

# 1 CORINTHIANS COMMENTARY

1 Corinthians 1.....	2
1 Corinthians 2 .....	13
1 Corinthians 3 .....	22
1 Corinthians 4.....	30
1 Corinthians 5 .....	39
1 Corinthians 6 .....	44
1 Corinthians 7 .....	52
1 Corinthians 8 .....	66
1 Corinthians 9 .....	73
1 Corinthians 10 .....	83
1 Corinthians 11 .....	98
1 Corinthians 12.....	111
1 Corinthians 13.....	125
1 Corinthians 14 .....	133
1 Corinthians 15.....	150
1 Corinthians 16 .....	170

# 1 Corinthians 1

**1:1—Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother.**

Two men are addressing the Corinthians, Paul together with a Sosthenes. Very little is known about Sosthenes, but we can infer a fair amount from what we do know. We know that he was the leader at one time of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17). As such he would have been known and respected by the people of Corinth as a spiritual leader. He was one of the few Jewish leaders of Corinth to respond to the truth and was beaten for it by the Jews who did not believe. He became a coworker with Paul in the gospel effort and at the time of this writing they are together. His presence and name will add authority and credibility to Paul's words.

Paul calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ and adds that this is true by the will of God. His authority and calling are not a result of self-appointment or even human appointment and so his message should not be regarded simply as of him. This would be important in view of some of the "tough things" that Paul had to say to the Corinthians.

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

In this verse Paul reminds the Corinthians and all future readers of five things that are true about us. First, we are part of the Church of God. With the leaders, followers, and whomever, the church is God's. He is over it in every sense, in its triumphs and in its apparent setbacks. The local church must be seen as God's church not anyone else's. Second, the church is in Christ Jesus, that is through His work on the cross and the sending of his Holy Spirit, we have been sanctified or set aside for special use. We are not what we were. We have been dedicated to a certain purpose and use in the plan of God. Third, we are saints by calling. It is not a possibility, it is a reality, for it is by calling not by a level of achievement. It is what we have been set apart to be, to be holy ones dedicated to the special works God wishes to do through us. Fourthly, we are part of a bigger family, a part of a family that includes everyone in every place and we could add "at any time" who call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26). We are not alone in this world. Paul wants the Corinthians to have a sense of community. Fifthly, Jesus Christ is our common Lord, our Sovereign and ruling authority. Paul had apostolic authority, but ultimately, he bowed to the same authority as the rest of the family of God. There is within the church the authority of those who occupy the various offices. But ultimately all answer to Christ as Lord and He is the One who unites us, our Head.

**1:3—Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul would have some tough things to take up with the Corinthians, some areas in which they were being sinful and arrogant. They are still blessed of God and Paul can sincerely say that grace and peace are God's will and plan for them. And so he uses the greeting common to all his letters to greet the Corinthians.

**1:4—I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus.**

When the grace of God begins to flow into people's lives so that they are justified and so that the sanctification process starts, and when you have been used by God to make that happen, it makes for wonderful memories. It is cause for repeated thanksgiving. It was for this that Paul set aside all his past privilege and was willing to spend his life in tribulation and sorrow. It is the earthly comfort that comes with giving oneself to the truth. It likely kept him going through many a sleepless night in prison. The response to truth and the work of grace in others that results from our sacrifice fills lives, and that fills our lives.

**1:5—That in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,**

The grace of God brings salvation, and salvation begins now of belief. We tend to think of it as a one-shot transaction, with a result way off in the future somewhere. The Bible does not use the term salvation in this way. Rather, salvation is a process that begins with the belief. At that moment our eternal future becomes secure. But at that moment a process begins in our life that "saves" us from what we have been. All areas of our lives become targets of the great reclamation project carried out by the Holy Spirit as we obediently cooperate.

Our lives, which are conducted in the moral poverty of humanity's fallenness, which both our speech and minds reflect, are enriched deeply by God's grace. The results of this work of the Holy Spirit are that our speech and our understanding of what is right and true changes. So we're being saved daily from all that we once were, and the most significant thing is that it happens from the inside out.

**1:6—even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,**

As we walk in the truth, we become more convinced of it, because we begin to experience Christ and so know that He is alive. This adds to the power of the truth in our lives, makes us receptive to even more, and so we're introduced to whole new spheres of grace that we didn't even know existed. The enriching process of His grace continues growing wider, deeper, and stronger as we interact more and more with truth.

As this experience grows, the reality of truth is confirmed in the minds of others who watch our lives. And so there is an individual effect and a sort of communal effect of God's grace that comes about in and through us. The ultimate proof of the truth of God is the resurrection of Jesus. From that event that same power has been at work and that is evidenced by the number of lives that have been changed. All who have ever believed have experienced that change to some degree.

**1:7—so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

The Corinthians had traveled far enough in their journey with Christ, and the process of grace has been such that Paul could see the presence of every gift in the members of that local assembly. Ministry-wise the Corinthians were very capable. I do not know if we can say this of every local assembly, that it has all the gifts operating, but it may well be true by God's design. It must be quickly added however that this does not

ensure a church's maturity since the record will show that Corinth was not particularly seasoned, and they were said to be still fleshly (3:1-3).

If church health is defined as having people function in their God-given roles in fellowship with the Holy Spirit and in submission to the head, Christ, and having in the body all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, then Corinth at least had the latter. The first part was in process, as it is in the lives of everyone who is as young in the Lord as these Christians were. The church is healthy when they are where they should be in this grand process of walking in the Holy Spirit and submitting themselves to the headship of Christ. This should move forward with passing time. But it can slip backwards very easily. Time alone does not produce maturity in the faith.

The Corinthians were awaiting the revelation of Jesus Christ, what we refer to as the second coming. Their hopes were not in what they could gain for themselves in this life, but in this great event that they saw off in the future. The return of Christ gives us reason for hope. The Christian's hope is based on a theology that includes the belief that the return of Jesus Christ to Earth is certain.

### **1:8—who also will confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Some take verses like this as referring to our justification. However, it fits all of Scripture better to see them as referring to our sanctification, for which we will give account at the judgment seat of Christ. Blamelessness does not mean free of sin so much as it means faithfulness in service.

Jesus “confirms” us through the work of the Holy Spirit. There are human rituals of confirmation within religious systems, but it is this confirmation that Jesus gives that is the important one. The word is βεβαιώσει, and it means to render constant and unwavering.

This ministry of Christ should not be viewed as something done apart from our own cooperation or effort. Such an idea can be read into Scripture, but the Scripture itself clearly speaks of possible failure in the Christian life due to a lack of obedience.

This confirmation, the strengthening of the inner being that comes through our faith-produced obedience, is not however simply commensurate with our effort. It is the nature of grace that we receive back far more than we deserve. Grace is the very thing Paul has attributed this confirmation (same word) of the Corinthians to (see verses 4-6) thus far. The result is that on the day of our Lord, which begins with Him gathering all who are of faith to be with Him, we will be right where we should be if we are listening to the voice of His Spirit. He will find us doing what we should be doing, and more important, being what we should be.

### **1:9—God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

God is faithful. That's good news. Others may fail and we may fail, but God is true to His word. The task and overall challenge of our lives may be foreboding, but we can rise to it because God is faithful. He has called us into fellowship with His Son. We are not being summoned to tasks primarily. We've been summoned to a relationship with Jesus Christ. That relationship will lead to shared work, even as a marriage does, but the work arises from the relationship and is made possible through the relationship.

This is a most critical idea, and it is why we must abide in the vine to bear fruit (John 15). When the relationship is lost, heartless service comes about along with legalism, religious form, its companion hypocrisy and eventually burnout. This concept is essential to the long-term health and success of any Christian, particularly those in ministry. The devotional life is the most significant thing they do, and it must be conducted in a relational way, in a way that strengthens the relationship between themselves and Christ for it to have its intended value. It must not be considered a task, done when a certain amount of time is spent. It must produce intimacy with Christ, a mutual exchange of emotion, ideas, concerns, plans, and heart concerns, or it will not strengthen. It will simply be one more task for a tired Christian to do. Don't ever exchange fellowship for simply being an employee.

**1:10—Now I exhort you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.**

Having spoken of the work that has been done in them by God's grace, Paul now begins to speak of the unfinished business of their lives, that great part of the work of God that remains undone in them. There is always much that remains undone in the life of Christians. We are called to fellowship with Christ, an ongoing relationship that initiates and sustains an ongoing process. For this we need to be constantly exhorted, because it is human nature to stop and rest, then to get used to the surroundings and settle down. We live in the lowlands rather than the high lands. So Paul begins to exhort in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ. He is speaking as an official representative of Christ, bearing his personal message to them.

It is Paul's heart and will that they agree that the divisions among them be repaired and healed. Theirs is to be no mere surface unity. They are to think alike and reach the same judgment and opinion. They are to strive for that completeness, that submission to the Holy Spirit that results in their individual minds being one with the Head, who is Christ. It is through this that they will be one with each other. All of that is wrapped up in what Paul describes as being made complete.

This completeness in individual lives leads to a corporate unity to the degree that is impossible to explain from a merely human vantage point. It is miraculous. Yet it only comes when a human work of ongoing and continual submission is faithfully and persistently carried out. This is the work Paul is exhorting them to do.

The term for mind is νοῦς, the term for judgment is γνῶμη. Paul is probably looking for them to have the same internal values and thought processes and through these to arrive at the same conclusion in practical life matters.

**1:11—For I have been informed concerning you, my brother, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.**

After stating his wish and prayer for them Paul reveals why he has stated the concern. This it is not simply a generic request that he prays for any church. It is a specific one for them because he has specific information about them from some who know them that reveal that they are not thinking right in matters that affected their unity. As a result, there were these quarrels among them.

Sometimes for people to “get it” and make application of truth to themselves a leader must get very specific and straightforward about the problem. This is because human nature is such that we can be oblivious to the obvious. In fact, this is a common human disorder. Paul will therefore speak very specifically to give precise definition to the issue.

**1:12—Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.”**

These statements revealed that the Corinthians were straying in cultic directions in terms of the practice of their faith. They were not seeing the practice of faith as a broad movement set forth and led by Christ, that individual teachers then expound on from their differing perspectives. Instead, they were elevating the individual perspectives above the sum of them and so becoming fragmented into followers of various teachers. This remains common in humanity.

To be called a Christian is simply to be understood as being “of Christ.” To be of Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or any other individual may identify a favorite personal perspective on following Christ. But it is to leave Christ. It is to exchange His teaching and the breadth and magnificence of Christ for a spot in a system that offers a view of Him that is personally attractive. No matter how good the teacher or leader, to allow them to become the focus always results in a lowering of the bar in terms of the experience of the faith. It is a terrible yet frequent exchange we make. It was apparently the dominant practice among the Corinthians because Paul says that “each one” was doing it.

**1:13—Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**

Paul asks three questions, each of which makes a profound point. When he asked, “has Christ been divided?” He is reminding them of the unity with other Christians that we have through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of what is felt, or experienced, this unity in Christ is THE fact that is essential. Disunity is a contradiction to the exclusive importance of Christ.

When Paul asked if he himself had been crucified for them, he is reminding them of the One to whom they really owed their salvation. It is to Christ, not the one who brought them the news of Christ and His life and death for them.

Baptism was the ceremony that visually represented their belief in the Jesus and their placement by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, the forgiveness of sin, and more. Paul is reminding them that baptism was not done by the authority of the name of Paul. In his name none of these great things that marked the Christian experience came about. And so the unspoken message is that in attaching their identity to human teachers and leaders they are engaging in idolatry. They are giving those individuals reverence that should be reserved for Christ.

**1:14—I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,**

In view of the present error in their thinking, and in view of what Paul felt was his chief purpose and mission (which he will state concisely in verse 17), Paul is thankful to God that few of the Corinthians can point to him as the one who baptized them. He dwells

on the issue of how baptism was done in their lives to emphasize that Christ is the One who should be object of their faith and affection. In retrospect, in view of the errors that had sprung up in their thinking, he is thankful that others performed the baptisms.

**1:15—that no one should say you were baptized in my name.**

Paul here states his reason for being thankful that only a handful had been baptized by him in Corinth. He is grateful not to have contributed more to their errant thought. This tone lends emphasis to his words and his argument that Christ must be central in the minds of Christians, or they are practicing something other than Christianity.

**1:16—Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanus, beyond that, I do not know whether I baptize any other.**

Paul remembers one other family he baptized, that of Stephanus, after citing Crispus and Gaius as the only ones. Paul's memory seems fuzzy, and his words have an indefinite tone to them. This helps to add emphasis to the thought that follows. This thought will convey something he doesn't just believe, but that he feels and practices.

**1:17—For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void.**

Paul felt no special passion or calling when it came to baptism. He observed it, but He saw even legitimate ceremony as secondary in terms of his calling. This is obvious from the underlying tone of the whole passage. This is instructive for us to note this. It is not that the sacraments or so-called ordinances of the church are unimportant. It is that they are defined and take their place under the main thing, the person of Jesus Christ. The practices of the faith cannot be allowed a greater place than this that they have, even something like baptism which was certainly a part of Jesus commission of the Apostles (Matthew 28:19).

Paul will now begin to develop that which must be kept central. His own calling was to preach the gospel. For this he has been sent. As a sent one, an apostle, this was his commission. His preaching was to be carried out in a certain matter to a specific end. That end was that the work of Christ on the cross and its good-news-nature. This must not be minimized. It must be kept central in our thinking today.

Paul was commissioned to preach, but not to package the gospel in some way that would be flattering to him. He would not lead others to feel he was wiser or more holy than he was. Paul avoided such "cleverness" for the very reason that the Corinthians were demonstrating. It is too easy for people to begin to give the human leaders the central place in the practice of their faith and to lose sight of the fact that Christ's work on the cross is the reason we are in the household of God. This life we call Christianity is about Christ first and foremost, not His servants. Leaders must take pains to keep it that way.

