand, and things that seem strange or unpredictable to us, but there will not be a general atmosphere of confusion or weirdness.

i. Some, in justifying their strange and unbiblical practices at church meetings, have declared this spiritual principle: "God cannot reach the heart without offending the mind." This is unscriptural nonsense. It results in the attitude that the more confused and crazy and weird it is, the more it must be from God. How different from the teaching of Paul here!

4. (34-35) Women should not judge prophecy or disrupt meetings.
Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

a. **Let your women keep silent in the churches**: Paul has already assumed the right of women to pray or prophecy publicly (as stated in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16). Here, he probably means that women do not have the right to judge prophecy, something restricted to the male leadership of the church.

i. Instead of judging prophecy, women should **be submissive** to what the leadership of the church judges regarding words of prophecy.

b. **If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home**: In the ancient world, just as in some modern cultures, women and men sat in different groups at church. Among the Christians in Corinth, there seems to have been the problem of women chattering or disrupting the meetings with questions. Paul is saying, "Don't disrupt the meeting. Ask your questions at home."

i. In the Jewish synagogues, men and women sat apart. But if a woman chattered or called out to her husband sitting far off, she would be dealt with severely. The Corinthian church may have adopted the same kind of seating arrangement, but with many women from Gentile backgrounds, they did not know how to conduct themselves at a church meeting. Paul teaches them how.

c. **It is shameful for women to speak in church**: Again, because Paul assumed the right of women to pray and prophesy under proper authority in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, the context suggests **speak** refers to either the judging of prophecy

(something for the leadership of the church to do) or to disruptive speaking.

i. Alan Redpath points out that Paul uses the ancient Greek verb *laleo*, which means, "to talk, question, argue, profess, or chatter." Redpath says, "It has nothing to do with prophecy or prayer; it is not public speaking as such."

5. (36-38) Paul insists on his authority in these matters.
Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

a. **Or did the word of God come originally from you?** Paul wonders if some of the Corinthian Christians want to contend with him on these matters. If so, he will have none of it. The word of God did not come **from** the Corinthian Christians; it came to them from Paul. They need to sit and listen and be teachable instead of contending with the apostle Paul.

b. **If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual**: We might imagine at the next meeting among some of the Corinthian Christians, someone standing up with a "word from the Lord," saying, "Paul is all wrong!" Paul forewarns them, saying that if anyone is really a prophet or spiritual, they will agree with Paul.

i. Some people think that if they are really spiritual, they don't have to obey God's word on these matters. In their own minds, they are so spiritual that the rules don't apply to them. But if we are really spiritual, we will stick to the Word of God, and not go "beyond" it.

c. **But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant**: Paul pretty much describes how he regards those Corinthian Christians who must contend with him on these matters; they are **ignorant**.

6. (39-40) A fitting summary of the chapter.

Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.

a. **Desire earnestly to prophesy**: When you come together as a church, it is far better to be a blessing to someone else; therefore, prophecy is much more useful than tongues.

b. **Do not forbid to speak with tongues**: Though Paul will carefully regulate, and even discourage the use of tongues in the church, he will not **forbid** it. At the same time, he will greatly encourage its use in one's personal devotions.

i. The gift of tongues is not to be despised. It especially has a valuable place in personal devotional time. But the gatherings of the church should emphasize prophecy and mutual blessing.

c. **Let all things be done decently and in order**: God is a God of order and peace, and He wants order when the church comes together. When the gifts of the Spirit are given an unscriptural focus, it discredits the true work of the Holy Spirit, and often leads people to deny the gifts because they see unbiblical excess.

i. "How often is a work of God marred and discredited by the folly of men! For *nature* will always, and *Satan* too, mingle themselves as far as they can in the genuine work of the Spirit, in order to discredit and destroy it." (Clarke)

d. **Let all things be done decently and in order**: However, the **order** should always be the order of the living, not of the dead! Some have cultivated an atmosphere of gloom and depression among Christians in the name of **Let all things be done decently and in order**.

i. "Why, brethren, true praise sets the heart ringing its bells, and hanging out its streamers. Never hang your flag at half-mast when you praise God; no, run up every colour, let every banner wave in the breeze, and let all the powers and passions of your spirit exult and rejoice in God your Saviour. They *rejoiced*. We are really most horribly afraid of being too happy. Some Christians think cheerfulness a very dangerous folly, if not a ruinous vice." (Spurgeon)

ii. "Propriety very greatly objects to the praise which is rendered by the Primitive Methodists at times; their shouts and hallelujahs are thought by some delicate minds to be very shocking. I would not, however, join in the censure, lest I should be numbered among the Pharisees who said, 'Master, rebuke thy disciples.' I wish more people were as earnest and even as vehement as the Methodists used to be. In our Lord's day we see that the people expressed the joy which they felt; I am not sure that they expressed it in the most tunable manner, but any rate they expressed it in a hearty, lusty shout." (Spurgeon)

1 CORINTHIANS 15 – THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND OUR RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:1-19 – The Gospel of Jesus Christ
1 Corinthians 15:20-58 – The Glory of the Resurrection

A. The truth of Jesus' resurrection.

1. (1-2) Preface to the proclamation of Paul's gospel.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you,

which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

a. **The gospel which I preached to you**: In verses three and four, Paul will describe the *content* of the gospel. Here, he describes how the gospel can be of *benefit* to man. The gospel is only of benefit if it is **received** and if one will **stand** in it.

i. The word **gospel** means "good news." As the word was used in ancient times, it didn't have to describe the message of salvation in Jesus Christ; it could describe any good news. But the best news ever is that we can be saved from the punishment we deserve from God because of what Jesus did for us.

ii. The Corinthian Christians first **received** the gospel. The message of the gospel must first be believed and embraced. As Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, *For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.* (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

iii. The Corinthian Christians also did **stand** in the gospel. Despite all their problems with carnality, lack of understanding, strife, divisions, immorality, and weird spirituality, they still stood for the gospel. This is in contrast to the Galatian church, who was quickly being moved away to another gospel (Galatians 1:6).

b. **By which you are also saved, if you hold fast that word I preached to you**: The Corinthian Christians *had done* well in that they **received** the gospel. They *were doing* well in that they did **stand** in the gospel. But they had to *continue to do well*, and **hold fast** the gospel Paul preached to them. Every Christian must take seriously their responsibility to not only have a good past, and a good present, but to determine to have a great future with the Lord, also.

i. **Hold fast** also implies there were some people or some things which might want to snatch the true gospel away from the Corinthian Christians. All the more, this is why they had to hold on!

c. **Unless you believed in vain**: If the Corinthian Christians did not continue to **hold fast**, one day they might let go of the gospel. And if one lets go of the gospel, all their *previous* belief won't do them any good. It was as if they had **believed in vain**.

2. (3-4) The content of the gospel Paul preached.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

a. **For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received**: Paul did not make up this gospel. He **received** it (and not from man, but from Jesus Christ, according to Galatians 1:11-12), and Paul **delivered it**. This is not "Paul's gospel" in the sense that he created it or fashioned it; it is "Paul's gospel" in the sense that he personally believes it and spreads it.

i. "Notice that the preacher does not make the gospel. If he makes it, it is not

worth your having. Originality in preaching, if it be originality in the statement of doctrine, is falsehood. We are not makers and inventors; we are repeaters, we tell the message we have received." (Spurgeon)

b. **For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received**: As Paul describes the gospel in the following verses, it is important to notice that this gospel is not insightful teaching or good advice. At the core of the gospel are things that *happened* – actual, real, historical events. The gospel isn't a matter of religious opinions, platitudes, or fairy tales; it is about real historical events.

i. "Our religion is not based upon opinions, but upon facts. We hear persons sometimes saying, 'Those are your views, and these are ours.' Whatever your 'views' may be, is a small matter; what are the facts of the case?" (Spurgeon)

c. **Christ died**: The death of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, is the center of the gospel. Though the idea of glorying in the death of a Savior seems foolishness to the world, it is salvation to those who will believe.

i. How did Jesus die? The Roman government executed Him by one of the most cruel and excruciating forms of capital punishment ever devised: crucifixion.

ii. "Although the Romans did not invent crucifixion, they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering." (Edwards) What exactly was it like to be crucified? In days the New Testament was first written, the practice needed no explanation. But we do well to appreciate just what happened in crucifixion.

iii. The victim's back was first torn open by scourging, and the clotting blood was ripped open again when the clothes were torn off the victim. When he was thrown on the ground to nail his hands to the crossbeam, the wounds were again torn open and contaminated with dirt. Then, as he hung on the cross, with each breath, the painful wounds on the back scraped against the rough wood of the upright beam and were further aggravated.

iv. When the nail was driven through the wrists, it severed the large median nerve. This stimulated nerve produced excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms, and resulted in a claw-like grip in the victim's hands.