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

There are two distinct views of Christ's work on the cross. To those outside the faith, there was no work at all. It is utter foolishness. It is not even a legitimate "theory" to them. These are perishing. By their unbelief they are left outside the scope of the grace and mercy of that great event.

To those within the scope of belief the message of the cross epitomizes the power of God. The cross represents God's power to orchestrate the events of earth so that they bring about His purposes. The cross shows Yahweh's power to act through evil to bring about His desire and satisfy the demands of every aspect of His character. It shows His power to bring about through imperfect people and events matters of His will and of great eternal consequence. It shows His power to overcome the power of the evil one's lies, deceits, and schemes. It shows His moral power to provide for the complete moral reclamation and re-creation of those "hopelessly" immoral, power to reverse an immoral current. It shows His power to create a righteous and holy kingdom amid evil's cruel and vicious domain. Amid the kingdom of evil, and against its suppression is the power of Yahweh and the cross that transforms the vilest subjects of that kingdom and makes them instruments of righteousness given to the service of a holy God. In every sense He can reverse every evil intent of all. And besides all this, the cross shows the unwavering, relentless love of Yahweh that focuses and directs His limitless power! The cross epitomizes the power of God, affirming its infinite nature and revealing the love directs it.

**1:19—For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."**

This is a quote from Isaiah 29:14. The context of the original remark is the well-known statement, "this people draw near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me... Therefore behold, I will deal once again marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous..." It is in this context that God says He will destroy the wisdom of the wise men of Israel. Paul quotes the Septuagint here and changes one word. He chooses to say the cleverness of the clever I will "set aside." The Septuagint says God will "conceal" or "hide" (κρυψω), the discernment of their discerning men.

The meaning of the prophecy is that God would deal with the Jews in a way that defied all expectations of reason. In fact, He would deal "wonderfully marvelous" with them. All the scheming of the supposedly wise, God said He would destroy. This "wisdom and scheming" has in mind that of the evil one and extends to all who have followed him. These all, like children, believe they have come up with some new idea or deceitful scheme that will outsmart God, enabling them to "cast off His fetters." God will destroy all such arguments and inventions of those opposed to Him.

The gospel does that in the hearts of those who believe. It is truth and spreads the truth to all who listen so that they see through the scam of the evil one. Even as the unbelieving parade around in supposed wisdom, the children of God through the gospel are not deceived. The day will come when it happens in a very visible way. Evil's entire scheme with its leaders will melt away. It will happen in several ways. Hardcore rebels will look on Him whom they have pierced and be converted (Zechariah 12:10-13:1). The armies of the Antichrist, the world united against the will of God, will be slain with just the word of the resurrected Christ as He comes to claim His kingdom.



**1:20—Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?**

One answer is the answer to all three questions. It is not even stated by Paul. It is that obvious. Where are they? They have aligned themselves against God. They have chosen to stand with the evil ones who said of God's Anointed One, "We will not have this man rule over us!" And so they have spurned God's love and made the most foolish of all mistakes, deciding to join the forces of those who are destined to be cast aside by the wrath of their Creator. Thus, those who have projected such wisdom, even as Satan did in the garden, rush headlong into the worst of intellectual errors and into the worst of miscalculations.

**1:21—For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.**

It was the wisdom of God that shaped and implemented His plan. His plan and His will reflect His knowledge and understanding of all things—His omniscience. That wisdom produced a plan that allowed for humanity's salvation. But that plan would not allow humanity to save themselves. For if it would have, humanity would have had that which they could boast about, and that pride is the root of all other sin. That pride was found first in the evil one, Satan, who led humankind into it. So in the wisdom of God, who knew pride to be the root of all other sins, the plan was hatched which saved humans apart from any effort and goodness on their part.

Because of this plan, humans worship God when they reflect on their own salvation. They do not exalt themselves. That would lead them right back into the sin of the evil one. The world's wisdom in matters of salvation leads them away from salvation. It brings them no closer to relationship with God or to knowing Him. It is in accepting one's helplessness, one's moral inability, that salvation becomes possible.

Now moral inability seems like foolishness just as God becoming human and serving humanity seems foolish. It is a foolish message the message of the gospel. It goes against all human instinct. But it saves all who believe. And this ending seemed well pleasing to God. Since the world had used His gift of intellect to exalt themselves over their Creator it seemed fitting that His plan would seem counter intuitive. It seemed fitting that pride in one's intellect or competence in one's ability to devise and execute plans that lead to all forms of profit, had to be set aside in the matter of personal salvation.

**1:22—for indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom;**

The religious mood of two cultures of Paul's day, both present in the Church in Corinth, is expressed here. Among the Jews skepticism prevailed so that they were not about to trust in what could not be proven. They were "slow to believe" as a group. Among the Greeks a mysticism prevailed, a desire to sense what lies beyond the sensible and a desire to experience what lies beyond the rational—even the absurd! In both cases truth was becoming a rare commodity. Reason was abandoned to discover the divine, and reason and skepticism in the case of the Jews were synonymous with the divine.

The approach of the Jews was analytical. It dealt with data, particularly with legalities. It was analysis of Christ through the letter of the Law. The Greeks "searched. Their

approach included this objective but also readily crossed over into the subjective. They wanted to experience the gods. There's was a sensual appetite for the spiritual and the divine.

**1:23—but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness,”**

To the Jews, the idea that they needed to be saved and so made right with God was a stumbling block. They could not get past it. Did not God's choice of them reinforce the contradictory nature of such an idea? Christ, the humble servant, the itinerant preacher who had spoken primarily of them as evil, how could such a One be their hope? There was this intellectual barrier of presupposition to the whole idea of their Christ dying on the cross.

But there was also a great barrier built by their own stubbornness. How could they accept Jesus as Christ now that they had crucified Him? To do so would be to admit how far removed they were from God. They stumbled over their own pride which was clearly brought out in them by the very idea that Christ was their Messiah. And the Greeks, whose thoughts permeated the Gentile world of Paul's day, had their own well-developed understanding of the gods. By their standard of wisdom one God didn't fit and this Jesus certainly didn't fit.

**1:24—but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

Paul teaches in his writings that there are those who have experienced a special call of God, a summons to believe. He teaches that it is this call that brings an individual to faith. It is of course a great debate what all is implied by this, but the fact remains that Paul's teachings include the idea of a call from God and that such a call is irresistible.

Those who are thus called understand Christ in a different way than those not called. The called recognize Christ as the power of God, God's own arm bringing about humanity's salvation. Christ is God's power manifested when brought to bear on man's spiritual plight. He is also God's wisdom made manifest, God's salvation that satisfies the conflicting demands of His love and justice at once. In Christ we see God doing what man had no power to do. Christ is the power of God. Through Christ we see that God is enabled to do justly what His love wanted to do in humanity's behalf. Christ is the wisdom of God.

**1:25—because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.**

God's simplest workings are not fully understood by humanity. In becoming a human God revealed Himself to humanity in a way that humanity could perhaps begin to comprehend Him. Yet even when God did this, the God-man was not understood or comprehended in a complete way by humanity. In the man Jesus we see God at His most basic level, at His most vulnerable moment. We could say we saw Him at His most foolish moment, or at His weakest moment. Yet we are confounded at times by the hypostatic union, the fact undiminished deity and perfect humanity united forever in one person.

Yet in that momentous miracle, Christ's wisdom was overwhelming. As a child He astounded the scholars of His day. Those who saw Him work said, "What manner of man is this?" Those who heard his words marveled at His teaching. And one who watched Him die said, "truly this was the son of a God!" Even in His death, the experience of the supposed inevitable human weakness, there was astounding power that reverberates through all creation for all time. By subjecting Himself to humanity's most powerful weapon, the taking of one's physical life, He showed that even death was in the end subject to working His purposes. Death could hold Him only until it had fully served Him.

**1:26—For consider your calling, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;**

If we look around at one another, we must admit that there is not much in our natural makeup that would be impressive. There are not many exceptionally talented or capable people within the body of Christ. Our strength as a movement has never been our own. Our strength is our Lord's. We are a miracle.

It is not particularly flattering, this line of thinking. But it is the truth, and the truth is that God has chosen to carry out His work through run-of-the mill-people for the most part. His glory rests not in just how He created us, but in how He re-created us. And so as we look at one another we find that apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us we are not people who distinguish ourselves due to our great wisdom. There are not many of us who are great physical specimens or who have exceptional strength of personality and charisma. There are not many born into special privilege, with good bloodlines, related by birth to noble people. We are common people for the most part coming from "common stock."

**1:27—but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,**

The wise and strong people of the world will for the most part be passed over in the things of the Spirit that involve true wealth, power, and wisdom. And this is the result of purposeful acts of God. This is how He wants it to go down. And so everything from philosophies to empires have their seasons on Earth, surfacing and enjoying great favor, then gradually fading from the scene. But the truth of God outlives them and persists from generation to generation even though most in every age consider the faith foolish, the crutch of the weak.

**1:28—And the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not that He might nullify the things that are,**

We must admit as we look at ourselves that in many contexts we are not even "dull-normal!" God has chosen to work through and in the people, the situations, and even activities that are considered "low life." His treasures are found in the people and things that have been cast off and found to be lacking. These He reclaims and works through, and one day they will rule the earth destroying and bringing to nothing all that the so-called high and mighty have established.

**1:29—That no man should boast before God.**

The pride of man, that which led to the original rebellion of the first humans, is that which God is seeking to undo. And so in His great plan that unfolds we will see Him to be the cause and sustainer of every good thing and every good person. We will see a great work that has been carried out by a rag-tag army of people whose strength can only be explained by the sovereign power of God. The day will come when no man boasts before God.

**1:30—but by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,**

All the works that are part of Yahweh's salvation came to us freely from Him. All were set in motion because of God's doing not our own. He is the initiator as well as the One who sustains our relationship. By His sovereign will and work we are in Christ Jesus, that is, we are joined to Him legally in covenant relationship as well as in actual spiritual union through the Holy Spirit. The result is that God views us as a part of Christ, one with Him.

God's provision to us in this union and this standing is that Christ might be to us wisdom, the very wisdom of God imparted personally and continually to us. We are no longer drawing simply from our own resources. He is wisdom incarnate and here we are told that wisdom has come to reside in us. In joining ourselves to Christ we come to recognize Him not as "the fool on the Hill," but as the very essence of God and because of that the essence of life itself. And His Spirit is united to ours.

Christ became righteousness to us. Our sins were charged to His account. He paid for them by His death. Where we once lacked and came up short, we are forever supplied by Him. He also became to us sanctification, meaning we were set apart as instruments of the work of God. It is carried out in us and through us by His Holy Spirit. Through Him there is a process whereby we become more like Christ along with others who are experiencing this great process in their lives. He also became redemption to us. We are personally redeemed, bought back by Him. Our debt to God because of sin has been fully paid by Him, the demands of His justice fully met. We are also participants in the redemptive process, His work of saving His creation from the presence and power of evil. It is a process that involves world events, knowledge of which we have been given. It involves a visible kingdom of God on earth, in which we will reign with Him. It involves a new heaven and earth, our eventual eternal home where we will live completely free of the presence and influence of evil. All of this is His doing, not ours.

**1:31—that, just as it is written, "let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."**

This verse is based on the statements of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 9:23-24. It gives the reason for all that Paul has stated beginning in verse 17. This is the grand outcome of God's entire program, that humanity might come to understand their own dependence on their Creator, not on anything human. In the practical issue at hand where members of the Corinthian church had chosen human leaders as their heroes, gurus, and even perhaps idols, this statement emphasizes the folly of such thinking. It reinforces the supremacy of Christ, the absolute superiority of Him, and the subjection to Christ of all the human line including Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and any other leader that might arise.

## 1 Corinthians 2

**2:1—and when I came to you brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.**

Paul came to Corinth (Acts 18), because of what we've labeled "the Macedonian call" (Acts 16:9). That call of God led Paul and his companions into Macedonia. This turned out to be a difficult venture marked by jail time in Philippi, near riots in Thessalonica, and the idolatry of Athens. It was a historical trip in that the gospel was decisively preached in the cultural crossroads of the world and the church established in its fledgling form on the European continent.

This verse describes Paul's feelings as he came to Corinth. The contrast between his feelings and the historic results of the mission couldn't be much greater. In the Acts account we see him reasoning with the Greeks in Athens and in the Jewish synagogues elsewhere. We see that his speech must have been very effective and his overall manner to some degree at least, attractive, because he made some decisive inroads for the faith. Yet this is how he felt he did it. The world of one's feelings is a tricky world. I've experienced several successful moments at times when I felt anything but successful.

Paul did not feel he had a brilliant strategy or that his gift of speaking would carry the day. He did not arrive on the continent relying on these. Yet history would say that it would be hard to imagine one who could have better articulated the faith to the world. But Paul, in terms of his conscious methodology, did not attempt to "package" the testimony of God in a way that would have sensory appeal. That is the primary point he wants to make in these verses. It is big and we do well to ponder it.

It is interesting that Paul describes his message here as "the testimony of God." That is how the message of Christ should always be viewed. Ministry to others from the New Testament perspective is God giving us His testimony in the matter of spiritual things for us to pass along precisely.

**2:2—For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.**

Paul's strategy was deliberately thought through. He determined what he would project, and he determined that it would be Christ and that he himself would not put a "spin" on Christ. This does not mean he was not culturally relevant. The story in Acts 17 of his presentation in Athens exposes the folly of any who would force that meaning on this verse. What Paul avoided was not the legitimate sensitivity to culture, but the changing of the actual truth, and specifically the temptation to leave out or minimize the inglorious end of Christ's human life. Instead that "inglorious" element was made central, or more accurately kept central, because Paul realized that the crucifixion is the heart of the gospel. Other things might be debated. Some might even be lived out very differently in different cultures. But the things every person must be made to face are these: the guilt of their own sin, their own inability to pay for their offenses, and God's gracious payment to Christ on their behalf. It can be summed up in this statement; Christ crucified by humanity, for humanity, according to God's design. This is the central truth of the gospel, the thing which must be pondered and embraced by every person wishing to be embraced by God.