v. Beyond the excruciating pain, the major effect of crucifixion was inhibiting normal breathing. The weight of the body, pulling down on the arms and shoulders, tended to fix the respiratory muscles in an inhalation state, and hindered exhalation. The lack of adequate respiration resulted in severe muscle cramps, which hindered breathing even further. To get a good breath, one had to push against the feet, and flex the elbows, pulling from the shoulders. Putting the weight of the body on the feet produced searing pain, and flexing the elbows twisted the hands hanging on the nails. Lifting the body for a breath also painfully scraped the back against the rough wooden post. Each effort to get a proper breath was agonizing, exhausting, and lead to a sooner death.

vi. "Not uncommonly, insects would light upon or burrow into the open wounds or the eyes, ears, and nose of the dying and helpless victim, and birds of prey would tear at these sites. Moreover, it was customary to leave the corpse on the cross to be devoured by predatory animals." (Edwards)

vii. Death from crucifixion could come from many sources: acute shock from blood loss, being too exhausted to breathe any longer; dehydration, stress-induced heart attack, or congestive heart failure leading to a cardiac rupture. If the victim did not die quickly enough, the legs were broken, and the victim was soon unable to breathe.
viii. How bad was crucifixion? We get our English word *excruciating* from the Roman word "out of the cross." "Consider how heinous sin must be in the sight of God, when it requires such a sacrifice!" (Clarke)
ix. However, we never speak of the physical sufferings of Jesus to make us feel sorry for Jesus, as if He needed our pity. Save your pity for those who reject the complete work of Jesus on the cross at Calvary, and save your pity for those preachers who do not have the heart of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:23, when he proclaimed the center of the Christian message: *we preach Christ crucified*.
d. **Christ died for our sins**: What does it mean that Jesus **died for our sins**? How does His death do anything for our sins? Many noble men and women have died horrible deaths for righteous causes through the centuries. How does the death of Jesus do anything **for our sins**?
i. At some point before He died, before the veil was torn in two, before He cried out *it is finished*, an awesome spiritual transaction took place. God the Father laid upon God the Son all the guilt and wrath our sin deserved, and Jesus bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the wrath of God in our place.
ii. As horrible as the physical suffering of Jesus was, this spiritual suffering – the act of being judged for sin in our place – was what Jesus really dreaded about the cross. This was the *cup* – the cup of God's righteous wrath – that He trembled at drinking (Luke 22:39-46, Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15). On the cross Jesus became, as it were, an enemy of God, who was judged and forced to drink the cup of the Father's fury so we would not have to drink that cup.
iii. Isaiah 53:3-5 puts it powerfully: *He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*
iv. "Reader! *one drop* of this cup would bear down thy soul to endless ruin; and these agonies would annihilate the universe. He suffered *alone*: for the people there was none with him; because his sufferings were to make an atonement for the sins of the world: and in the work of redemption he had no helper." (Clarke)
v. And when that was accomplished (who knows how long it could have lasted), there was no reason for Jesus to "hang around" on the cross. His work was done and He could go on to what was next.
e. **For our sins**: Our **sins** were *responsible* for the death of Jesus. He did not die for a political cause, or as an enemy of the state, or for someone's envy. Jesus died **for our sins**. Jesus did not die as a mere martyr for a cause.
f. **He was buried**: We don't often think of the burial of Jesus as part of the gospel,

but it is. The burial of Jesus is important for several reasons.
i. It is proof positive that He really died, because you don't bury someone unless they are really dead, and Jesus' death was confirmed at the cross before He was taken down to be buried (John 19:31-37).
ii. Jesus' burial is also important because it fulfilled the Scriptures which declared, *And they made His grave with the wicked; but with the rich at His death* (Isaiah 53:9). Jesus was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Matthew 27:57-60).
g. **He rose again**: This truth is essential to the gospel. If Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins and remove our guilt, then why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?
i. Although Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross, *as if* He were a guilty sinner, guilty of *all* our sin, even being made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), He Himself did not become a sinner. Even the act of taking our sin was an act of holy, giving love for us – so that Jesus Himself did not become a sinner, even though He bore the full *guilt* of our sin. This is the gospel message! That Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross, and remained a perfect Savior through the whole ordeal – proved by His resurrection.
ii. For this reason, He remained the *Holy One* (Acts 2:27, 2:31-32), even in His death. Since it was incomprehensible that God's Holy One could remain bound by death, the resurrection was absolutely inevitable.
iii. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus is not some "add on" to a "more important" work on the cross. If the cross is the *payment* for our sins, the empty tomb is the *receipt*, showing that the perfect Son of God made perfect payment for our sins. The payment itself is of little good without the receipt! This is why the resurrection of Jesus was such a prominent theme in the evangelistic preaching of the early church (Acts 2:24, Acts 3:15, Acts 4:10, Acts 13:30-39).
iv. The cross was a time of victorious death, a *negative* triumph. Sin was defeated, but nothing positive was put in its place until the resurrection. The resurrection showed that Jesus did not succumb to the inevitable result of sin. The resurrection is proof of His conquest.
h. **He rose again the third day**: The fact that Jesus **rose again the third day** is part of the gospel. Jesus was a unique case. He did not or will not rise at some "general" resurrection of the dead. Instead He rose **the third day** after His death. This also demonstrates Jesus' credibility, because He proclaimed He would rise three days after His death (Matthew 16:21, 17:23, 20:19).
i. Because of the reference to **the third day**, and because in Matthew 12:40 Jesus refers to *three days and three nights*, some have thought it necessary for Jesus to spend at least 72 hours in the grave. This upsets most chronologies of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and is unnecessary, being unaware of the use of ancient figures of speech. Eleazar ben Azariah (around the year 100 A.D.) said: "A day and a night make a whole day, and a portion of a whole day is reckoned as a whole day." This demonstrates how in Jesus' day, the phrase *three days and three nights* did not necessarily mean a 72-hour period, but a period including at least

the portions of three days and three nights.
ii. "According to Jewish reckoning, 'three days' would include parts of Friday afternoon, all of Saturday, and Sunday morning." (Mare)
i. **According to the Scriptures**: Because this idea is so important, Paul repeats it twice in these two verses. Jesus' work for us didn't just come out of thin air; it was planned from all eternity and described prophetically in the **Scriptures**.
i. The plan for His *death* is described in passages such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.
ii. The plan for His *resurrection* is described in places like Hosea 6:2, Jonah 1:17, and Psalm 16:10. Another example is the scenario in Genesis 22 where Isaac, as a type of Jesus, is "raised" on the third day of their journey, at the beginning of which Abraham had reckoned his son dead.
iii. Admittedly, the Old Testament understanding of resurrection was shadowy. Many passages look to a bleak existence after death (Psalms 6:5, 30:9, 39:13, 88:10-12, 115:17, Isaiah 38:18, Ecclesiastes 9:4-5, 9:10). Yet there are other passages of hope and confidence after this life (Job 19:25-27, Psalm 16:9-11, 73:24).
iv. Remember though, that it was Jesus, not the Old Testament, which *brought life and immortality to light through the gospel* (2 Timothy 1:10).

3. (5-8) Concrete evidence of Jesus' resurrection.

And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

a. **And that He was seen by Cephas**: No one saw the actual resurrection of Jesus. No one was present in the tomb with Him when His body transformed into a resurrection body. If someone were there, perhaps in a brilliant flash of light, they would have seen the dead body of Jesus transformed, and virtually vaporize out of the grave clothes. Perhaps it would be something along the lines of the way a body was transported on the old Star Trek series; the molecules would alter, and the person could pass through a solid object, and re-assemble themselves into a solid person. We know that Jesus could do this after His resurrection; He could miraculously appear in a room that had all the doors locked and the windows shut. Yet He was no phantom; He had a real flesh and bone body.
i. Though no one saw the actual resurrection of Jesus, many people saw the resurrected Jesus. Paul now calls forth these witnesses to the resurrection, to establish beyond all controversy that Jesus was raised from the dead in a resurrection body.
b. **He was seen by Cephas**: Jesus made a special resurrection appearance to Peter (Luke 24:34). We are not told much about this visit, but we can assume there was some special need for comfort and restoration in Peter that Jesus ministered to.
c. **Then by the twelve**: This probably refers to the first meeting Jesus had with His assembled disciples, mentioned in Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, and John 20:19-25.

This was the meeting where Jesus appeared in the room with the doors and windows shut, and breathed on the disciples, giving them the Holy Spirit.
i. When Paul writes **by the twelve**, he uses the term as a figurative title. At the first meeting of the resurrected Jesus with His disciples, Thomas was absent and Judas had killed himself. But they still were known as **the twelve**.
ii. "Perhaps the term *twelve* is used here *merely* to point out the *society of the apostles*, who, though at this time they were only *eleven*, were still called the *twelve*, because this was their *original number*." (Clarke)
d. **Over five hundred brethren at once**: This meeting of the resurrected Jesus with **five hundred brethren** isn't detailed in the gospels, but is suggested by Matthew 28:10 and 28:16-17. During the time after His resurrection, but before His Ascension, Jesus met with His followers on many different occasions.
i. **Of whom the great part remain to the present** is compelling testimony of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul says, "Go ask these people who saw the resurrected Jesus. There are not a handful of self-deluded souls; there are literally hundreds who saw the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes. They know Jesus rose from the dead."
ii. There really were **five hundred** followers of Jesus before His Ascension, though Acts 1:15 mentions only the 120 who were in the Jerusalem area. Jesus met with these 500 followers in the region of Galilee. They *knew* Jesus rose from the dead.
iii. We sometimes sing: "You ask me how I know He lives; He lives, He lives inside my heart." But that is not the best way to prove Jesus lives. We know He lives because the historical evidence *demands* we believe in the resurrection of Jesus. If we can believe *anything* in history, we can believe the reliable, confirmed testimony of these eyewitnesses. Jesus rose from the dead.
iv. Through the years, there have been many objections suggested to the resurrection of Jesus. Some say He didn't die at all, but just "swooned" on the cross and revived in the tomb. Others say He really died, but His body was stolen. Still others suggest He really died, but His desperate followers hallucinated His resurrection. A plain, simple understanding of these evidences of the resurrection of Jesus destroys all of these theories, and shows they take far more faith to believe than the Biblical account.
v. "I suppose, brethren, that we may have persons arise, who will doubt whether there was ever such a man as Julius Caesar, or Napoleon Bonaparte; and when they do, – when all reliable history is flung to the winds, – then, but not till then, may they begin to question whether Jesus Christ rose from the dead, for this historical fact is attested by more witnesses than almost any other fact that stands on record in history, whether sacred or profane." (Spurgeon)
e. **He was seen by James**: This would be **James**, the brother of Jesus, who is seen as a prominent leader in the church in Acts 15. Significantly, in the gospels, Jesus' brothers are hostile to Him and His mission (John 7:3-5). Yet in the first chapter of Acts, Jesus' brothers are among the followers of Jesus (Acts 1:14). What happened to change them? Certainly, this meeting of the resurrected Jesus

with His brother **James** had some influence.
f. **By all the apostles**: This refers to a few different meetings, such as in John 20:26-31, John 21:1-25, Matthew 28:16-20, and Luke 24:44-49. There may have been many more meetings that are not described in the gospels. These meetings were important in proving to the disciples that Jesus was who He said He was. At these meetings He ate with them, comforted them, commanded them to preach the gospel, and told them to wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after His ascension.
g. **Last of all He was seen by me also**: By saying **as by one born out of due time**, Paul may mean that he did not have a three-year "gestation" period as the other apostles; he came on the scene suddenly.
i. Paul used the ancient Greek term *ektroma* meaning, "abortion, stillbirth, miscarriage" – it speaks of an untimely birth with "freakish" associations. Some think Paul used this striking word because the Corinthian Christians so consistently depreciated his stature as an apostle. They considered him truly a *paulus* ("little") apostle, but Paul will glory in his weakness.
h. **Seen by me also**: The cumulative testimony of these witnesses is overwhelming. Not only did they see Jesus after His death, but they saw Him in a manner which revolutionized their faith and trust in Him.
i. The changed character of the apostles, and their willingness to die for the testimony of the resurrection, eliminate *fraud* as an explanation of the empty tomb.
ii. Why didn't Paul mention the appearances of Jesus to the women at the tomb as evidence of Jesus' resurrection? Probably because in that day a woman's testimony was not received in law courts. It was true, and it was good evidence for the apostles at that time, but the world of that day would reject that testimony, because it came from women.

4. (9-11) Paul's testimony of grace.

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me. Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.
a. **For I am the least of the apostles**: Paul would argue hard for his apostolic credentials, because he knew he had to be respected as an apostle. But he had no desire to compete with other apostles for the "Most Valuable Apostle" award. He would gladly say, **I am the least of the apostles**. In fact, Paul believed he was **not worthy to be called an apostle.**
i. For some, this would just be spiritual sounding talk, which showed more pride than humility. But Paul meant it. He regarded himself as **the least of the apostles** because he **persecuted the church of God**. Paul always remembered how he had sinned against Jesus' church. He knew that he was forgiven; yet he remembered his sin.
ii. Paul felt – rightly so – that his sins were worse because he was responsible for

the death, imprisonment, and suffering of Christians, whom he persecuted before his life was changed by Jesus (Acts 8:3, Acts 9:1-2, Galatians 1:13, Philippians 3:6, and 1 Timothy 1:15).
iii. "This was literally *true* in reference to his being chosen *last*, and chosen not in the *number* of the *twelve*, but as an *extra* apostle. How much pains do some men take to make the apostle *contradict* himself, by attempting to show that he was the very *greatest* of the apostles, though he calls himself the *least*!" (Clarke)
iv. There are worse kinds of sin. Sins that harm God's people are especially grievous in God's eyes. Are you guilty, now or in the past, of harming God's people? "[God] remembers jests and scoffs leveled at his little ones, and he bids those who indulge in them to take heed. You had better offend a king than one of the Lord's little ones." (Spurgeon)
b. **But by the grace of God I am what I am**: Paul gave **the grace of God** all the credit for the change in His life. He was a changed man, forgiven, cleansed, and full of love when he used to be full of hate. He knew this was not his own accomplishment, but it was the work of the grace of God in him.
i. The grace that *saves* us also *changes* us. Grace changed Paul. You can't receive the grace of God without being changed by it. The changes don't come all at once, and the changes are not complete until we pass to the next life, but we are indeed changed.
ii. "You see that the mark of a child of God is that by the grace of God he is what he is; what do *you* know about the grace of God? 'Well, I attend a place of worship regularly.' But what do you know about *the grace of God?* 'I have always been an upright, honest, truthful, respectable man.' I am glad to hear it; but what do you know about the grace of God?" (Spurgeon)
iii. "'By the grace of God' we not only are what we are, but we also remain what we are. We should long ago have ruined ourselves, and damned ourselves, if Christ had not kept us by his almighty grace." (Spurgeon)
c. **His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all**: Though grace made Paul what he was, Paul still **labored** with grace, so that it wouldn't be given **in vain**.
i. Conceivably, if Paul had not worked as hard as he did, the grace of God would still have been given to him, but in some measure it would be given **in vain**. Grace, by definition, is given freely. But how we receive grace will help to determine how effective the gift of grace is.
ii. Grace isn't given because of any works, past, present or promised; yet it is given to *encourage* work, not to say work is not necessary. God doesn't want us to receive His grace and become *passive*.
iii. Paul knew that God gives His grace, we work hard, and the work of God is done. We work in a partnership with God, not because He needs us, but because He wants us to share in His work. Paul understood this principle well, writing, "*for we are God's fellow workers*" in 1 Corinthians 3:9.
iv. Many Christians struggle at this very point. Is God supposed to do it or am I supposed to do it? The answer is, "Yes!" God does it and we do it. Trust God, rely

on Him, *and then get to work and work as hard as you can!* That is how we see the work of God accomplished.

v. If I neglect my end of the partnership, God's grace doesn't accomplish all that it might, and is therefore given **in vain**. Later, in 2 Corinthians 6:1, Paul pleads that we might not receive the grace of God in vain: *We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain*.

d. **I labored more abundantly than they all**: Paul compares himself to the other apostles. He was not shy about saying he worked harder than any of the other apostles did. This is not to say the other apostles were lazy (although some of them may have been), but that Paul was an exceptionally hard worker.

e. **Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me**: Paul was honest enough to know and to say that he worked hard. He was also humble enough to know that even his hard work was the work of God's grace in him.

i. If you were to ask Paul, "Paul, do you work hard as an apostle," he wouldn't respond with that falsely spiritual, "Oh no, I don't do anything. It's all the work of God's grace." Paul would say, "You bet I work hard. In fact, I work harder than any other apostle." But then he would not dwell on it, but simply have the inward knowledge that it was all the work of God's grace in him.

f. **Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed**: Whether Paul or one of the other apostles brought the message, the result was the same. They preached the resurrection of Jesus, and the early Christians believed the resurrection of Jesus.

i. The verb **we preach** is in the *present continuous* tense; Paul says that he and the other apostles *habitually* preached this message.

B. The relevance of the resurrection of Jesus.

1. (12-13) The resurrection of Jesus proves there is a resurrection.

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

a. **Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead**: Why did Paul so carefully prove the resurrection of Jesus? It wasn't because the Corinthian Christians did not believe Jesus rose from the dead. In fact, he makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 15:11 that they *did* believe it: *so we preach and so you believed*. Then why was it important?

i. The Corinthian Christians did not deny Jesus' resurrection; they denied *our* resurrection. They were influenced either by Greek philosophy (which considered the resurrection undesirable, thinking the state of "pure spirit" superior), or by the thinking of the Sadducees (which thought the world beyond to be just wishful thinking). The bottom line is that the Corinthian Christians believed we lived forever, but not in resurrected bodies.

ii. Remember that *resurrection* is not merely life after death; it is the continuation of life after death in glorified bodies, which are our present bodies in a glorified state.

b. **How do some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?** The

Corinthian Christians just did not think carefully. Some of them denied the reality of resurrection, while believing in a resurrected Jesus. Paul shows how the resurrection of Jesus not only proves His own resurrection, but it proves the *principle* of resurrection.

c. **If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen**: If these few Corinthians were right about the resurrection, then Jesus was still dead!