**2:3—and I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.**

It was while at Corinth that the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, “Stop being afraid!” (Acts 18:9-10). We know very little about these fears from the account in Acts since Paul’s actions recorded there seem to reflect boldness. It must be that underneath his activity carried out in faith, there were natural fears he was overcoming through the Spirit’s power. We know that there were a few legitimate fears he could have had for his own safety. The wounds were scarcely healed from the beating at Philippi, and the Jews who were causing him trouble there showed no hesitancy to follow him to other places. And so in these words we must not read that Paul was a coward. He was a man whose body told him how much hatred certain ones held for Christ in him. They were powerful people, a legitimate threat to Paul’s well-being.

He arrived in Corinth after brief stays in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. It is likely that his body was not fully healed, having been beaten “with rods” (Acts 16:22-23), and having absorbed “many blows.” This is likely “the weakness” spoken of here. As he reflected on the memory of Philippi, the close call that immediately followed in Thessalonica, and then the fact that the trouble followed to Berea, it is likely the fears expressed themselves in “trembling” within Paul.

The Lord, knowing the legitimate turmoil felt by Paul in his inner being comforted him and sought to encourage and strengthen him through a vision in which He guaranteed his safety at Corinth and his fruitfulness in ministry while there. It is likely that Paul healed both physically and emotionally during his relatively lengthy stay at Corinth, gathering strength from the Lord through fellowship, and from the challenge of ministry.

**2:4—And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,**

Neither the content that Paul passed on by way of life to the Corinthians nor that delivered to them through his preaching was persuasive because it was recognized as “wise” by the standard of his times. Nor was it delivered in the style that would have been considered in line with that of the great thinkers of the day. It was not “persuasive” in the normal sense of the word, by it appealed to that combination of emotions and intellect that commonly compels humans to accept ideas or courses of action.

But Paul’s words were of the Spirit. As such they registered not only in the minds of the hearers, but at the deepest level of their beings. They were persuasive not from without, but from within. They were powerful words because of this, words that though hard to understand through powers of reason, nevertheless registered and rang of truth to the inner being. So these words broke through walls and barriers that were erected by so-called wisdom against them. Even as the outer being grappled with the message, the inner being embraced it.

Every person that has engaged the proclamation of truth has had to make the choice between seeking to facilitate the miracle of transformation by the Spirit as recorded in the New Testament, or of trying to duplicate the organization, methodology and impact as we have come to experience it in our times.

**2:5—that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.**

Paul's ultimate objective which he strove for in his strategy is given here. It was that the faith of the Corinthians be dependent only on God and His ongoing work. They would not be dependent on the prodding of some human teacher, nor would their faith rest on some clever group dynamic established by a gifted leader whose presence then became essential. And so by his own intentional strategy arrived at through the help of God, Paul did not bring to Corinth a "slick" approach that would be applauded or accepted by those simply looking for more earthly wisdom. His demeanor was not one of confident self-assertion. His spoken words were not compelling because they embraced or advanced the wisdom of the day. All such "spiritual bravado" would produce not a belief system, but a faddish, spiritual-looking, emotional ebb and flow in the lives of the Corinthians. It might bring about the new birth of some, but not the ongoing miracle of transformation or the spiritual life and health that were the agenda of God.

**2:6—yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature, a wisdom however not of this age, nor the rulers of this age, who are passing away;**

None of this is to say that Paul's message, which was "the testimony of God" (verse 1), was not wise. It was wisdom in its purest form, the account of divine wisdom incarnated in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. So Paul's message was wise and his words were words of wisdom. But they did not conform to the wisdom of the time, and they were not such that they would be embraced by the contemporary leaders in human thought. They were immediately recognizable to the spiritually mature. But the spiritual gurus of the day, to those curious experimenters who followed them, and even to the legitimate spiritual babe, Paul's words did not have natural appeal and Paul himself did not have a charismatic draw among the Corinthians.

**2:7—but we speak God's wisdom in the mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory.**

A mystery occurs when truth can be missed, when the data must be examined, the order of things carefully studied, lessons carefully corroborated and collated, to find the truth that explains the entire picture of events or occurrences. Wisdom is not gained at first glance or without pondering. On the other hand, it is not necessarily hard and complex, to require great learning or long arduous study. In fact, this truth that Paul speaks of is a mystery because of its simplicity, because it is hidden in plain sight, camouflaged by its ordinary appearance.

The wisdom of God is everywhere presented not as that which requires classic human search or complex journey of the soul or being transported to another realm (Deuteronomy 30:11-16). It is a mystery because of where we tend to look, not because of where God has deposited it. It is written in human language and put in book form. With this written knowledge we can utilize the inner voice of our conscience and discern the voice of the Holy Spirit to understand the more subjective voice of God.

The mysteries of God were embodied in Christ. They are stated plainly in His life and in His words. Then the apostles explained and articulated that wisdom at the direction of the Holy Spirit so that it eventually came to be in written form. Paul was one of the ones to articulate that wisdom of God that was hidden in Christ. This written revelation of wisdom allows us to see what God plainly and repeatedly had planned and set in motion on our behalf before time even began.

It is an important thought, this that Paul expresses about “our glory.” We can understand “our glory” as a reference to what makes our life meaningful and that which gives the entire human experience significance. It is found in Christ. So we can say that there is nothing better to embrace in terms of life values, no grander vision to advance and support. Christ in some sense is the answer to every life.

The term “hidden mystery” is a perfect word to describe this wisdom. It is not that it is easy to grasp or that it is naturally understood. But when the gospel is believed and the message of Christ accepted, one holds in hand that which when pondered, yields wisdom for every imaginable situation.

**2:8—the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;**

The wisdom of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, was not comprehended by the religious leaders of His day. Various things blinded them from seeing the truth in Him, primarily that they sought truth on their own terms. That is the surest way of missing what God has to say. Had they sought truth on the terms of their own Scriptures, not selectively but for the message, they would have recognized and believed in Jesus. Instead, they crucified Him who was the sovereign Lord of glory. In doing so they turned their back on the wisdom that leads to eternal life.

It is a particularly hard thing for rulers to accept Christ. It is because He and His teachings have great implications about the nature of their role in creation and specifically their accountability. Spiritual truth can take root and establish itself well only in soil that has been properly prepared. Such soil is found in people who have learned to follow. It takes root in those who are ready to surrender to whatever they learn the truth may imply as they become acquainted with it. They are ready not only to learn it but to ponder and implement it, allowing it authority over them.

It seems to be an axiom of human life that the earthlier authority we get, the more difficult accepting authority becomes. This is particularly true in the case of spiritual truth because its movement usually begins among the humblest of the rank-and-file and moves to the ears of those in authority. It requires a humbling of oneself that rulers are usually unwilling to condescend to. This was true of the rulers of Paul’s time. It has been true ever since with very few exceptions.

**2:9—but just as it is written, “things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those you love Him.”**

It seems that this verse is most often jerked from its context and applied to Christian people. We are told that as God’s people we have no idea of the wonderful things that await us from the hand of God. The context shows that this is not the intended meaning or application. The things God has prepared for those who love Him are not hidden to those who love Him. They are hidden from the minds of the unbelieving.



This verse answers some key questions that pop into the mind of any thinking person. Are we imagining the God we believe in? Are we imagining our present relationship with Him including His leading, His care, and answered prayer? Are we imagining eternal life due to our fear of the finality of death?

Paul begins the verse with the conjunction “but.” It shows that further thought is being added by way of contrast. Paul has just stated that the rulers of the world would not have crucified Christ if they had known the wisdom of God. This verse, beginning with “but,” states that the absence of such wisdom among them to accept Christ rather than killing Him, should not be considered particularly bizarre or abnormal. The great goodness of Yahweh has not entered the heart or mind of the unbeliever.

These rulers could not have arrived at such wisdom to worship Christ by their senses or even accidentally through their imaginations. To show this Paul draws from verses in Isaiah that speak of the condition of people apart from God. To these the things of God are completely hidden and the life of God, eternal life, unimaginable. This life is not laid hold of in the way that most knowledge is arrived at, through the pondering of information fed to us by the activity of our senses. True spirituality is elusive in this sense because it deals in the realm that lies beyond our senses. Because of this we could not even arrive at it accidentally through our imagination. Imagination builds its pictures purely off what the senses initially provide. And so the wisdom of God is not something our eyes would naturally see or our ears hear of, nor would we even imagine it, if led only by our own senses.

Now if spiritual things lie beyond the power of normal human senses and even beyond their imaginative powers, how do we explain the presence of so much religious thought in the world? We must remember that this inability has not always characterized humankind. In the Garden of Eden, the first family on earth experienced the life of God firsthand. Their eyes saw it, their ears heard His voice, their hands touched the things of Him. This experience of God was like a flash of light that lasted very briefly but left behind images of another reality.

When sin caused their spiritual death and darkness set in, they could only speak to successive generations of such life by memory. They could not point to it so that the senses could absolutely verify it. From then on it was an oral tradition that had to be apprehended by faith. Those who exercised faith entered the realm of the wisdom of God eventually verified in the person of Jesus Christ. Those who did not were left with a stimulated imagination, a germ of truth regarding another realm, that gave birth to all matters of religious and pseudo-spiritual thought. It was added to, revised, altered, and passed along. And so there is no shortage of religious schemes and systems in our world, for where truth has once enlightened, man’s imagination can run wild.

Now there are many who believe that the Christian life is just such an imaginary scheme. They believe reality consists purely of what we see and observe, nothing more and nothing less. To them the thought of eternal life is folly, the cruel work of vivid imaginations.

God assures us in this verse that such belief as we hold—a loving God who became a man, who saved us by grace and who will raise us from the dead to live with Him—lie beyond the capabilities of the imagination of people except through a work of the Holy Spirit. The human mind will not run in the direction of such a noble concept as a perfect, loving, gracious God. We will imagine a merit system, like virtually every relationship we experience on the fallen earth. We fabricate a god or gods of retribution because we fashion a god in our own image. Our imagination would never

arrive at a God such as the One whose wisdom has been revealed to us, who has prepared a life for all who love Him, who freely extends forgiveness to the worst offenders. That idea never enters the heart of humanity except through a special work of God.

And so in the vast and diverse sea of religious thought and device, the fact remains that there is absolute truth about God, His own wisdom, that He has made known. It is the germ of all humanity's imaginations about God. But though our human imaginations are quite active, we are incapable of imagining the wonderful truth of Yahweh. It comes to us only through revelation. So what Christians believe is not merely the product of our own active imaginations. It is wisdom from God, hidden to many but made visible to us through a very special work of God.

**2:10—For to us God has revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.**

The wisdom of God consists of the knowledge of what God is doing and how it applies to oneself. It is the application of the knowledge of the divine. Most, due to their own stubbornness of heart, have no knowledge of God and so cannot possibly apply such knowledge. Some behave wisely, having learned behavior by rote without knowledge or understanding of God. A few possess the wisdom of God, that is, they are learning His heart and imitating it in the practical matters of life.

There is one explanation for the condition of this latter group of people. God has done a very special work in them through the Holy Spirit. These have come to believe certain things about themselves, about Jesus, about the future. We may argue what role their own wills have played in this matter. But one thing is certain. God is the One who should be credited with the result, which is their faith. And so Paul here refers to the work of the Holy Spirit who through the mouths of others and through our own consciences made known to us the truth, wisdom from God, that which we otherwise could not have known.

That which lies beyond the ability of our senses to perceive, and which lies beyond our creative power to imagine, has been made known to us by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit can do this because unlike us, nothing lies beyond His ability to explore and perceive. He searches the depths of God. The word for search is *εραυνά* from *εραυνάω*. It means to examine, to inquire, to try to find out. We might use the word "research," except that this implies a process requiring time, which is not an issue for Yahweh.

There is nothing about God, even His deepest most personal thoughts, that the Holy Spirit does not understand, because the Holy Spirit is God's deepest innermost being and He has been given to reside within us. We have through the special work of God, the Holy Spirit living within us. Through His presence and influence the deep things of God become known to us. We have the wisdom of God constantly being imparted to us whereby, if we respond to it, we constantly grow to understand more of that divine wisdom.

**2:11—for who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.**

Those thoughts of humanity that are unexpressed remain unknown. There is no human being that can describe the thoughts of another apart from God's intervention. Such thoughts are known only to the inner being of the person that has them. They alone

know what they are thinking. God's thoughts are the same. That which is unrevealed is known to the Spirit alone. No person, apart from the Spirit, can know what is not revealed. And so in the Holy Spirit we have united with our spirits, the sum of God's thinking which then can become known by us as we live in harmony with the Spirit.

**2:12—Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God.**

We have been regenerated, made a new and different by the uniting of our spirits with the Spirit of God. Before this act our spirits were one with the spirit of the world, so that all our inner being knew was the instinctive ways of the world. We call this depravity. That word speaks of the condition we live in before regeneration when we are morally incapable of doing that which pleases God. It doesn't mean we didn't do anything good. It means that when motives, intent and all the elements that stimulated our actions are examined even the good is found to be impure, corrupted in some way by evil.

The Spirit of God enables us to escape this "Earth-boundness," this slavery to the world system. He leads us into a whole other world based on our growing knowledge of the truth of God. Through the Spirit, light is shed for us on the true nature of things, and we come to know and accept God's grace. The things freely given to us by God we come to understand and accept. We enter a relationship with God that allows us, as we are faithful, to have an ever-increasing knowledge of these things.