2. (14-19) What if there is no resurrection?

And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

a. **If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is in vain**: If there is no resurrection, then Jesus is not risen, and Paul and the other apostles have preached **in vain**. There is no real, resurrected Jesus whom they serve.

b. Worse, **if Christ is not risen**, then **we are found false witnesses of God**. If there is no principle of resurrection, and if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then the apostles are *liars*.

c. Worse yet, **if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!** We can follow Paul's logic point-by-point:

· If there is no principle of resurrection, then Jesus did not rise from the dead.
· If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then death has power over Him and defeated Him.
· If death has power over Jesus, He is not God.
· If Jesus is not God, He cannot offer a complete sacrifice for sins.
· If Jesus cannot offer a complete sacrifice for sins, our sins are not completely paid for before God.
· If my sins are not completely paid for before God, then I am still in my sins.
· Therefore, if Jesus is not risen, He is unable to save.

d. Worse still, **if Christ is not risen**, then **those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished**. If there is no principle of resurrection, then the dead in Christ are gone forever.

e. Worst of all, **if Christ is not risen**, then **in this life only we have hope in Christ**, and we **are of all men the most pitiable**. If there is no principle of resurrection, then *the whole Christian life is a pitiful joke!* If we don't have something beyond this life to look forward to, why hassle with the problems in being a Christian?

i. It is true that being a Christian *solves* many problems; but it also *brings* many others. Paul, (like the preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes) saw little ultimate value in life if there is only this life to live.

ii. It is true that knowing Jesus and loving Jesus can make this life better, but sometimes it will make this life worse. When we understand what Paul meant when

he wrote, "**If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable**," then we understand what a difficult life Paul lived. Paul thought, "with all I have endured for Jesus Christ, if there is not a resurrection and a heavenly reward beyond this life, I am a fool to be pitied." Can we, in our super-comfortable age, say the same thing? Trapp says Paul can write this "Because none out of hell ever suffered more than the saints have done."

iii. Paul only applies this principle to *Christians*. He writes, ***we* are of all men the most pitiable**. For the unbeliever, this life alone gives them any chance at pleasure, and whatever happiness they can find now is all the happiness they will ever know. How different for the Christian!

f. See how important the truth of the resurrection is! This is not some side doctrine, to be believed if one likes it. If you do not believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead in a resurrection body the way the Bible says He did, then *you have no right to call yourself a Christian*. This is one of the *essential* doctrines of the Christian faith.

i. "Everything depends on our retaining a firm hold on this doctrine in particular; for if this one totters and no longer counts, all the others will lose their value and validity." (Martin Luther)

ii. "If Jesus rose, then this gospel is what it professes to be; if He rose not from the dead, then it is all deceit and delusion." (Spurgeon)

g. When you know what rests on the resurrection, you know why **if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable**.

i. The *divinity* of Jesus rests on the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 1:4).

ii. The *sovereignty* of Jesus rests on the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 14:9).

iii. Our *justification* rests on the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 4:25).

iv. Our *regeneration* rests on the resurrection of Jesus (1 Peter 1:3).

v. Our *ultimate resurrection* rests on the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 8:11).

vi. "The fact is, that the silver thread of resurrection runs through all the blessings, from regeneration onward to our eternal glory, and binds them together." (Spurgeon)

3. (20-23) The resurrection of Jesus was the firstfruit of our resurrection.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.

a. **Now Christ is risen from the dead**: In the previous part of the chapter, Paul demonstrated beyond all doubt that Jesus rose from the dead, and the importance of that fact. Here, he simply states the fact: **now Christ is risen from the dead**.

b. **And has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**: **Firstfruits** is the ancient Greek word *aparche*. In the Septuagint, this word is used for the offering of firstfruits and in secular usage the word was used for an entrance fee.

i. Jesus was the **firstfruits** of our resurrection in both senses. In the Old Testament, the offering of firstfruits brought one sheaf of grain to represent and anticipate the rest of the harvest (Leviticus 23:9-14). The resurrection of Jesus *represents* our resurrection, because *if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection* (Romans 6:5). The resurrection of Jesus also *anticipates* our resurrection, because we will be raised with a body like His. "As in the firstfruits offered to God, the Jews were assured of God's blessing on the whole harvest; so by the resurrection of Christ, our resurrection is insured." (Trapp)
ii. The Feast of Firstfruits was observed on the day after the Sabbath following Passover (Leviticus 23:9-14). Significantly, Jesus rose from the dead on the exact day of the Feast of Firstfruits, the day after the Sabbath following the Passover.
iii. The resurrection of Jesus is also the **firstfruits** of our resurrection in the sense that He is our "entrance fee" to resurrection. Jesus paid our admission to the resurrection!
c. **By man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead**: Here, Paul communicates the same ideas found in Romans 5:12-21. Adam (**by man**) is one "head" of the human race, and all mankind was brought under death by Adam. The *second Adam*, Jesus Christ (**by Man**) is the other head of the human race, and Jesus brings resurrection to all that are "under" His headship.
i. "Men admire the man who is first to discover a new country... Oh, then, sing it in songs, sound it with voice of trumpet to the ends of the earth – Christ is the first who returned from the jaws of death to tell of immortality and light." (Spurgeon)
d. **In Christ, all shall be made alive**: Does this mean everyone is resurrected? Yes and no. All will be resurrected in the sense that they will receive a resurrection body and live forever. Jesus plainly spoke of both *the resurrection of life* and *the resurrection of condemnation* (John 5:29). So, all are resurrected, but not all will receive *the resurrection of life*. Some will receive the *resurrection of condemnation*, and live forever in a resurrected body in hell.
i. "But though this text doth not prove the general resurrection, (being only intended of believers, that are members of Christ,) yet it doth not oppose it. But that the *all* here mentioned is no more than all believers, appeareth not only from the term *in Christ* in this verse, but from the whole following discourse; which is only concerning the resurrection of believers to life, not that of the wicked to eternal condemnation." (Poole)
e. **Each one in his own order**: It would be strange and inappropriate for us to receive resurrection before Jesus. So He receives resurrection first as **the firstfruits**, and then we receive it **afterward... at His coming**.
i. The **coming** of Jesus described here uses the ancient Greek word *parousia*. This word can simply mean a person's presence (as in Philippians 2:12, *not as in my presence only*). But when it is used of Jesus, it has special reference to His Second Coming (as in Matthew 24:27).
ii. If Jesus is **the firstfruits** of our resurrection, does that mean He was the first one raised from the dead? What about the widow's son in the days of Elijah (1

Kings 17:17-24) and Lazarus (John 11:38-44), among others? Each of these were resuscitated from death, but none of them were *resurrected*. Each of them were raised in the same body they died in, and were raised from the dead to eventually die again. Resurrection isn't just living again; it is living again in a new body based on our old body but perfectly suited for life in eternity. Jesus was not the first one brought back from the dead, but He was the first one *resurrected*.

4. (24-28) The resurrection of Jesus leads to the resolution of all things.

Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under *Him*," *it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

a. **Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father**. In Ephesians 1:10, Paul reveals God's eternal purpose in history: *that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him*. Paul wrote of the "gathering together" of all things in Jesus, or of the "summing up" of all things in Him. Here, in 1 Corinthians, he looks forward to the time when all things are resolved in Jesus Christ and He presents it all to God the Father, giving glory to the God who authored this eternal plan of the ages.

b. **When He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power**: For now, God has granted a measure of **rule** and **authority** and **power** to men, to Satan, and even to death. But all that is temporary. Jesus will take His rightful place as *the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords* (1 Timothy 6:15). After the resurrection, God will finally resolve all of history according to His will.

i. "In raising Christ from the dead God has set in motion a chain of events that must culminate in the final destruction of death and thus of God's being once again, as in eternity past, 'all in all.'" (Fee)

c. **He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet**: Paul here refers to the one-thousand-year reign of Jesus described in Revelation 20:1-6. After that time, there will be a final, Satan inspired rebellion (Revelation 20:7-10), which Jesus will crush and finally and forever **put all enemies under His feet**.

i. The expression **under His feet** is an Old Testament "figure for total conquest." (Mare)

d. **The last enemy that will be destroyed is death**: Death will be present during the millennial reign of Jesus (Revelation 20:9 and Isaiah 65:20), but afterward, death will be abolished. It is truly the **last enemy that will be destroyed**.

i. Paul reminds us of something important: death is an **enemy**. When Jesus came upon the tomb of Lazarus, He *groaned in the spirit and was troubled*, and *Jesus wept* (John 11:33, 35). Why? Not simply because Lazarus was dead, for Jesus

would raise him shortly. Instead, Jesus was troubled at death itself. It was an **enemy**. Today, some are told to embrace death as a friend, but that is not Biblical thinking. Death is a defeated enemy because of the work of Jesus, an enemy that will one day **be destroyed**, and therefore an enemy we need not fear. But death is an enemy nonetheless.

ii. The destruction of death was shown at the resurrection of Jesus, when *the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many* (Matthew 27:52-53). "When at the Redeemer's resurrection many of the saints arose and came out of their graves into the holy city then was the crucified Lord proclaimed to be victorious over death and the grave... these were but preliminary skirmishes and mere foreshadowings of the grand victory by which death was overthrown." (Spurgeon)

iii. If death is destroyed, why do Christians die? "Death since Jesus died is not a penal infliction upon the children of God: as such he has abolished it, and it can never be enforced. Why die the saints then? Why, because their bodies must be changed ere they can enter heaven... Saints die not now, but they are dissolved and depart." (Spurgeon)

iv. "Death is not the worst of enemies; death is an enemy, but he is much to be preferred to our other adversaries. It were better to die a thousand times than to sin. To be tried by death is nothing compared to being tempted by the devil. The mere physical pains connected with dissolution are comparative trifles compared with the hideous grief which is caused by sin and the burden which a sense of guilt causes to the soul." (Spurgeon)

v. "Notice, that death is the last enemy to each individual Christian and the last to be destroyed... Brother, do not dispute the appointed order, but let the last be last. I have known a brother wanting to vanquish death long before he died. But, brother, you do not want dying grace till dying moments. What would be the good of dying grace while you are yet alive? A boat will only be needful when you reach a river. Ask for living grace, and glorify Christ thereby, and then you shall have dying grace when dying time comes." (Spurgeon)

e. **But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted**: Paul reminds us that the Son will not someday be superior to the Father. The relationship of *Father* to *Son* will be eternal: **the Son Himself will also be subject to Him**.

i. Those who deny the deity of Jesus say this verse proves their point. They take the submission of God the Son as "proof" that He must not be equal in deity to God the Father. But the submission of Jesus to the Father doesn't come from any inherent inferiority; instead, it comes from the administrative order of the Godhead. A *son* is always in submission to his *father*, even if both are "equal" in substance.

ii. "The son of a king may be the equal of his father in every attribute of his nature, though officially inferior. So the eternal Son of God may be coequal with the Father, though officially subordinate." (Hodge)

iii. "The Son's subjection to his Father, which is mentioned in this place, doth no where prove his inequality of essence or power with his Father; it only signifieth what was spoken before, that Christ should deliver up his mediatory kingdom to his Father." (Poole)
iv. Simply put, God the Father will always be God the *Father*, and God the Son will always be God the *Son*, and for all eternity they will continue to relate to each other as *Father* and *Son*.
f. **That God may be all in all**: Here, Paul refers to God the Son's desire to glorify God the Father through all eternity. Importantly, each person of the Trinity desires to glorify another person of the Trinity. The Son glorifies the Father (John 17:4), the Father glorifies the Son (John 17:5), and the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14). This aspect of the nature of God is something God wants us to walk in, having a concern for the glory of others, and not our own (Philippians 2:3-4).

5. (29-32) More reasons to believe in the principle of resurrection.

Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? If *the* dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

a. **Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all?** What was being **baptized for the dead**? It is a mysterious passage, and there have been more than thirty different attempts to interpret it.
i. The plain meaning of the original language is that some people are being baptized on behalf of those who have died. Paul's point is "If there is no resurrection, why are they doing this? What is the point if there is no life after death?"
ii. Significantly, Paul did not say, "we baptize for the dead," but asked, "**what will *they* do who are baptized for the dead**," and "**why then are *they* baptized for the dead?**" Therefore, Paul refers to a *pagan* custom of vicarious baptism for the dead. "Paul simply mentions the superstitious custom without approving it and uses it to fortify his argument that there is a resurrection from the dead." (Mare)
iii. Paul certainly does not *approve* of the practice; he merely says that if there were no resurrection, why would the custom exist? The Mormon practice of baptism for the dead – erroneously based on this passage – is neither Scriptural nor sensible.
iv. Paul's point is plain: "The pagans even believe in the resurrection because they baptize for the dead. The pagans have the sense to believe in resurrection, but some of you Corinthian Christians do not!"
b. **And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?** If there were no resurrection, why would Paul place his life in jeopardy for the gospel? The way Paul lived his life all-out for the gospel was evidence of the truth of the resurrection.
i. Most of us are so concerned about living comfortable lives here on earth that our lives give no evidence of the resurrection. Paul lived such a committed Christian

life, people could look at him and say, "There is no way he would live like that unless there was a reward waiting for him in heaven."

c. **I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily**: Paul will boast a little here. His boasting is both **in you** (that is, in the Corinthian Christians) and **in Christ Jesus**. What will Paul boast about? That he does **die daily**.

i. Vincent on **I die daily**: "I am in constant peril of my life." Paul's life was lived so on the edge for Jesus Christ that he could say, "**I die daily**." His life was always on the line; there were always people out to kill him. An example of this is in Acts 23:12-13, when more than forty men took a vow that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. With enemies like that, no wonder Paul could say, "**I die daily**." And this is his *boast*!

ii. It is important to understand that when Paul says, "**I die daily**," he does not speak of his spiritual identification with the death of Jesus. He does not speak of the spiritual putting to death of the flesh. He writes of the constant imminent danger to his physical life. It is important and useful for Christians to daily reckon themselves dead to sin with Jesus Christ (as in Romans 6:11, *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord*). But to use this statement **I die daily** to support that truth is wrong, because in context Paul is writing about the danger to his physical life.

iii. How can we die daily? Spurgeon gives seven steps to dying daily in a sermon titled *Dying Daily*.

· First, every day carefully consider the certainty of death.
· Second, by faith put your soul through the whole process of death.
· Third, hold this world with a loose hand.
· Fourth, every day seriously test your hope and experience.
· Next, come every day, just as you did at conversion, to the cross of Jesus, as a poor guilty sinner.
· Sixth, live in such a manner that you would not be ashamed to die at any moment.
· Finally, have all your affairs in order so that you are ready to die.

d. **I have fought with beasts at Ephesus**: The book of Acts does not record an occasion when Paul faced wild animals in an arena. It may simply be unrecorded, or Paul may mean "**beasts**" figuratively, in reference to his violent and wild human opponents (as he faced at Ephesus in Acts 19:21-41).

i. Paul faced all this for the sake of the resurrection of the dead, both Jesus' resurrection and the believer's. Though at the time of his writing 1 Corinthians it was still in the future, Paul's whole arrest, imprisonment, and journey to Rome as done for the sake of the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6, 24:15, and 24:21).

e. **If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."** Paul's third proof for the resurrection in this section is also compelling. If there is no resurrection, then there is no future judgment to consider. Then life is lived only "under the sun," as is considered in Ecclesiastes.

i. The ancient Egyptians, at the end of a big banquet, often escorted a wooden image of a man in a coffin around the tables, telling people to have a good time

now, because you'll be dead sooner than you think. If there is no resurrection, and no future judgment, then we may as well have the best time we can right now – and Paul was a fool for putting himself in such discomfort and danger for the sake of the gospel.

6. (33-34) Knowing the truth about our resurrection should affect the way we live.

Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.

a. **Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."** Where did the Corinthian Christians get their strange ideas about the resurrection, ideas Paul spent this chapter trying to correct? They got this bad thinking by associating either with Jews who did not believe in the resurrection (such as the Sadducees) or by associating with pagan, Greek philosophical types, who did not believe in the resurrection (Acts 17:31-32). It was bad enough that these associations had affected their thinking on an important matter like the resurrection, but this **evil company** could corrupt far more.

i. This speaks to the vital need described in Romans 12:2: *do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*. By keeping **evil company**, the Corinthian Christians were being *conformed to this world*, and they needed to be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*. Christians must let the Word of God shape their thinking, not the **evil company** of this world.

ii. Through much of this book, Paul deals with the moral problems of the Corinthians: envy, divisions, pride, immorality, greed, irreverence, and selfishness. How much of this came in because they kept **evil company**? Their problem with the resurrection also indicated the source of many of their moral problems.

b. **Evil company corrupts good habits**: This is not a quotation from the Old Testament, or even from the words of Jesus. Paul quotes from an ancient, secular comedy play, *Thais*, written by Menander. Though he was a pagan, Menander told the truth at this point, and Paul (more properly, the Holy Spirit) had no problem quoting a pagan who did tell the truth at a particular point.

c. **Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God**: For Christians to resist God's process of transformation by the renewing of our minds is to neglect the knowledge of God. To remain willfully ignorant of the truth is **sin**.

C. The nature of the resurrected body.

1. (35) What is the nature of the resurrected body?