**2:13—which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thought with spiritual words.**

Paul says that the things he had come to know about, things which have been given to us freely by God, he was passing along. Then Paul makes a very important claim with respect to the things he had passed along. His message is not words that are acquired and passed on by mere human wisdom. The message of Paul and the others who he is including here who were designated as the official spokespersons of the movement of God started by Jesus Christ, were not simply that of normal human thought processes. Paul is claiming that their words themselves were more than just normal human communication. There was a spiritual quality about them in the sense that they were word choices of the Holy Spirit Himself, passed on through the human speakers or writers.

These words were to be viewed as uniquely authoritative. They were what we might call "the official version of things from God." They were carefully worded by Him and expressed through human language through the activity of His Holy Spirit. It is not simply that the underlying message was from God, and in that sense "breathed," or what we call "inspired" by Him. If this were the case, we would seek the overall tone of the message and not get overly focused on the words themselves. But Paul states that this inspiration of God extends to the actual words of the message. Their written words were a miracle of Yahweh for our benefit.

And so we believe that the message of God, as recorded in the Bible, is verbally inspired, that is, the words are the very thought of God placed by Him in human language. Paul is saying that his words, together with those included in "we," meaning quite probably the apostolic company, were taught by the Spirit and therefore have a unique character, that of "spiritual words." And so they are authoritative to us, that which serves as the standard for what we believe and how we live. These are to serve as the standard for everything else we think we know.

**2:14—the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised.**

In contrast to Paul and those of the apostolic company who have been taught of the Spirit and in turn passed the Spirit's words along to others, are those people Paul referred to as "natural men." By "natural" he means those who have not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Such a "natural" person is unspiritual by Paul's terms. It is not that such people do not believe in spirits or are not controlled and influenced by them. It is that they are not possibly able to be controlled exclusively by the Holy Spirit, which makes them "natural" or unspiritual. To such a "natural man" the things of the Spirit seem foolish. That is because such a person has no capacity to recognize, absorb, and ponder them, much less realistically evaluate them. This is because the nature of such words can only be evaluated and judged as true with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**2:15—but he that is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man.**

The word for appraised is *ανακρίνα*, meaning to question or examine, to evaluate. It also means to judge, to sit in judgment, or to call to account. It is perhaps use in both senses in this verse. As opposed to the natural man who rejects spiritual things as foolish and does not examine the wisdom of God, the spiritual man examines, studies, and investigates such things. Once he comes to learn of them, they become an important focus. He ponders them and learns more of them.

At the same time the man who is spiritual is free from all earthly masters. He answers to no one. If to God he is true, other people will find their appropriate place of influence. If to the judge of all things he is justified, no one else will bring him any condemnation that matters (Romans 8:1-4).

As we walk in the Spirit, we will be discerning in all things. We will come to understand them for what they really are. And if we walk in the Spirit, every legitimate obligation we have to other people will be fulfilled so that we are blameless.

This does not mean we function independently of others or that we are a law to ourselves. It only means that we have ability through the Holy Spirit to process and sort one another's words and so gain the thought and wisdom of God.

**2:16—for who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.**

Paul quotes a well-known verse from Isaiah 40 that speaks of the transcendence of God. God is unknowable in the relational sense to the natural man. He is a closed book. No one, believer or unbeliever can know enough to bring correction or instruction to the Lord about any matter. He is transcendent, beyond our ability to fully comprehend in our natural state. It is people who have responded to His revelation through Jesus Christ, who have the mind of Christ. They have vast potential as they grow to discern things rightly and so gain great wisdom from God.

Having the mind of Christ means two things. We have His mind in the sense of His personal instruction in writing on a number of life topics that he spoke of while on earth. This is the mind of God regarding these things. We also have Christ's mind in the deeply personal sense spoken of in verse 12, through the person of the Holy Spirit

who lives within us. Our reality is that the deepest part of our being is fully united with the deepest part of the Godhead. The result is that we have Christ's mind continually in the sense of His will and heart being impressed on our own.

And so the great enigma goes. The unknowable God whose ways are inscrutable, has forever joined Himself intimately to all who believe. So though we do not know Him in the sense of fully comprehending and understanding His being, it can be said emphatically that we know Him in the relational sense and have the capacity to be moved and stirred by those things that move and stir Him. This is a great paradox.

## 1 Corinthians 3

**3:1—and I brothers, and could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as men of flesh, as to babes in Christ.**

The Corinthian people were not living up to that to which they had been called. It is possible to be spiritually alive, and yet to be living as if dead, or more properly understood as unhealthy and having a very minimal experience of Christ. It is possible to have the Holy Spirit and not to live according to the Spirit. Those to whom Paul is writing were obviously Christians (see 1:4-9, 30). He embraces them with the term “brethren,” though Paul did use this of unregenerate Jews on occasion. He does not address them as “natural men,” a term he has already used of the unbeliever. It is clear from what he has testified already that he regards them as born-again. Yet he also regarded them as people “of flesh,” that is, individuals who were not responding as they should to the Holy Spirit. They were simply following their own instincts.

As such they were babes in Christ, for no one can reach any level of maturity in Christ apart from living by the leadings and prodding of the Holy Spirit. This is a recurring idea in the writings of the New Testament. So in this verse Paul speaks of what the Corinthian people had been. There is nothing wrong with being a babe. We all start that way. But they have not moved on in their faith, and that is a condition that must be addressed.

**3:2—I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you are not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not able,**

Because they were not skilled in the things of the Spirit, Paul had given the Corinthians what he refers to as “milk.” We don’t know exactly what that was because he does not define it. It probably refers to a certain level of training, a certain standard of achievement in terms of the work of ministry, and a certain level of expectation or accountability. It probably also related to the level of spiritual discussion and dialogue he had with them.

This condition was not surprising or abnormal at one time. It is routine and expected. But here Paul expresses surprise that the same is still true. In Paul’s mind the time had passed in which milk should be required instead of solid food. They had fallen short of his expectation. His words of surprise are literally “but neither still now are you able!” There is an expectation by the writers of Scripture that as time passes, we should grow and mature as people of the Spirit (Heb. 5:11-14).

**3:3—for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?**

The expectation of Christian people is never that we are to be “just human.” Now God has provided for the fact that we are just human and so there is mercy and grace with forgiveness when we fall short. But God has also provided His Holy Spirit and truth so that we might be lifted above our human weakness and never be consigned to “walk like mere men.” And so it was that Paul had an expectation of the Corinthians because they were Christians. In time Paul expected that the self-centered thinking of the Corinthians would gradually give way to spirituality. But there were still plenty of their old ways lingering around. Paul saw jealousy and strife among them—tell-tale signs that they were still thinking wrongly and failing to live by the impulses of the Holy Spirit in them. This is the essence of fleshliness.

**3:4—For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men?**

Normal human behavior is never to be the acceptable standard that regulates the behavior of Christians. We are to rise above being “mere men,” or as the original says simply, “men.” It is normal human behavior for there to be factions, to side with different human leaders whom we can see and stop looking at Christ. The moment the focus ceases to be Jesus the Christ it becomes wrong. It leads us in directions that are against His will no matter how normal they may be.

And so movements based on people reflect our humanity, but the church must rise above that. There must be present the ongoing miracle of transformation or the church is unhealthy. In these verses Paul is seeking to deflect the loyalty, borderline worship, that is being directed toward himself and Apollos to Jesus. Jesus is the one who has done the ultimate thing worthy of attaining the admiration and obedience of men.

It is typical of people to assign too much importance to their human leaders and not enough to Christ. This is the condition that good leaders must keep from developing in churches. Also, the matter of teaching people to appreciate and honor their church leaders must be done wisely so that undue and inappropriate fixations do not develop. One of the great measures of a leader is to see how well his followers attach themselves to Christ and how they can function when the human leader is removed or incapacitated.

**3:5—what then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.**

Paul and Apollos were ultimately just servants God used to bring about belief in the Corinthians. The source of their opportunity was the Lord. Paul and Apollos could not even be credited with presenting them with the opportunity. Now Paul and Apollos were pretty important figures in the church of the day. Here Paul says “we’re just servants.” Ultimately ministers are servants and must see themselves as such.

**3:6—I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.**

Paul describes his role as planting because he gave the Corinthians their initial exposure to truth. The various figures in Paul’s illustrations are equivalent to how Jesus used them in the parable of the sower. There the seed is the truth, the planter is the one bringing the truth, and the soil is the human heart.

Here Paul adds more to that figure. He wants to demonstrate the diverse but equal and subservient roles of individuals ministering to the Corinthians. Paul gave them their initial exposure to truth. Apollos nurtured them in that truth, affirming Paul’s work and expounding on it. Luke in His writings express that Apollos was eloquent in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24). This made him good at nurturing new believers and helping them mature as Christians. But the supreme One, most critical in the whole process was God who made growth happen in the lives of those in the church just as in the crops of the field.

**3:7—so then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.**

Paul is not by these comments suggesting that the contributions of himself and Apollos were valueless. He is seeking to remind them that in terms of whom they should choose as the object of their deepest affection and loyalty, there is only one legitimate candidate, the Lord Jesus.

In looking for the cause of the spiritual work in one's life there is only one place to look. Look to the head of the church. Jesus is the one who creates and sustains all the ministries and workings that go on within it. It is He who is to be worshiped and followed, not those He has chosen to work through.

**3:8—Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.**

In stating that “neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything,” Paul has decisively stated that the workers themselves are not to be exalted and pitted against one another for supremacy. But he realizes that his statement could easily be misconstrued. The impression could be given that since the workers are nothing, they contribute nothing. And since they make no real contribution, they bear no real responsibility to be faithful and so will not be held accountable for their work. This would be such an awful offense to the truth that Paul was willing to digress from his major point to state clearly the matter of the individual responsibility of the workers in the church.

He states first that they are one. By this he means that they are equal in value under the Lord. They are part of a united effort by Yahweh's design that advances His will and plan. They are seen as one under Christ by God, equal in worth and value. But they are viewed individually in the matter of their faithfulness in carrying out their portion of the work. Each one will receive his own reward that will be in accordance with his own labor.

So in this effort coordinated by God in Corinth, several individuals that we know of were used. All of them had one common purpose, to advance the interests of God. But individually they will be rewarded commensurate with their work. This is a very important idea, critical to managing one's own life affairs and the affairs of the church. The verses that follow develop further this important idea of individual accountability and reward.

**3:9—for we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.**

To clearly illustrate the principles of individual responsibility, accountability, and reward, Paul will switch the metaphor from the field and planting and watering to that of a building with its bricks and sticks. The building in this metaphor is a picture of the church in Corinth, that is, that church's people. It is a metaphor that applies to both the local and the universal church. We are coworkers with God in this great people project that spans all boundaries of culture and time.



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

Whenever Paul speaks of one's role in the work of God, he always presents that reality as an operation of the grace of God. Any aptitude we demonstrate, any skill we show, is a result of the provision of God to us. And so, the reward we may garner is ours, and we will enjoy it, but God has made such a thing possible. Paul had skill as a "master builder." He was "wise" in the use of this skill. This he saw as a work of God's grace just as the spiritual gifts are (see Romans 12).

A "wise master builder" would seem to be one who is able by virtue of gifting to set the course for multiple "building" projects. In this case the establishment of multiple churches in many locations would be the work of a "master Builder" as opposed to just a "builder." It is likely the gift mix bestowed on those who were then called to be apostles. This was a multi-gift mix that enabled the men of the time to give oversight to the establishment of the church throughout the known world. Theirs was a foundational work, absolutely required to bring about the eventual building, essential to its strength and shape. Others would contribute as builders, but the "master builder" brought it out of the ground and gave what it would need to support the later contributions of the builders.

**3:11—for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

If the church or movement is based on something other than Jesus Christ, then it is not the church. It is a counterfeit. All the movements that have grown out of Christianity which are not founded on this apostolic teaching are not authentic.

In another place the church is said to be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Here Christ is said to be that foundation. Christ was the fulfillment of all the prophets taught. The apostles were those Christ commissioned to teach the world about Him. So He was that to which both the prophets look forward to and the apostles look back to, hence He is the foundation of the church.

**3:12—Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,**

What we do in the church can be compared to building a portion of the building on the foundation. We might do work that is rightly motivated, done in the power of the Spirit and in submission to our Head, or we might do work that is fleshly motivated for the praise of men. Work done by the Spirit is building with gold, silver, and precious stones. Work done in the flesh is building with wood, hay, straw.

It is not the doing of certain tasks that make for good building. It is the fact we do what the Spirit is directing that makes for building that is of the right stuff.

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

When individuals are finally called to give an accounting of their actions, and when the One who knows all and sees all including the heart, passes judgment, then we will know the true quality of what all who have in anyway ministered in God's church is. As fire consumes wood, hay and straw, so nothing done for wrong motives, nothing

secretly done, and nothing left undone will escape the notice of God. His judgment, symbolized here by fire, will reveal things for the way they truly are.

Whether or not there is an actual building, or an actual fire is open to speculation. What is certain is that the event will reveal not just how things appear but how they really are. In the case of the gold, silver, and precious stones, fire might change their form, but they will survive and be still purer.

And so there is for every individual this day of judgment when God will evaluate and pass judgment on their work. What we will be judged for is our work on the building, which is God's church. It is not that we have our own building representing whatever we choose to do with our lives. Our responsibility is to do work on God's building, His church. We are charged with a section of the wall, so to speak. To do nothing is to do something very significant in terms of the day of judgment that awaits. On that day what will matter is what we have done for the good of the church, and how we advanced it on our watch.