But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"

a. **How are the dead raised up?** This is a question Paul doesn't really answer in the following verses, because the answer is obvious. God raises the dead. As Paul said to Agrippa in Acts 26:8, *Why should it be thought incredible by you that God*

raises the dead?

b. **And with what body do they come?** This may be a foolish question (Paul calls his imaginary questioner "*Foolish one*" in 1 Corinthians 15:36), but it is a question Paul will answer.

2. (36-38) The analogy of the seed.

Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other *grain*. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.

a. **Foolish one**: In the wording of the ancient Greek, it is even stronger: *Fools!* "A hard knot must have a hard wedge, a dead heart a rousing reproof." (Trapp)

b. **What you sow**: Paul says our bodies are like "seeds" which "grow" into resurrection bodies. When you bury the body of a believer, you are "sowing" a "seed" that will come out of the earth as a resurrection body.

i. "Truly it is never a pleasant sound, that rattle of the clay upon the coffin-lid, 'Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes,' nor to the farmer, for its own sake, would it be a very pleasant thing to put his grain into the dull cold earth; yet I trow no farmer ever weeps when he sows his seed." (Spurgeon)

ii. "Dear friends, if such be death – if it be but a sowing, let us have done with all faithless, hopeless, graceless sorrow... 'Our family circle has been broken,' say you. Yes, but only broken that it may be re-formed. You have lost a dear friend: yes, but only lost that friend that you may find him again, and find more than you lost. They are not lost; they are sown." (Spurgeon)

c. **You do not sow that body that shall be... God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body**: When you plant a wheat seed, a big wheat seed does not come up. Instead, a stalk of wheat grows. So, even though our resurrection bodies come from our present bodies, we should not expect that they will be the same bodies or just "improved" bodies.

i. Some mock the idea of resurrection. They say, "Here is a Christian's body, lying in a grave with no casket. The atoms in the body are taken up in grass and eaten by a steer, and the steer is slaughtered and another man eats the meat and takes the atom into his body. Where does that atom go in the resurrection?" But God does not need every atom of a man's body to make a resurrection body. Since every cell of my body contains the DNA blueprint to make a whole new body, God can no doubt take one cell of my dead body and make a glorious resurrection body out of that old blueprint.

3. (39-41) The analogy of living and heavenly bodies.

All flesh *is* not the same flesh, but *there is* one *kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, *and* another of birds. *There are* also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. *There is* one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for *one* star differs from *another* star in glory.

a. **All flesh is not the same flesh**: There are all different kinds of "bodies" in

God's creation, including **celestial bodies**. Our resurrection body will be a heavenly (**celestial**) body, suited for life in heaven, not only life on this earth.
b. **All flesh is not the same flesh** explains why animals do not rise in the resurrection. "Man's flesh only is informed by a reasonable and immortal soul, not so the flesh of other creatures: and hence the difference." (Trapp)
c. There are different **bodies** or structures in the universe (**sun... moon... stars**), and each is created with its own **glory**, and each is suited to its own particular environment and needs. While our present bodies are adapted for the environment of time and earth, our resurrection bodies will be adapted for the environment of eternity and heaven.
d. **There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory**: Some take this to mean there will be different degrees of glory for believers in heaven. "Whether there are degrees of glory, as it seems probable, so we shall certainly know, when we come to heaven." (Trapp)

4. (42-44) Comparison of the two kinds of bodies.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.
a. **So also is the resurrection of the dead**: It's hard to understand what our resurrection bodies will be like, so Paul will use *contrast* to help us, giving four contrasts between our present body and our future resurrection body. On all counts, the resurrection body wins!
· **Incorruption** triumphs over **corruption**.
· **Glory** triumphs over **dishonor**.
· **Power** triumphs over **weakness**.
· **Spiritual** triumphs over **natural**.
b. **Raised in incorruption... raised in glory... raised in power**: Our resurrection body will be glorious!
i. "There is nothing more uncomely, unlovely, and loathsome than a dead body; but it will not be so when it shall be raised again, then it shall be a beautiful, comely body. We shall rise in a full and perfect age, (as is generally thought) and without those defects and deformities which may here make our bodies appear unlovely." (Poole)
ii. "Three glimpses of the body's glory were seen, in Moses' face, in Christ's transfiguration, and in Stephen's countenance." (Trapp)
iii. "The righteous are put into their graves all weary and worn; but as such they will not rise. They go there with the furrowed brow, the hollowed cheek, the wrinkled skin; they shall wake up in beauty and glory." (Spurgeon)

5. (45-49) The two Adams and their bodies.

And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of

dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man*, so also *are* those *who are* heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*.

a. The first perfect man, **Adam**, gave us one kind of body. The second perfect man, Jesus the **last Adam**, can give us another kind of body. He is **a life-giving spirit**.

b. We have all borne the image of the first **Adam**, and those who put their trust in the **last Adam** will also bear His resurrection image. From the first **Adam**, we all are **made of dust**, but from the **last Adam** we can be made **heavenly**. For believers, the promise is sure: **we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man**.

i. Philippians 3:21 repeats Paul's theme: *Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

c. Since we will **bear the image of the heavenly Man**, the best example we have of what a resurrection body will be like is to see what Jesus' resurrection body was like. The resurrection body of Jesus was material and could eat (Luke 24:39-43), yet it was not bound by the laws of nature (Luke 24:31, 24:36-37).

6. (50-53) The need for the resurrection.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

a. **Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**: Paul is not saying, "material things cannot inherit the kingdom of God," because Jesus' resurrection body was a *material* body. **Flesh and blood**, in this context, means "our present bodies." Jesus' resurrection body was not a "pure spirit" body, but a material body described as *flesh and bones* (Luke 24:39) instead of **flesh and blood**. This may seem like a small distinction to us, but it must be an important distinction to God.

b. **Nor does corruption inherit incorruption**: The word **corruption** does not mean moral or ethical corruption, but physical, material corruption. These bodies which are subject to disease, injury, and one day decay, are unsuited for heaven. **Corruption** can't **inherit incorruption**.

c. **I tell you a mystery**: In the Biblical sense, a **mystery** is simply a thing to be understood by spiritual, rather than by merely human perception. Paul will tell the Corinthian Christians something they could not have known by reason or research. They could not have known this unless God revealed it to them.

d. **We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed**: Since **sleep** is a softer way of describing the death of a believer, Paul tells us that not all Christians will die, but there will be a "final generation" who will be transformed into resurrection bodies at the return of Jesus before they ever face death.

i. Does **we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed** mean that Paul predicted Jesus would come in his lifetime? Barclay says "yes," and simply points out that Paul was dead wrong here. But Hodge recognizes that Paul isn't necessarily referring to only believers of *his* day with **all**; it is a word that properly embraces all believers, over all time. Secondly, it was right and proper for Paul to live as if the coming of Jesus was imminent, though he did not in fact know when Jesus would return. When writing Scripture, Paul was infallible, but not omniscient.
ii. "The plain fact is that Paul did not know when these events would take place, and nowhere does he claim to know. So when he says *we* he means 'we believers.'" (Morris)
e. **In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed**: In a single moment, Jesus will gather His people (both dead and on the earth) to Himself, for resurrection.
i. Paul expressed the same idea again in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. This remarkable, instant gathering of Christians unto Jesus in the clouds has been called *the rapture*, after the Latin word for *caught up* in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.
ii. There will come a day when in God's eternal plan, He gives those dead in the Lord their resurrection bodies, and then in an instant He gathers all His people to meet Jesus in the air. All the redeemed on the earth at that time will rise up to meet the Lord in the clouds, and will receive their resurrection bodies.
iii. What of the dead in Christ before that day? Are they lying in the grave, in some kind of soul sleep or suspended animation? No. Paul made it clear that to be *absent from the body* means *to be present with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:8). Either the present dead in Christ are with the Lord in a spiritual body, awaiting their final resurrection body; or because of the nature of timeless eternity, they have received their resurrection bodies already because they live in the eternal "now."
f. **At the last trumpet**: What is the **last trumpet**? Those who believe that Jesus gathers His people *after* He has poured out His wrath on a Jesus-rejecting world sometimes argue that it is the last trumpet of judgment, cited in Revelation 11:15-19. But this is not necessarily the case at all.
i. The **last trumpet** may not refer to the last trumpet of the seven trumpets of Revelation at all, but simply refer to the **last trumpet** believers hear on this earth.
ii. This **last trumpet** may be connected with the *trumpet of God* in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, but not with the trumpets of angels in Revelation 11. A distinction may be made between the trumpet of an angel and the trumpet of God. Chuck Smith points to a grammatical construction that would be different if this trumpet were the trumpet of Revelation 11.
iii. Ironside says that the **last trumpet** was a figure of speech that came from the Roman military, when they broke camp. The first trumpet meant, "strike the tents and prepare to leave"; the second trumpet meant, "fall into line"; the third and **last trumpet** meant "march away." This **last trumpet** describes the Christian's "marching orders" at the rapture of the Church.
g. **So this corruptible must put on incorruption**: Resurrection is a **must** for the Christian's destiny. In light of all this, how could the Corinthian Christians let go of

such an important truth?