### **3:14—if any man's work which is built on it remains, he shall receive a reward**

When the judgment has concluded, the fire gone out and the smoke cleared, what is left will be the basis for reward. If we suppose that the fire is just symbolic of God's judgment, and the building of the people of God, then our reward will be based on what good fruit is evident in the lives of those to whom we ministered. We will be commended for faithfulness to Jesus' direction as the lead pastor of His church. Reward is not likely based on the completion of tasks that we identify as the ministry. It is based on faithfulness to discern what He wants done and how and sacrificing to bring it about in His way. Such faithfulness is rewarded not just because God wants tasks done, but because faithful repetition brings about change in us and in those to whom we minister.

The key thing about reward to remember is that it will be based on what remains after the fire, after the scrutiny of God has removed all pretense and stripped away all that conceals false motive and evil thought. What will remain is the simple truth of what a life have become. To the extent that we have done what God has asked us to do, we will be rewarded by the One who has enabled, orchestrated, and directed our work.

### **3:15—if any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.**

If what we have worked at is not commendable, that is, if we have not brought about the will of God, to that degree we will suffer loss. The loss here is of reward, a word that is used for wages. We will have expended effort for nothing. Our time will have been wasted. But this does not affect our eternal salvation. We will still be saved, but as when a fire takes everything we have, we will have nothing.

The verse raises an interesting possibility, that a person's work can be burned up. I take that to mean that a Christian can completely waste their life, have nothing of eternal value to show, and yet in fact be a Christian. In such a case, and in all cases where work is even partially burned up, there will be loss. It will be real and actual, and I assume with appropriate regret. And so, it will not be that eternity will make this present life meaningless, but that this present life will find its meaning in eternity. Our entry into eternal life is not at stake in this judgment of God. Our "wages" for this life's work are.

Now it is interesting to note that this teaching is largely rejected by most Christian teachers, and yet what else can be concluded from this text? We would love to believe that our equal value to God somehow translates into equal reward for all. Whether faithful or not so faithful, everyone gets a trophy! But that would not be the work of a just God, a “rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:4). That would be the work of a merciful God who set aside completely His justice, and if He does such a thing can we in the end rely on His justice at all? Jonah made that faulty conclusion about God and became disillusioned (Jonah 3:10-4:11). The truth is that resting in Him as the righteous judge was the example set by Christ and the standard held up for us (1 Peter 2:22; Hebrews 12:3).

**3:16—do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?**

It would seem from the context that this verse, often applied individually, is meant to be applied to the church collectively. The building in the previous versions has been the church, and so would seem here that Paul is capping off what is said in the previous verses with this very sobering statement. Church work and ministry is a very important and serious business. When we work among the people of the church we are working on God’s personal residence, the place He has chosen to put His name. His presence is in each one of them and in uniquely in them collectively.

The Spirit of God dwells in us. This is true individually and that is true of us in an ever more profound way corporately. Each one of us manifests the Holy Spirit in a unique way. But it is when the church is viewed collectively that the complete picture is given, and it is in His collective leading that we come to understand His complete leading. Individually we are threads, together a tapestry. The individualism of our times must be moderated with a more holy respect and reverence for the community of the redeemed. When God says you, we think me. It very often means you all, so we must learn to think we.

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

There are those who for fleshly motives engage themselves in ministry in God’s church. Such ministry produces nothing good, and in fact destroys the work of others. It brings damage to the temple of God. There are men who through fleshly motives destroy whole local assemblies, turning away many from the faith. In doing so they are aligning themselves against all that is holy. These God will destroy.

God’s destruction of such individuals could consist of Him taking away their ministries, allowing sin to be found out, completely discrediting them. It is a sad and sobering thing to see such personal loss, but in the justice of God it is fair, right, and even good. He might destroy such a one through loss of their physical life, cutting short their years on earth. These first two scenarios are perhaps His way of dealing with His own servants who have gone bad, who have left the straight way. For those who masquerade as Christians and as shepherds and bring damage to the church, there is a deeper destruction that awaits them, the second death. And so, entering ministry is a sobering step, and one’s ongoing spiritual health is a vital matter that all who lift a hand to impact God’s people should carefully examine. Ministry is holy ground, the holiest, that we tread on beginning to influence the children of God. Do we destroy or buildup? That is the question. Do we do it for our own need for recognition to be met, or do we do it for His glory? That is a question we all frequently must be humbled by.

**3:18—let no man deceive himself if a man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may come wise.**

With this Paul returns to the thought that he gradually digressed from in chapter two. There and in chapter three his thoughts were on the wisdom of God that the natural man, any person not regenerated by the Holy Spirit, cannot accept. That led Paul into commenting on the Corinthians themselves, because though they were not natural, he did not address them as spiritual people because they were still looking at things in the natural way. As an example of this he cites their propensity to choose gurus, to choose sides against one another and to pick one leader against another so that himself and Apollos were being understood as sect leaders rather than co-laborers in Christ.

With that he begins to speak of his responsibility in his ministry and of every person's responsibility who serves the church. He will be speaking of both eternal reward and of eternal loss. These are what is at stake in our service in the church. For now, he returns to the subject of the wisdom that is the nature of the gospel message.

Regarding the Gospel and its implications, it is easy to deceive ourselves. It is so easy to think we are wise and so reject the Gospel. We believe we have life figured out early. With time and truth, we come to understand the Gospel's true nature. Our hope is really to become foolish by the world's estimation, by accepting the truth of the gospel. It is in receiving this very gospel they think so foolish, that we will begin to assess the things that, when pondered, lead to wisdom.

**3:19—for the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness.”**

The world's way of thinking is uninformed in so many ways. How can it be, as the collection of finite minds, anything else? It is inevitable that all humans make false judgments, establish faulty premises, embrace wrong presuppositions, and so arrive at laughable conclusions (Psalm 2). These lofty theses of humanity will be brushed aside as irrelevant, works of ignorance when God reveals Himself and the truth.

Paul cites Job 5:13 to illustrate what God has revealed would happen to the world's clever schemes on the day He has appointed for the judgment of evil to occur. Humanity cannot outthink or outmaneuver God. He cannot be manipulated. His justice and Law know no loopholes. The unbeliever will simply collide with the wall of reality on the day when He reveals the true nature of all our wisdom.

**3:20—and again, “the Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.”**

Quoting here from Psalm 94:11, Paul adds to the argument from another angle. The world does not know anything that God has not already known and pondered. God does not hold His position because He is unenlightened. He holds it because He knows all things.

The classic belief among humans in relationship to one another is that if others had the wisdom, I have then they would agree with me! And so, it is very natural to carry this thinking into the arena of one's relationship with God and assume that when God gets all the facts, I will be fine. But that is a faulty understanding of God that supposes He is like us, finite in His understanding.

The reality is that God has all the facts. There is no theory, no scheme He has not seen, evaluated, and decided about. He knows every philosophical system there could be and can pinpoint its fundamental error and render it useless.

**3:21—so then, let us not boast in men. For all things belong to you,**

The Corinthians were boasting in humans. They were taking pride in who their teacher was—their personal guru. In this they were being molded by the culture of the day, where private teachers were symbols of status, and one's identity was enhanced by the intellectual master they could name.

In this they were showing that they were victims. They were deriving their sense of their own value and the value of others by the standard that had emerged from fallen people living in a fallen creation. It is an awful part of the curse. It is the shame of the nakedness that Adam and Eve felt. It is evidence of the compensation that shame births in every human. This identity crisis rakes the people of every generation and gives birth to every sin.

In this verse Paul wants to establish the fact that every believer is inseparably joined to Christ and therefore to God, the Master of the universe. Since all things belong to God, they also belong to those in His family of believers. There is equality in privilege among those in His family. All things belong to all of them. Now we might by our own trust or lack of it enter that privilege to different degrees. But the fact remains that we all have a privileged position with the Creator of all things. If there is a point of boasting that is it, and next to that what is of any significance? Is the status conveyed by some human teacher worth boasting of? Is one's body type? Is wealth? Is education? Are any of the world's trappings?

Paul could not be clearer that such "rating" of people's relative value is not to be brought into the church. In the church all that Yahweh is, is Christ's and is ours. That is a far-reaching statement and Paul was vehement about placing himself on the level of the Corinthians. He and the others who teach them were simply servants.

**3:22—whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you.**

Having stated the great position of the believers as possessing all things and having demonstrated the relative insignificance of any status conveyed by some human association, Paul reinforces that by naming first himself, then Apollos and Cephas, as examples of people under Christ. He then names some of the big things of this life. This has the effect of raising another question, "Why would you brag of following Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, when through Christ all things related to this life are yours?" But Paul is not content with raising this question. As logical sounding as it might be it would still focus on the wrong thing, and so he goes on.

**3:23—and you belong to Christ and Christ to God.**

This is the real thing that we should find significance in. It is not who our spiritual leader on earth is. It is not even in the fact that the world is ours through Christ. It is that we are owned by Christ and hence by God. Our human associations may be impressive, but they are not anything compared to who we really belong to. Because we are God's people, in His family, siblings of Christ, of what relative significance is our earthly teacher?

## 1 Corinthians 4

**4:1—Let a man regard us in this matter, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.**

Paul, Apollos, and Cephas were being thought of in a lot of ways in Corinth. Some of the thoughts people had toward them were no doubt inflated. Others likely undervalued them. Paul says they were to be regarded in a certain way, as stewards. A steward is one who is entrusted with the care of what belongs to someone else. Implicit in stewardship is accountability and reward. If Paul and the others were to simply be regarded as servants and stewards, they would be happy, and the Corinthians could consider themselves within the bounds of propriety.

First, they wanted to be regarded as servants of Christ. The word used here for servants is *υπηρετης*. It means “under-rowers.” What a graphic term. Rowing requires of one that they be willing to work according repetitively and faithfully to the cadence of the master who would direct so that the boat would go the direction appropriate to the destination. An under-rower is insignificant in terms of the decisions the owners of the ship might make. But they are vital to the success of its mission. It is doubtful that Paul and the other early church leaders had any idea just how important their life’s work would become in church history. But this is the very thing that enabled them for such work, they were simply listening to the cadence call of their master, working under His direction.

Paul also desired that they be thought of as stewards of the mystery of God. As stated earlier, a steward was a manager, charged with responsibility to look after and advance the interests of his master. In the case of Paul and the apostolic company they were entrusted with the mysteries of God. The knowledge and understanding of the gospel, the Old Testament Scriptures, the present age, and the end of the ages had been passed along to them by Christ. They had been entrusted with that which no other person had been entrusted with. They had the responsibility to manage that treasure wisely. This involved proclamation of the truth as well as implementation and preservation of the truth. It demanded something of Paul and the other leaders that he will speak out in the ensuing verses. It also implied to the Corinthians the authoritative nature of Paul’s ministry.

So in these words we have the genius of Christ-like leadership summed up, the perfect statement of servant-leadership. Spiritual leadership is leadership that comes from humble people who are themselves being led by the Holy Spirit. It is also leadership that brings to light clearer understanding of the things of God. It is humble individuals being led by God to impart knowledge and understanding to His children.

**4:2—in this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.**

Accountability was something Paul understood. It was his greatest hope and desire that when judgment was rendered by Christ on his life and ministry, the verdict would be that he had been faithful to the trust that had been placed in him. He sought his ongoing accountability simply as a part of the calling. Even as he looked moment by moment to his master for direction, he saw the master scrutinizing his work and his motives for flaws. Trustworthiness was simply a requirement of the calling. It was such a part of Paul’s thinking that any human scrutiny was meaningless and any pressure from that scrutiny was insignificant.

**4:3—but for me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.**

In terms of who and what really matters, the Corinthian's examination of Paul, and the scrutiny of any others, was insignificant. Their approval or disapproval was insignificant. Even Paul's own self – examination was meaningless.

Paul says he doesn't examine himself. That is a remarkable fact. There is this sense that if we live right, obeying the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit, then we leave the outcome and its evaluation to God. There is a sense in which we cannot hope to render an accurate evaluation because we are simply not aware of all that He is doing and what His objectives are.

**4:4—for I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.**

Paul says he is aware of nothing against him. He is aware of nothing he is doing or has done that would in any way make him culpable. But he adds that this is meaningless. His own conscience and his own discernment are subject to error. He is not the lawmaker or the judge, so his verdict is really of no consequence. The examiner is the Lord. It is His verdict that will matter, and His will be the only desire that will matter. Considering the Lord's examination no other examination carries any weight.

**4:5—therefore, do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.**

There is a time for judgment. There is a time for the declaration of what is wheat and what is chaff, what is gold and silver and what is hay and stubble. Until then there is false doctrine, fleshly ministry, much wrong thinking, much evil, wicked schemes, unrighteous motives within the church.

There are many messes that God does not straighten out, yet. There are countless things He does not confront decisively, though He certainly does confront them through conviction. It is instructive to us that there are many things we simply must wait on. God has a day when the verdict will be handed down against those things. When that day comes, we will know the contribution of each individual, and doubtless all contribute in some way, shape, or form. We will not know the truth until then. There is much that appears good, but when motives are brought to light it will appear quite different. There is much that can appear bad, but when God brings to light the true nature of things, it will be approved by all. When He comes, the time will then have arrived for us to know.

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

Through himself and Apollos Paul has created a figure, an illustration of how one ought to think of themselves and others. The thing Paul is trying to help them avoid is arrogance, the kind of arrogance that causes people to choose sides pitting one

against the other. We might call it immaturity, perhaps even normal. Paul calls it arrogance. That's important.

It is arrogant to suppose that one's personal judgment or preference is a greater priority than the overall mission or health of the body. When those thoughts begin to form in us what is written should prevail. We should quickly reject our personal favoritism as from the evil one.

Such opinions are recognizable because they exceed what is written. By this Paul means that they fall outside of the boundaries of principles taught in Scripture about legitimate distinctions that are to be made. Paul wants the Corinthians to learn not to fall into the trap that can be constructed in their own minds, so that they become instruments that fracture rather than bring unity.