7. (54-57) Resurrection is the final defeat of death.

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."
"O Death, where *is* your sting?
O Hades, where *is* your victory?"
The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

a. **Death is swallowed up in victory**: A resurrected body is not a resuscitated corpse. It is a new order of life that will never die again. Death is defeated by resurrection.

i. Freud was *wrong* when he said: "And finally there is the painful riddle of death, for which no remedy at all has yet been found, nor probably ever will be." Compare that with Paul's triumphant declaration, "**Death is swallowed up in victory**"!

b. **O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?** Paul, knowing death is a defeated enemy because of Jesus' work, can almost taunt death, and mock it. Death has no power over the person found in Jesus Christ.

i. "This is the sharpest and the shrillest note, the boldest and the bravest challenge, that ever man rang in the ears of death... Death is here out-braved, called craven to his face, and bidden to do his worst." (Trapp)

ii. "I will not fear thee, death, why should I? Thou lookest like a dragon, but thy sting is gone. Thy teeth are broken, oh old lion, wherefore should I fear thee? I know thou art no more able to destroy me, but thou art sent as a messenger to conduct me to the golden gate wherein I shall enter and see my Saviour's unveiled face for ever. Expiring saints have often said that their last beds have been the best they have ever slept upon." (Spurgeon)

iii. For those who are not in Jesus Christ, death still has its **sting**. "The sting of death lay in this, that we had sinned and were summoned to appear before the God whom we had offended. This is the sting of death to you, unconverted ones, not that you are dying, but that after death is the judgment, and that you must stand before the Judge of the quick and dead to receive a sentence for the sins which you have committed in your body against him." (Spurgeon)

c. **The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law**: The principle of resurrection also proves that we are not under the law any longer. We are no longer subject to the penalty of the law (death), and we are set free from sin. Sin is the ultimate cause of death (Romans 6:23, Genesis 2:17), and the *result* can't be defeated unless the *cause* is defeated.

i. Paul brilliantly links together the ideas of sin, death, and our identification with Jesus' death and resurrection in Romans 6:1-14.

d. **Through our Lord Jesus Christ**: This defeat of death is only possible for those who live **through our Lord Jesus Christ**. For others, there is resurrection and eternal life, but unto damnation. If you are an unbeliever, death is not your friend; it is your enemy.

8. (58) Final application: how our destiny of resurrection means we should stand fast for the Lord right now.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

a. **Therefore... be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord**: Because we know death is defeated and we have an eternal, resurrected destiny with Jesus Christ, we should stand firm and unshakable all the more for Him right now. We should work hard in everything now, working for the Lord, because *right now counts forever*!

b. **Knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord**: Even if your labor is vain to everyone else, and everyone else discounts or doesn't appreciate what you do for the Lord, **your labor is not in vain in the Lord**. It doesn't matter if you get the praise or the encouragement; sometimes you will and sometimes you won't. But resurrection means **that your labor is not in vain in the Lord**.

i. "You must not only *work*, but you must *labour* – put forth all your strength; and you must work and labour *in the Lord* – under his *direction*, and by his *influence*; for without him you can do nothing." (Clarke)

ii. This should make us **steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord**! We don't need to waver, we don't need to change direction, we don't need to fall, and we don't need to quit. *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister* (Hebrews 6:10). The Lord will show His remembrance of our *work and labor of love* at the resurrection.

1 CORINTHIANS 16 – A COLLECTION AND A CONCLUSION

Audio for 1 Corinthians 16:

1 Corinthians 16 – A Collection and a Conclusion

A. The collection for the Jerusalem church.

1. (1-2) Receiving the collection.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

a. **Now concerning** is used again in this letter (see also 1 Corinthians 7:1, 8:1, and 12:1). It means Paul is replying to something the Corinthian Christians asked about.

b. **The collection for the saints**: Paul refers to a collection he gathered for the **saints** in Jerusalem. In several other passages it speaks of this effort among many different churches to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30, 24:17, Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 8:13, 9:9-12).

i. **As I have given orders to the churches of Galatia**: Paul mentioned his heart for the poor Christians in Jerusalem in Galatians 2:9-10. "The business of relieving the poor members of the church, is a moral duty, a sacrifice with which God is well pleased, Philippians 4:18; our faith must work by this love." (Poole)
ii. Why was the church in Jerusalem so needy? There may be many reasons. We know they supported a large number of widows (Acts 6:1-6) and were in the midst of famine (Acts 11:27-30).
iii. Generally, Christians have excelled in these efforts of practical ministry. For example, why do you think the Red Cross is named the Red *Cross*? It started as a Christian organization.
iv. Some have thought that because Christians are commanded to help the poor, especially Christians in need, that this is more important than supporting ministers of the gospel. But in 1 Timothy 5 Paul speaks of the responsibility of the church to *honor widows*, and to consider ministers of the gospel *worthy of double honor*. So, while Christians have a responsibility to help the poor, it does not come before the responsibility to support ministers of the gospel.
c. **The collection for the saints**: General principles from the Bible for supporting the poor in the church:
i. Benevolence distribution is a potential source of conflict and division, and it is the job of deacons to prevent such problems by their wise, Spirit-led actions (Acts 6:1-7).
ii. The church has an obligation to help the truly needy (James 1:27).
iii. The church must discern who the truly needy are (1 Timothy 5:3).
iv. If one can work to support himself, he is not truly needy and must provide for his own needs (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, 1 Timothy 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:11).
v. If one can be supported by their family, he is not truly needy and should not be supported by the church (1 Timothy 5:3-4).
vi. Those who are supported by the church must make some return to the church body (1 Timothy 5:5, 5:10).
vii. It is right for the church to examine moral conduct before giving support (1 Timothy 5:9-13).
viii. The support of the church should be for the most basic necessities of living (1 Timothy 6:8).
d. **Collection for the saints**: The ancient Greek word for **collection** is *logia*. It means, "an extra collection," one that is not compulsory. This was not a "tax" upon the Christians of Corinth. They were free to give as their heart directed them.
i. It is also possible that the sense of "an extra collection" refers to the idea that this was a collection to receive gifts *above* their regular giving. Paul may be receiving a special offering for the poor of Jerusalem.
e. **As I have given orders... so you must do also**: For Paul, this was not an option. The Corinthian Christians were responsible to take an offering among themselves for the needs of the poor Christians of Jerusalem. They could not say, "money is unspiritual. We will just pray for them."
i. This commandment coupled with the idea of "an extra collection" shows that

they were commanded to take an offering, but not every Christian was commanded to individually give. They had to give as God put it on their heart to give.

f. **On the first day of the week**: Paul wanted their giving to be *systematic*, not haphazard. When they came together for worship and the word, they were commanded to receive an offering at the same time.

i. **The first day of the week** also refers to the fact that early Christians met on Sunday, not the Sabbath. They were not against meeting on the Sabbath; they just knew that all days were alike to the Lord (Colossians 2:16-17), and wanted to celebrate the day Jesus rose from the dead (Luke 24:1).

ii. "It is plain from hence, that the gospel churches were wont to assemble upon that day; nor do we read in Scripture of any assembly of Christians for religious worship on any other day." (Poole)

g. **Let each one of you**: Who was supposed to give? **Each one**. Paul wanted all to give. Every Christian should be a giver, because God is a giver (John 3:16).

h. **Lay something aside, storing up**: This has the idea of coming to church with your gift already prepared. In other words, you should seek God about your gift at home, and prepare it at home. This makes one seek the Lord more in their giving, and helps them resist any manipulation to give.

i. **As he may prosper**: Believers who have more should give more. We should give proportionately; that is, if you give $10 a week when you make $100 a week, you should give more money when you make more money.

i. We shouldn't fear giving generously. Proverbs 11:24 is a great commentary on this idea: *There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty*. No one thinks a farmer is "wasting" grain when he scatters it as seed; the more he plants, the more he will harvest.

j. **That there be no collections when I come**: Paul didn't want to manipulate anyone! He wanted giving from the heart, as each heart heard from God, and not in response to a high-pressure fund-raising program.

2. (3-4) Sending the gift to Jerusalem.

And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

a. **Whomever you approve by your letters, I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem**: Paul wanted a representative from the Christians in Corinth to help deliver the gift to Jerusalem. The Corinthian Christians could choose their own representative. Paul did this to be above reproach in financial matters.

b. **Your gift**: Literally, Paul calls giving a *charis* – a grace, a gift freely given. Paul calls it a *grace*, "because it flowed from their free love towards their poor brethren... or because their sense of the free love and grace of God to them, was that which moved them to that charitable act." (Poole)

i. Sometimes Paul called giving a *koinonia*, which means "fellowship, sharing" (2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:13, Romans 15:26).

ii. Sometimes Paul called giving a *diakonia*, which means "a practical service or

ministry" (2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:1, 9:12-13).