**4:7—for who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?**

The Corinthians had lost touch with reality. They had chosen sides and formed various factions, each supposing that their superior wisdom, understanding, and overall spiritual prowess demanded that they draw such lines and make such distinctions. They had only to visit the real world to be reminded of their folly.

Paul asked three questions. He begins with, "who regards you as superior?" That is a great question to ask of oneself. This wisdom that you suppose yourself to have, who else recognizes it? Do others seek you out because of your superior spiritual status? This is a rhetorical question that Paul asked. He expects only one answer: "No one!"

The second question presupposes the same answer. Everything the Corinthians had by way of wisdom or understanding they had been given by Paul, by Apollos and by Cephas, and perhaps others. Now the learners were supposing themselves able to make judgments that their teachers dared not make. They had nothing that they had not learned from someone else. It was impossible for them to be in a class by themselves. No one that must acquire knowledge can rightly view themselves as exclusive.

The third question is one for which there is no answer except to repent. We might word this question in the following way. "Why do you suppose that you have some innate wisdom that exceeds that of your fellow believers when the reality is that any wisdom you have is the result of what someone else has told you?"

And so Paul is asking the Corinthians to stand back and look around them, to get back in touch with the real world.

**4:8—you are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.**

Sarcasm is a device frequently used in Scripture to make a point. On the human level it must be entered into carefully, but it is able to point out dramatically the utter foolishness of a course of action or way of thinking.



After asking the Corinthians to look around themselves for those who see them as being in any way superior, Paul acts as if he is doing so with them. He then describes a scenario that is exactly the opposite of the reality he sees, and it has the effect of making the true picture stand out starkly and with great vividness. He describes the Corinthians as already filled, not lacking in anything, complete in every way. He describes them as rich, without need. They are kings, royalty, having achieved a high level of influence and power.

Then Paul ends the brief dream by saying in effect, "how I wish this were true." He follows this with another sarcastic statement, "that we might reign with you." He is saying if they had achieved such a high level of prestige, maybe they would consent to allow those to whom they owed everything to be blessed by some "trickle down." The fact was they were simply getting carried away by arrogance and the false games of prestige that the flesh enters to exalt itself.

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

In these verses we see what it really felt like to be an apostle. There was the joy of having seen Christ, the joy of being those specially commissioned by Him. But the day-to-day experience from a human point of view, and by normal standards of human expectations was rough. In fact, Paul felt that in terms of the normal standards of evaluating lifestyle, theirs was pretty much on the bottom. In terms of the regard of others for them, he felt there was none. In terms of respect accorded them, he felt none. He felt rejection like that accorded a condemned criminal. He sensed he was an object of the stares of disbelief from both men and angels.

What was it like to be an apostle? We usually think of the thrill of power. What about the miracles they did? Wouldn't it have been great to heal the sick, raise the dead, walk free out of jail? Then people would really receive your message! What a response there would be!

**4:10—We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.**

Paul begins to drive home in a very personal way his concern that the Corinthians were becoming arrogant. He speaks of his own and his fellow apostles' servitude. Then he compares it to the expectation of the Corinthians.

Paul and the apostles were considered fools, and they were willing to be so considered for the cause of Christ. The Corinthians were striving for an image of respectability and status in their faith. They did not want to embrace anything that would imply weakness or take away from their sense of dignity and honor. So they were carefully crafting their image as Christians. Perhaps they were trying to use their faith as a means of gathering elements of social status, i.e. the following of a personal teacher or guru. But the result was that they were not rightly practicing the faith as it was being modeled to them. Paul will tell them more to strengthen his point.

**4:11—to this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless.**

The basic needs and expectations that one would normally have in life were not being realized by the apostles. Now if the leaders of the movement were not gaining status through the practice of their faith, why were the followers expecting that they should? This was not simply a matter of some rough, past, isolated experiences, apart from the norm in the apostle's lives. This was the up-to-the-minute "scoop" on their lives. Far from gaining status through the Christian life, they had become like common "street people" in the eyes of their detractors.

Paul, who had once known the status and prestige of a Pharisee, who would experience the fine things of the prestigious town of Tarsus, and who would enjoy the privilege of education under Gamaliel, who had been considered an up-and-coming leader in the Jewish community, had willingly and joyfully accepted this base existence. And not only had he accepted it, but he also considered it a profitable exchange, in view of the treasure gained in Christ.

But those who were his spiritual offspring were not following him. They were still seeking the things of the world, and particularly the recognition of the world. When viewed in this way, Paul's words seem very gentle. There was so much that could have been said and asserted. Paul will continue this line of thinking for several more verses, continuing to describe the condescension of the apostles. He is really being very nurturing in the matter of their carnality, and seeking to call them up to the higher ground they need to occupy.

**4:12—and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;**

That timeless symbol of status, freedom from manual labor, had eluded the apostles. They worked not simply with their minds, accomplishing tasks through the hands of others, but with their own hands. This referred to not only the hard work of ministry but more so the hard work of earning a living. Paul knew the feeling of tired, rough, blistered hands. He had felt the soreness of manual labor. Not only this, but he had also given up the most basic of human rights, the right to defend oneself against personal attack—what we would call "the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And so Paul responded to being reviled and persecuted with blessing and patient endurance. Like his own master, Paul was here to serve, not to be served.

**4:13—when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.**

Is hard to be faithful to Christ if one hangs onto the flesh's desire for respectability and dignity. We are easily drawn into the desire to be proven and judged right and correct, to win and be affirmed as a winner. Paul had escaped this "corruption that is in the world through lust," but this was no sacrifice with a happy earthly ending. There is no overtime victory in this world that proves one's choices worthwhile. The sacrifice was continuous and ongoing "until now." He had not "paid his dues." Paul had not gotten done years earlier. His sacrifice was being done daily and repeatedly.

There had been many false accusations against Paul personally over the years. Paul remained conciliatory in his tone. He had not reacted to being considered "scum," the visible byproduct of a good thing going bad, something to be skimmed off and cast aside to get to the real essence of the thing. Many regarded the apostles as such, Judaism gone bad, a bad strain of an otherwise legitimate faith, to be discarded as the dregs of a fine wine after it had been allowed to settle on the lees.

Paul and the others remained faithful even in the absence of "strokes." They completed their mission with single-mindedness, to gain the approval of only one, their true master. Their approval from men was never forthcoming, the acceptance never "just around the corner," and they would have it no other way. This was a challenge the Corinthian Christians had to reckon with. It was the obstacle to their maturing in the faith, to becoming spiritual people rather than carnal people. They still desired to be considered something.

**4:14—I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.**

Paul had been sarcastic, a little bit cynical, and very direct. Here he begins to qualify his tone and clarify his intention. His desire is not to shame the Corinthians. Fleshly leaders love to bring shame to their followers. It helps them elevate themselves. It allows them to be held in awe.

Paul's goal is simply stated. He regards the Corinthians as his "beloved children." They are not his subjects; they are his heart and soul. His goal is not to more fully subject them, but to develop them more fully, to come alongside them and urge them toward higher ground. He wants them to experience his joy, the joy of abandoned submission to Christ.

**4:15—for if you have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father to the gospel.**

The Corinthians loved tutors. The culture they were in elevated those with personal teachers. Paul was more than that to them. He was not simply providing a service for a fee, and their relationship had much more at stake than mere matters of personal status. It wasn't even a matter of just better information about Christ, coming from one of any number of tutors God brings into the lives of His people. This was the heartbeat of the one who brought them into the faith, their spiritual father. He was the one who in the great sovereignty of God had been the human instrument in their new birth. He was the one who surely was an instrument of God's love, the dad who lay awake at night for their welfare.

**4:16—I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me.**

Here is the point Paul has been building toward. It is the thing that is ultimately the heart of a loving father. "Do it like I do it, like I have shown you, like I have modeled it." Now a lousy father cannot make this statement. A lousy father must ask his child to overlook the actions he has for years witnessed. But these are the words of one who believes what he lives and lives what he believes. They were words of one who has put himself to death daily to advance the agenda of the master in the lives of others. We should rise to the same.

**4:17—for this reason I have sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.**

Because Paul wants the Corinthians to be imitators of him just as children would imitate their father, he sends one of his faithful children, Timothy, to be with them. In Timothy they would have a pattern to follow. He would be able to instruct them in detail about Paul's way of living. In him they would have an on-site example of how they were to live.

Paul's teaching was that of Christ. By following him they would be following Christ. This is not to say Paul saw himself as perfect, but he saw himself as mature and complete, a legitimate example of a fallen man moving forward in the sanctification process.

Paul understood the faith as conformity to a certain pattern. It would have common elements in every local culture. There would be common practices among those of vastly different backgrounds. There would be shared beliefs among diverse people groups. This is the truth about Christianity. It is a specific doctrinal system. A distinct way of living that is embraced by people of diverse cultures. Their cultures create uniqueness in the local assemblies, so they have a distinctive local flavor. But there are also distinctive elements of belief and practice that are shared "everywhere in every church."

**4:18—Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.**

Paul does not specifically define the nature of the arrogance of these people. It was in some way connected logically to the idea that Paul was forever gone. He would not visit Corinth again. It may have been that his detractors were berating him as if his frequent changes in plans were a result of an inherent instability. 2 Corinthians seems to allude to this criticism of Paul. It may be that others, assuming he was gone forever, were seeking to assume his position of authority and influence in the Corinthian church. Either way the result was that they were, for fleshly reasons, "campaigning" for a following. In this self-serving arrogance they were directing and leading the Corinthian church away from those things delivered by apostolic authority.

And so a mess was developing that threatened to sever that which tethered the Corinthian church to the authentic movement started by Christ. It was in danger of becoming a satellite of someone other than Christ. Its very orbit was being threatened. Paul, seeing the potential seriousness of this goes on to issue some stern, unbending words to all who would read this letter.

**4:19—but I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who were arrogant, but their power.**

Paul has not been shaken from his fundamental commitment to do only what the Spirit leads him to do and to go only where the Spirit leads. Even false accusations do not cause him to deviate. He does not feel the need to respond immediately to this person or persons or to hasten to straighten this matter out. He will come soon if the Lord wills. He is certain once the Lord wills' what the agenda of his visit will be. He will come and find out about the power that is energizing and motivating this person or persons who are opposing the work he has done in Corinth.

We should not leap to the conclusion that there was to be a contest of miraculous power, like Moses and the Egyptian magicians or Elisha and the prophets of Baal. It could have been that Paul had this in mind, but it could also be that he, knowing already the source of this person's power, was planning to expose them publicly for all to see.

Spiritual leadership is a matter of spiritual power. There is power to one's words in the hearts of people when they are sourced in the Spirit and flow through God's anointed leader. Such words resonate, they motivate, they move people into action, they have such a ring of truth that they cannot be denied.

The one who leads to gratify the flesh cannot have such power. Theirs is the power of manipulation, mere human enthusiasm, or outright deceit. Paul had led from both perspectives during his life. He knew that fleshly leadership was no match for leadership carried out in the Spirit, and so he writes these confident words that would be a solemn warning to those who for their own selfish reasons were seeking to direct the Corinthian church.

#### **4:20—for the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power.**

One cannot learn to advance the kingdom of God and lead it in its God-ordained direction by learning the right words and phrases. There is an anointing with power for one's work in the kingdom. Whatever one's role, there is a gift bestowed to do it and empowerment from God for predetermined impact. To try to bring about different results is to try to advance something other than the kingdom of God.

If we are wise, we do not create leaders. We recognize those anointed by God to the task. We train and develop them, but we do not create them. Nor can one rise to the level of spiritual leadership by their own choosing, occupy such a position, and have anything good come about. It is more than words.

This means spiritual leadership is more than the right doctrinal statement, or the ability to properly articulate theology, church polity, or even the practical matters involved in accomplishing the tasks of Christian work. It is a matter of anointing, a divine choice coupled with a divine empowerment to advance the agenda of the kingdom of God in a specific way in the HEARTS of others. And this is true not only with respect to the exercise of the gift of leadership, but with respect to every other gift of the Spirit as well.

#### **4:21—what do you desire? Shall I come to you with rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?**

Having spoken sternly of his intent, should it be necessary, in his impending visit to Corinth, Paul now begins to place responsibility on the Corinthians for how confrontive he will have to be to ensure propriety in their assembly. In the matters of spiritual leadership there is a certain outcome that cannot be compromised. That outcome, conformity to truth, can be brought about in a very general way that is in accord with all that we think of when we speak of love.

But if the normal gentle manner of love does not bring about that result, the more direct corrective measures must be taken, figuratively spoken of here by the rod. Both are love. But here, probably in the interest of creating a more vivid picture in the minds of the readers of just how unpleasant such a visit might be, Paul uses more

classic human imagery of the normal warm and gentle manner of love versus corporal punishment. His point in what lies ahead is that there are some things they must deal with. If they deal with them his visit will be pleasant. If they do not, his presence among them will become rather an unpleasant memory.

## 1 Corinthians 5

**5:1—It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not even exist among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.**

This situation is one that is a blatant contradiction, so immoral Paul says, that it does not even happen among unbelievers. The statement is often made that a born-again person cannot live as the unregenerate do. While that certainly should be true, it is also true that they are sometimes live worse, and the Scripture here reports an actual case of that awful phenomenon. The case is of a man living with his father's wife, presumably his step-mother. It is bad that this, which does not happen among unbelievers, has happened within the church. What is even worse is how the Corinthian believers were handling it.

It is both instructive and admirable that Paul, knowing this situation existed in Corinth, has waited this long to mention it. Despite the mess that he will address in these verses, he has first stated that he thanks God always concerned the Corinthians, that in everything they are enriched in Christ. He spoke of the fact that the testimony of Christ has been confirmed in them. It is instructive that the divisions that existed among them concerned him more immediately than did this situation. It is admirable that he so patiently deals with their arrogance and the questioning on the part of some about his own integrity. It shows that any expectation of quick maturity is not a realistic one, and that we can be always thankful for the faith of individuals. We should always be ready to point out Christ at work in them, even when there are some rather blatant shortcomings.

**5:2—and you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who has done this deed might be removed from your midst.**

The Corinthians had responded to this situation arrogantly. Paul does not say if that means they ignored it, or if they were proud of their openness and tolerance, or if they knew they should do something but simply refused to do it. Their arrogance did involve boasting (verse six). So it is unlikely that they were simply ignoring it because they lacked courage. It is also unlikely they were ignoring it because they lacked knowledge or understanding of what to do. Verses 9-12 indicate that Paul had given them written instructions on how they were to deal with immoral people. Their failure to deal with the matter was willful and that makes it an issue of arrogance.

Such immoral situations should first produce in us sorrow. Paul says they should have mourned. We should be sorrowful because of what the consequences are to the parties involved, to ourselves, to the church, to the name of Christ, and to the cause of the gospel. It is a sorrow because it undoes so much that so many have sacrificed to accomplish. It is a sorrow because the guilty have been deceived and have swapped the blessing for the curse. It will send ripples into the coming generations.

The verses that follow will show that two means of removal of the guilty parties are possible. There is not the option of them continuing in the Church and living in this sin. But it should be astutely observed that removal comes not as a result of our shame, anger, or vengeance, and certainly not out of the judgmental spirit. It flows from our sorrow. It is done with tears and is carried out in an atmosphere of mourning and grief. We discipline well when we are moved by grief and when other emotions are properly contained.

**5:3—for I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has committed this, as though I were present.**

Such a situation does call for judging—not being judgmental but judging. We must decide about such things, and Paul has heard enough to act decisively. Such judging is fitting, proper, and in every way right. It is carried out in grief and so is not a matter of being judgmental. It does not have to be pondered long. The issue in this case is straightforward, and when the facts are in so that the issues become straightforward one should not linger long over initiating the appropriate response. Paul, though absent, knows what needs to be done, and within himself has already done it.

**5:4—in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you were assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,**

The thought of this verse, while not standing alone, conveys some important ideas. What Paul does is in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul sees himself as one with authority to act for Christ and to express His mind in this matter. How did he have this confidence? The testimony of written revelation (Leviticus 18:8) certainly helped Paul, which showed that this is not a relationship God would condone.

We see that it is possible to be with people “in spirit” though far from them bodily. This happens by means of the Holy Spirit, who impresses on our hearts and minds their needs. It also happens through prayer by which we bring God’s hands to bear on these areas of need. This is an amazing phenomenon. It is a reality not simply a nice comforting thought. There is a very real sense in which we cannot ever be separated from fellow believers.

What Paul is describing is a spiritual activity which we know too little about today. When we give ourselves to being with others through the Holy Spirit the power of our Lord Jesus is available for us to bring to bear in one another’s behalf. This possibility offers perhaps the greatest potential of all the activities of Christianity.

**5:5—I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of this flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.**

Now, what has Paul determined needs to be done here? We know that Satan wants to destroy the image of God among humans. He was allowed to have a measure of success in doing so when he led Adam and Eve into sin and the image of God was marred by their fall. We know that we who have believed are kept from him. As the image of God is being restored in and through us we are protected by God from Satan’s destructive power.

It appears from this verse that though one can become involved in heinous sin, their spirit can be saved in the day of the Lord. We take this to mean that they can be forgiven and enter the experience of eternal life in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. This, from the grammar Paul uses, appears to be the ultimate result that will stand when the action Paul is referring to is carried out. It is not that the action produces the result. How could the handing of one over to Satan result in their salvation? But this action does not affect the end toward which this individual was elected and chosen of God. No one can pluck him from God’s hand.



What Paul has determined is that this person's bodily actions bring such great harm to the body of Christ and to themselves that all are better off if the person is dead. Since Satan's desire is to destroy, only God's protective hedge must be removed, and physical death will come about. This is undoubtedly the purpose toward which Paul will pray, and it is a sobering thought that a child of God can commit sin unto death.

**5:6—clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.**

Before the Passover celebration the Jews would remove all leaven from their homes, from every nook and cranny in their house. They took great pains to do this to thoroughly obey the commands of God.

It is true that believers are cleansed from sin, declared righteous by God through the sacrifice of Christ. Our challenge is to allow Christ's righteousness to invade our day-to-day lives so that the day-to-day reality we live is righteousness even as our standing is righteous. We must clean out of our experience all vestiges of compromise with evil, that tendency we all must tolerate sin and indulge the flesh. It is then that we become a new lump. This is a collective task as well for the church. If we tolerate evil collectively, we will tolerate it personally and individually. We must clean out the old way of living to embrace fully the new.

We stand forgiven by God because Christ has been sacrificed. That has already been done, the celebration is in full swing. This is no time to allow evil any more than the Jews would think of serving leavened bread with the Passover lamb. It would be incongruous. To allow this evil to exist in the church is in the same way incongruous and makes a mockery of all that we do.

**5:8—let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, not with the level of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

Our lives are to be a celebration of Christ, a tribute to His person, His teaching, and His sacrifice. As we celebrate Him, whether by ritual and a corporate gathering, or by the choices of our individual lives, our celebration should flow from sincerity of heart. There should be no duplicity, but simply the truth.

As Christians meet and celebrate the Lord's supper, there should be sincerity in that practice. We should not embrace by our profession one thing and knowingly hang onto what contradicts that, as we celebrate the New Testament equivalent of the Passover.

The old way of living, where religion provided a rationale for and justified fleshly indulgence should be forever done away. There should be no more twisting of truth to make evil as a sacrament, to give it a legitimate and even sacred place in our lives. That way of living should be replaced by sincerity and truth, and others should see that in our personal lives and in our churches. Sincerity and truth must be our calling cards.

**5:9—I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people.**

There had been a previous letter written by Paul to the Corinthians which we do not have. Paul had given them certain instruction which he now wishes to clarify. Here he simply states what he had said.

**5:10—I did not at all mean with the immoral people of the world, or the covetous and swindlers, or with the idolaters; for then you would have to go out of this world.**

These verses provide a great doctrine of separation from the world. Paul makes it crystal clear that we are not to get caught up in the frequent Christian error of believing that we should go out of this world. We are not to feel the need to free ourselves from association with sinners. Our Lord himself was called "a friend of sinners."

Paul names several sins, each of them clearly condemned by Scripture, each of them vile. He does this so that there is no room for error this time in how his words are to be taken. To break all associations with such people, as if such association somehow made us "unclean", is both impractical and in terms of the mission very non-strategic. We need not feel the need to isolate ourselves from the world's people. Discomfort with them while in their company is normal. Don't mistake that inner discomfort for the voice of the Holy Spirit telling you to break off all association. That is the voice of the Holy Spirit witnessing to you of your identity, but it should not be mistaken as a call to end such associations.

**5:11—but actually I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or reveler, or a drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.**

We expect immorality in the world. Our stance toward the unbeliever is not best described by the word tolerance. It is one of compassion, of understanding individual potential and need. We expect something quite different of believers. We expect that when they learn what is right, they will do it. So the one who presents himself as a "brother," our spiritual kin, but who lives immorally, we must separate ourselves from. This is to send a clear message to him and to all who might be watching that this is not Christianity, it is hypocrisy.

The word for associate is a word that means to have dealings together with. Our dealings are to be cut off from such a one as this. They are not even to include eating with them, a common courtesy and symbol of friendship in all cultures always. The immorality does not refer to an immoral act, but to reputation, a pattern of behavior, how one is generally viewed.

**5:12—for what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are in the church?**

We do not judge those outside the church. This phrase gives insight into what Scripture means when it tells us not to judge. Judging must mean more than discerning the nature of a thing or a person's spiritual condition. We are to be able to do that and we must do it. Judging involves not only making the distinction but also imposing the sentence or the discipline. We judge in the church, that is, we discern one another's actions and in love bring about a change in each other through

instruction and encouragement, but also where necessary through admonishment, rebuke and even the corporate action of discipline. When we do these latter things we are judging. We do this in the church, we do not do it with respect to outsiders. The next verse states whose role that is.

**5:13—but those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.**

It is for God to judge and discipline those outside the family. We don't discipline the children of others who might misbehave in the grocery store. We discipline our own. God is the only one with the right to discipline those outside. But we share the responsibility of carrying out His discipline in the church. We act on His behalf. We are charged with it, both to do it and to do it with the right spirit. In this case Paul tells the Corinthians to remove the immoral party. Their action is not optional. What needs to be done does not need to be decided. It needs to be carried out.

## 1 Corinthians 6

**6:1—does anyone of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?**

To Paul it is incredulous to think as the Corinthians were thinking when a claim of some sort arose on behalf of one Christian against another. They somehow thought it was right to take one another to court to gain a settlement. Neighbor here is the way the NASB has chosen to render *ετερον*. The word simply means other or another. Paul says here that the proper place to take such a claim is before other Christians, to let them settle the matter.

**6:2—Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?**

It is apparent in the writings of the New Testament that the Christian life was thought of considerably different than today. Today in most of our theology, we know nothing of the day when we "judge the world." In covenant or reformed theology there is no allowance for this day in eschatology, except in the eternal state where sin is removed from us, in which case one wonders what is to be judged. Among a minority there is an era provided for where Christ will rule the present world for 1000 years "with the saints." That was a view that was held by Christians in the first century. It began to change with the writings of Augustine. The result is that today it is a view embraced by too few Christians for no particularly good reason since a literal interpretation of Scripture clearly allows it. This difference between the majority view today on eschatology and the view of Paul is apparent here.

The other difference is that we generally view ourselves as unfit for much of any significant spiritual work. We have a low expectation and a very mediocre Christian experience. We don't expect much by way of power to equip us to operate beyond our comfort zone and so we don't experience it. But Christianity is, after all, a walk of faith that brings about work that is clearly beyond us (2 Corinthians 2:14-18).

Paul and the other leaders of the movement always expected power and enablement from God to be the norm (Ephesians 1:15ff). To them if we pursued the right course of action God would make up the slack in resource. And so to them if there is a time in God's plan when we would judge the earth, that wisdom and resource to do so must be available now. We are already able to do it through the Holy Spirit, we are simply awaiting God's time. We are presently qualified when the Spirit makes known that it is His will for us to do such a thing.

We have the wisdom. It is simply not God's time for us to judge the world. However in the Church when an issue arises that requires discernment and judgment, we should be quick to grasp the nettle and do it. To allow unbelievers to settle our disputes is to get it exactly backwards. This is to set aside power and resource freely given to us.

**6:3—do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?**

Again, we might have replied to this statement if it were made in our churches today, "Yeah, but then we will be perfect!" Again, Paul saw us with the resources we need to do this now. Through the power of God such things are within our aim and focus now.

We will judge angels. This is a remarkable thought. Those to whom we likely owe our lives today, who minister in our behalf in ways we are not remotely aware of, will subject themselves to us one day. Whether in the millennial kingdom or beyond we are uncertain. It is likely in both the millennial kingdom and the eternal state, since in both cases we will be used to carry out God's rule with His resources. That will involve angels then as it always has, and so we will render decisions among angels.

This should be said as well about judging in the eternal state. There is a need for judgment, even where no evil is present, if the matters exceed the wisdom of the party or parties involved. In other words they would come in such a case for counsel and a wise decision, not to settle a matter where sin was involved. This may be the sense in which we will judge angels. But certainly if God will equip us and entrust us with such a work in the future age, then He will do so now for believers in the lesser matters of this life.

**6:4—if then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?**

When we as Christians use courts of law to settle our disputes, we are getting decisions from those unskilled in the things of the kingdom of God. We are getting a decision, but how much better to get a decision that considers the leading of Yahweh's Spirit, principles of eternity, truth as God has revealed it, and the things considered valuable in the kingdom of God? The courts are there as a necessity for an unbelieving world. Believers should settle their disputes through the counsel of those in the church.

**6:5—I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren,**

If there is one wise man in the church, we should settle our disputes with each other in-house. Paul wants to bring the Corinthian church up short. So he shows them the ridiculous nature of the message they are sending about themselves in this situation. It is a reflection on them, and Paul wants them to see that. By appearing in court with claims against each other they are stating to the world, "we are no wiser than you. Christ has done nothing for us in the practical matters requiring wisdom." But the truth is they are simply not assuming the responsibility that God's gifted and equipped them for. This rhetorical question is meant to make them take proper responsibility.

**6:6—but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?**

Posed in this way the whole matter seems absurd. Brother against brother before unbelievers; with that Paul paints the picture of how utterly contradictory this behavior of the Corinthian Christians has been.

**6:7—Actually then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?**

The absurdity of their behavior has been pointed out by Paul, but now he wants to get to the heart of the matter. The fact that there are such actions among believers shows that they have already failed. It is ironic that parties, by going to law, were seeking to prevail. But in doing so they were losing.

Paul tells them, “You already lost!” He says this because by all the teaching of Christ we should believe that there are things dearer than property, and one of those is the treasure gained by advancing the kingdom of God. That kingdom was losing ground under the Corinthian’s watch, or at least not gaining the ground it could. If Christian’s behavior toward one another is Christ-like, then Christ’s reputation is enhanced, His kingdom grows, and there is never an occasion for a lawsuit.

But Paul does not even state that point. Knowing that their behavior was not and could not always be Christ-like, he demands something else of them in terms of Christlikeness. It is that they become like Christ in His sacrificial death. They are to allow themselves to be wronged without striking back, for the good of the mission. For the sake of the cause of Christ they should mimic His forbearance, and not enforce their personal rights.