B. Concluding words.

1. (5-9) Paul's plan to visit the Corinthian Christians.

Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits. But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.

a. **If the Lord permits**: Paul leaves all his plans up to the will of the Lord. He planned to go through the region of **Macedonia**, visiting Corinth. But things happened differently than he planned. Instead, Paul made a soon, painful visit to Corinth to personally confront them in some areas.

i. "I know the fascination of having a programme, and having everything in order, and knowing where we are going; but let us leave room, at any rate, for the interference of God." (Morgan)

b. **I will tarry in Ephesus... for a great and effective door has opened to me**. Why didn't Paul go to Corinth immediately? Because he sees that God had given opportunity *now* in Ephesus. Paul wisely relied not only on his own desires, but also on God's open doors. Paul knew the secret of *directed service*.

c. **For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries**: Paul also knew that *opposition* often accompanies *opportunities*. Acts 19 speaks of both the opportunities and opposition Paul had in Ephesus at this time.

2. (10-11) Timothy's coming to Corinth.

Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also *do*. Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.

a. **See that he may be with you without fear**: Paul had trouble with the Corinthian Christians not respecting his authority as an apostle and as a minister of the gospel. If they didn't respect Paul, what might they do to a young man like Timothy? So, Paul asks the Corinthian Christians to respect **Timothy** when he comes.

b. **Let no one despise him**: This echoes Paul's later words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12. Apparently, Timothy suffered from both a lack of confidence and a lack of respect. It was important for God's people to not take advantage of this in Timothy, and it was important for Timothy to never give others reason to **despise** him.

c. **That he may come to me**: Wherever Timothy was, he was on his way to see Paul, and would probably stop in Corinth on the way.

3. (12) Apollos will come to Corinth at a later time.

Now concerning *our* brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will

come when he has a convenient time.

a. **I strongly urged him... but he was quite unwilling... he will come when he has a convenient time**: Paul did not sit as a "commanding officer" over **Apollos**, who is mentioned among the apostles (1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:22). This gives a rare insight about how the early church leaders related to each other. It was not a hierarchical relationship and Paul did not dictate his will to Apollos.

4. (13-14) Instructions to stand fast and to love.

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all *that* you *do* be done with love.

a. **Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong**: In a sense, each of these mean the same thing, simply saying it in a different way. Christians are to be like strong soldiers, on guard, watching for their Lord's return.

i. Jesus commanded us to **watch** (Matthew 24:42, 26:41, Mark 13:37).

ii. Paul warned Christians to **stand fast** in their liberty in Jesus (Galatians 5:1), in Christian unity (Philippians 1:27), in the Lord Himself (Philippians 4:1), and in the teaching of the apostles (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

iii. This is the only place in the New Testament where the word translated **be brave** is used (*andrizomai*). Literally, it means, "to act like a man." **Be brave** in the King James Version is *quit you like men*. That is a good, accurate translation of the idea behind the ancient Greek word.

iv. Christians are told to **be strong** in passages like Ephesians 6:10 and 2 Timothy 2:1.

v. "The terms in this verse are all *military*: *Watch ye*, watch, and be continually on your guard, lest you be surprised by your enemies... *Stand fast in the faith* – Keep in your ranks; do not be *disorderly*; be determined to keep your ranks *unbroken*; keep *closetogether*... *Quit yourselves like men* – When you are attacked, do not *flinch*; maintain your *ground*; resist; press forward; strike home; keep compact; conquer... *Be strong* – If one company or division be opposed by too great a force of the enemy, strengthen that division, and maintain your position... summon up all your courage, sustain each other; fear not, for fear will enervate you." (Clarke)

b. **Let all that you do be done with love**: All the watching, all the standing fast, all the bravery, and all the strength the Corinthian Christians might show meant nothing without **love**. They were called to do all those things in a meek, humble spirit of **love**.

5. (15-18) Concerning Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus.

I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with *us*. I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

a. **Stephanas**, **Fortunatus** and **Achaicus**: These were the three men who brought the questions of the Corinthian Christians to Paul. As Paul sends them back with this letter, Paul asked that they be received as devoted servants of the Lord.

i. Apparently, **Stephanas** was the head of the household, and **Fortunatus** and **Achaicus** were two household slaves of his, who accompanied him on his visit to Paul. **Fortunatus** and **Achaicus** were common names for slaves or freedmen (former slaves).
ii. **Fortunatus**: "This man is supposed to have survived St. Paul; and to be the same mentioned by Clement in his epistle to the Corinthians, sec. 59, as the bearer of that epistle from Clement at Rome to the Christians at Corinth." (Clarke)
b. **They refreshed my spirit**: Paul was especially grateful for their coming, because they ministered to Paul's needs when they visited. They did what the Corinthian church should have, but did not (**what was lacking on your part they supplied**).
c. **Therefore acknowledge such men**: Paul could call the household **Stephanas** the **firstfruits of Achaia** because they were among the first saved in that region, and were baptized by Paul himself (1 Corinthians 1:16).

6. (19-20) Greetings from afar.

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

a. **Aquilla and Priscilla** were a married couple who ministered with Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:1-3, 18:24-28). Now they were in Ephesus with Paul and sent their greetings to the Corinthian Christians.
b. **The church that is in their house**: The early church met in houses, because they had few meeting places of their own until the third century.
i. Clarke on **the church that is in their house**: "That is, the *company of believers* who generally worshipped there. There were no *churches* or *chapels* at that time built; and the assemblies of Christians were necessarily held in private houses... The house of *Philemon* was of the same kind; Philemon ver. 2. So likewise was the house of *Nymphas*, Colossians 4:15."
ii. Morris notes that the entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold about 30 people comfortably. Therefore, in any given city, there were probably many different "house churches."
c. **Greet one another with a holy kiss**: Jewish custom and early church tradition indicate that the **holy kiss** was a common greeting in that culture.
i. John Trapp on the **holy kiss**: "Not hollow, as Joab and Judas; not carnal, as that harlot, Proverbs 7:13."

7. (21-24) Paul's personal, final words.

The salutation with my own hand—Paul's. If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. My love *be* with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

a. **With my own hand**: Paul had a secretary write the letters as he dictated them. Often he added a personal note at the end in his own handwriting – which seemed to be poor, according to Galatians 6:11.
b. **If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed**: Paul again stresses the importance of love, pronouncing a heavy curse on those who

talk of commitment to Jesus, but have no genuine love for Him.
i. How can we tell if someone does or **does not love the Lord Jesus Christ**? "Love is an affection of the heart, but discernible by overt acts." (Poole)
ii. **Accursed** uses the ancient Greek word *anathema*. Paul said in Romans 9:3 that he was willing himself to be *anathema* from Jesus if it could accomplish the salvation of the Jewish people
iii. In fact, *anathema* was the third of three levels of discipline among the ancient Jews. The first level was a simple separation of a man from the synagogue for 30 days. If one did not repent in the 30 days, he was under the second degree of discipline, giving him still an undefined time to repent, but warning him of the dire consequences to come. The third level was the *anathema*, and with that all hope of reconciliation and repentance was cut off. The man could never be reconciled to the synagogue, and was no longer accounted as a Jew at all.
c. **Love the Lord Jesus Christ**: How can we *grow* in our **love** for **the Lord Jesus Christ**?
i. Samuel Rutherford described how to grow in love to Jesus: "Strive to make prayer, and reading, and holy conference, your delight; and when delight cometh in, you shall, little by little, find the sweetness of Christ, till at length your soul be over head and ears in Christ's sweetness. Then shall you be taken up to the top of the mountain with the Lord, to know the delights of spiritual love, and the glory and excellency of a seen, revealed, felt, and embraced Christ; and then you shall not be able to loose yourself off from Christ, and to bind your soul to old lovers; then, and never till then, are all the paces, motions, and wheels of your soul in a right tune and spiritual temper. But if this world and the lusts thereof be your delight, I know not what Christ can make of you; you cannot be metal for a vessel of glory and mercy. My desire is that that Lord would give me broader and deeper thoughts to feed myself with wondering at his love. I would I could weigh it, but I have no balance for it. When I have worn my tongue to the stump in praising Christ, I have done nothing to Him. What remaineth then, but that my debt to the love of Christ lie unpaid for all eternity!" (Cited in Meyer)
d. **O Lord, come!** Paul looked for the return of Jesus. *Marana tha* is Aramaic for **O Lord, come!** This was one of the earliest words of the Christian vocabulary.
e. **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all**: The letter ends with Paul pronouncing a blessing of grace and love towards the Corinthian Christians. Paul's final word (before the **Amen**) is **Jesus**. He has emphasized Jesus from beginning to end in this letter.
f. Paul's final words, written with his own hand, do much to reveal his heart of love, even though he had to rebuke these Corinthians strongly. It was Paul's **love**, for both Jesus and His church that made him such a great apostle. Love, expressed through humble service, makes us great in the Kingdom of God.