It is a huge issue, arriving at the point where one is willing to sacrifice their personal rights in this way. It is not so much a matter of maturity, of arriving at a point in one’s spiritual journey where this mentality suddenly sets in. It is forever in this life a matter that requires discipline and that the flesh greatly resists. Is a matter of dying daily. It is even for the mature a constant exercise of casting one’s concerns on the Lord and assuming a posture of a servant. We never arrive at a point where this is an automatic reflex to being wronged. It is automatic to fight back. It is the spiritual individual who can set aside the agenda for the sake of a more noble one. It is not simply the higher road, the better of two good things. It is a defeat to choose anything else. We must grasp that truth. We must wrestle with it daily if we are to advance the cause of Christ in our day. Anything less is to accept defeat.

**6:8—on the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren.**

There was wrongdoing and defrauding going on in the Corinthian church. They were suing each other and worse, they had cause. Not only was it a defeat that they were at one another’s throats, but worse it was legitimate in the sense that they were committing wrongs against one another. So they were twice defeated. They sinned against one another and then responded sinfully to that and sued one another. Contrary to being above reproach, they were up to their ears in it.

**6:9—or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,**

Paul is having a difficult time understanding how the Corinthians could be blindly doing and allowing the types of things they are. These are things associated with a whole different way of thinking, their old life. And so he asks them if they are aware that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. He asked this to remind them that these kinds of deeds that have crept into their church are the very things that characterize unbelievers, the unregenerate. The Corinthians had slipped backwards.

Why would those who had been born again do them? That is the question. Something is wrong when you start seeing these things rearing their ugly heads in the Church. That is the clear message Paul sends. Logically these things make no sense for Christians.

Paul is not trying to suggest that they themselves are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. He has already commended them (1:4-9) for the work God has done in their lives. He is telling them that they are not behaving in line with what God has given them. Paul is restating in a different way the problem he defined in 3:1-3. They are being carnal, or fleshly. They are babes in Christ. These deeds that he will list through verse 10, are the trappings of the old way of living. They are garments that are to be discarded, cast off to put on the new. It is a mark of ignorance to continue in them. There is something such a person has not really come to grips with.

**6:10—nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor grumblers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.**

Paul is describing the outward conduct of those who are unrighteous. To Paul, the unrighteous are the unbelievers. These follow a very predictable course of unrighteous deeds. It is not an all-inclusive list. Murderers are not listed. liars and deceivers are not listed. It does provide solid examples of what characterizes the unrighteous. It is fitting that this is a list of types of persons not just types of deeds. All humans covet at one time or another. It is another matter to be called a covetous person. Most have stolen. It is different to be a thief.

Why would a born-again individual mimic the character of such persons as these? It is completely and utterly incongruous. That is the point Paul wants to make. Why follow and mimic those who will end up banned for eternity from the presence of God? To do so is to behave ignorantly.

Do not be deceived in this matter Paul has said. One can easily fall into a pattern of justifying contradictory behavior. That is the great scourge of fallen humanity, sin's dominion, and our blindness. We must remind ourselves frequently of whom we should be following and mimicking. And remember that believers can fall into these deeds.

**6:11—and such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**

Paul does not say the Corinthians *are* such people. He says they *were* such people. They also *were* washed, sanctified, and justified. This verse tells the great story of grace that allows such a life to be a thing of the past and a completely different life to be our heritage.

Paul's immediate point to the Corinthians is that they should never let their lives individually or collectively slip back into the old patterns of the past. Such deeds are the norm for the unwashed, unsanctified, and unjustified of this world. They are our past not our present. Some of the Corinthians were slipping into fornication, swindling, stealing, coveting, drunkenness, and such things. They were being deceived and falling into the behavior of the deceived. Paul does not want it to be so. Here he exhorts them by reminding them of how high they have been lifted from what use to be their way of living.

**6:12—All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.**

In what sense does Paul mean that "all things are lawful for me"? There is a sense in which it is true where grace is done and is doing its work forgiveness. But this is likely a phrase that Paul is borrowing from antinomian (from *αντι* and *νομος*, meaning "against law") teachers who were using the doctrine of grace as license for all manner of immorality. We know that this kind of teaching was creeping into Christianity through Gnostic influences. So Paul quotes their line, "all things are lawful for me."

There is truth to that, and it is the freedom that comes with grace. However there are other doctrines that must be held even as one holds on to grace. There is the principle of stewardship. There is also the principle of reaping what you sow. So, while all things are lawful, because "our sins and lawless deeds God remembers no more," not all things will yield profit and reward. Not all things will advance the kingdom of God. Not all things bring glory and honor to the One who brought about my freedom. While all things are lawful for me, sin is still dangerous and can rain down its awful consequences on me. I can still be deceived by it and awake to find that it is mastering me. And while reveling in my freedom, I must hold on to these truths as well and make choices in time with their implications in full view.

**6:13—food is for the stomach and the stomach for food; but God will do away with both of them. But the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.**

This too is an answer to the Gnostic teachers who were advocating immorality since it is simply an activity of the body which was to be done away with anyway. "Food is for the stomach and the subject is for food," was likely one of their proverbial sayings, flippantly used to teach that the body was for sexual, and all means of pleasure, and such pleasure for the body, and it was all a matter that related just to this life. So immorality was no big deal.

Paul states emphatically here that this is not the case. Both the body and food serve God's purposes and he is Lord of them. The body is given to be inhabited by God's Spirit and to carry out His purposes. The body is not inconsequential to God. He not only cares about what the body is used for, He has a specific plan and purpose for it.

**6:14—Now God has not only raised up the Lord, but will also raise us up by His power.**

The present body we have will be done away with. But it is not right to say as the Gnostics were saying that death is the end of the body. For God will raise it and give it some new form. The new body will relate in some way to the old though we don't know how. Whether it will be similar in appearance but composed of a different type of matter or whether there are some other explanation remains a subject of our speculations. We know it is true that our present bodies are "done away with" (verse 13), and that they are raised up through God's power, in the same way as was true of Jesus. We know that in His resurrected body Jesus was both recognizable and not recognizable, both visible yet could vanish, that He ate yet could pass through walls. Our understanding of the future body is limited to these ideas.



**6:15—do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the member of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be!**

Our bodies are members of Christ, not just our spirits. Our bodies collectively make Christ visible to the world. Joining them to a harlot is incongruent with that vision Yahweh has for us. During the era of the Old Testament God's men did such things, but this marks the progress of revelation. Such a thing is unimaginable when we come to know and understand who we are and what we collectively are in Christ.

**6:16—or do you know the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For he says, "that you will become one flesh."**

"Or do you not know" is a phrase common in this passage. It is a means of reminding those who should know better and teaching those who are ignorant. It provides a means of conveying that this is a very basic part of what God has made known to us. In this case Paul cites the principle given in Genesis 2 regarding physical intimacy that would occur in marriage. There it is said that man would find woman his complement with all the companionship and emotional attraction that go with that, and for that reason would leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. It is for that context that God gave us our sexuality.

Joining oneself to a woman sexually is meant to make a statement about your feelings toward her, your commitment toward her, your value of her, and the choice you made concerning her for the rest of your life. Therefore when one joins himself to a whore, both are trivializing, or at least attempting to trivialize, something that has great emotional significance. They are believing that they can cause their emotions and their bodies to act independently of the Creator's design. In doing so one does damage to the unity that is their person.

There is no such thing as "casual sex." Something of your soul enters it. One who hires a whore pays much more than the supposed fee, and the woman who so sells herself assigns herself a place in an emotional wilderness. Sex creates an emotional bond, a union in which a host of emotions are designed to flow. When emotional exchange is denied, an emotional handicap begins to set in, a callousness that robs almost every relationship those persons enter, that breeds all manner of relational dysfunction, and if continuously repeated robs them of their capacity to achieve emotional intimacy.

**6:17—but the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him.**

Believing in the truth of Jesus Christ is an act joining oneself to the Lord. And when we do so, the Lord joins Himself to us, taking up residence in our spirit through the Holy Spirit. At that point we become one with Him and with other believers. It is incongruous to join oneself and in doing so the entire body of Christ, to a prostitute. In doing so we bring great grief to Christ, and we bring harm to all those we are joined to through Him. We are "one spirit" with the Lord. There is a deep holiness and sacredness to that. To join that to a harlot is to tread on the sacred, to blaspheme, and to make a mockery of all that we have professed.

**6:18—Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.**

Because of the nature of sex, the fact that it is an expression which the entire being enters, the consequences of its misuse are experienced in the entire being. I do not believe the term body is here used as a technical term for our physical body as opposed to our emotional and spiritual being. It is a term for the whole being, like the way the term body is used in Romans 12:1. You cannot abuse sex without experiencing personal consequences from emotional issues such as addiction, distrust, detachment, and compartmentalization, to physical issues such as disease.

It is not that other sins do not have such consequences. When Paul speaks of other sins being outside the body, he means that in other sins, something may be gained for the body. The thief may gain that which produces bodily comfort, as might a covetous man. But an immoral man who gratifies his body encumbers it with a sort of debt that will be paid on for years perhaps a lifetime.

Sins of immorality produce thought patterns like no other. They follow us around for our entire earthly lives. We "program" our bodies for certain behaviors through such sin. We either spent a lifetime fighting it or we choose not to resist and keep digging the hole deeper. It is sin unlike all other types in the way it can grip us. For this reason we are to flee from it. There is only one way to deal with this kind of temptation, don't stay and fight it, run from it.

**6:19—but do not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?**

This is the last of several "do you not know" statements in this chapter. Paul speaks of the truth that is important to ponder, that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. The word Temple is *naos*. It is the word used of the inner part of the Jewish Temple and the word used of anything considered a holy shrine. It is not that we are simply a dwelling, though we are that. We are meant to make a statement about the Holy Spirit by the deeds of our body. Our bodies are dedicated to Him whom God has given to us; we are not our own.

This does not mean we do not have a will of our own. It means that we no longer have only ourselves to serve. Our understanding has enabled us to accept a certain reality, that we never have had only ourselves to honor, but also our Creator and Savior to honor as well. In this sense we are not our own, we owe a debt of gratitude and respect to God, and He deserves from us true and sincere worship, carried out in the practical matters of life mentioned in this chapter.

**6:20—for you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.**

Paul speaks specifically to why we are not our own. The reason is God's act of redeeming us from our slavery to sin and the ruler of its domain. The blood of Christ settled the claim of God's justice against us. It was not a ransom paid to Satan; he only takes advantage of our fallen condition. The ransom paid was to satisfy God's own character, His great and perfect standard of justice. It was satisfactory payment in every sense, and it enabled those thus freed to live a new kind of life.

Before Christ's death, the Old Testament Saints had the Holy Spirit with them. Jesus said the time was coming when worshipers would no longer go to a certain place to

worship, but that true worshipers would worship in spirit and in truth. When He died, He provided payment for our redemption, we became a Temple of the Holy Spirit, who is no longer just with us, but He is in us. It became possible to glorify God in a whole new way in our bodies. Here Paul summons us to live out that potential, to bring to reality the prophetic words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman (John 4:21-24).

## 1 Corinthians 7

**7:1—now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.**

The Corinthians had written Paul a letter asking him questions about a variety of subjects that he will now begin to respond to. They had several questions about marriage and sexual issues, their interface with a very idolatrous culture, and various issues connected with conduct in public worship services and with the resurrection. We arrive at what their questions were by the issues Paul deals with in the ensuing chapters. We have no copy of the letter to him.

In this verse Paul says it is good for a man not to touch a woman. Though it is impossible to state with absolute certainty what the question was that brought about this answer, it is likely that they were beginning to move in the direction of asceticism, including the idea that any sexual contact was inherently evil. Paul wants to communicate to them that there is merit in abstinence but also merit in a sexual relationship that exists in the bounds of marriage. Here he is simply saying that if a man chooses abstinence, it is a choice with merit. His ensuing remarks will show that it is not all right for a married man to choose this position. But for now, if a man chooses not to touch a woman that is a choice with some merit.

The word for touch is *απτο*, meaning to ignite or kindle. In the middle voice it was used to express the idea of touch and appears widely in the New Testament for this idea. Here it means to touch sexually. But sexuality is not inherent in the word itself, the context adds that idea.

This statement is likely the first step in responding to the question, "should a Christian man abstain from all sexual activity?" Paul would naturally begin by saying this, that such a position is a legitimate choice. He will go on to state that this is not the only option, nor is it even the normal option. It is an option for some in certain cases, which he will eventually describe.

**7:2—but because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.**

While it is good to choose abstinence, it is usually not realistic. Only a few can live in this way. So marriage is how our sexual needs are met. Random sexual activity is not an option. A man should have his own wife, one woman who is exclusively his, and a woman should have one man that is exclusively hers. This is because of "immoralities", *πορνεία* in Greek, a wide range of sexual activities outside of God's will.

Abstinence is a good choice for some people, but usually not a practical one that they can maintain a commitment to. It most often results in immorality. God's provision for our sexuality is marriage. He instituted and condoned it and declared it an honorable thing, as a writer to the Hebrews would state in Hebrews 13:4.

**7:3—let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.**

The husband and wife are to "give back what is owed" to one another. While there is nothing inherently sexual in these terms themselves, the context makes it clear that this is Paul's intended meaning. Paul does not view the sexual expression between husband and wife as something that must be earned or won. It is a marital responsibility to meet your spouse's sexual needs. Paul's wording is straightforward. I do not believe that he is trying to reduce the sexual experience to mere robotics. We must remember that the issue he would most likely be addressing in these comments was the idea that a man should not touch a woman, that sexuality was inherently wrong. For him to portray it as a responsibility was exactly what the situation called for, and so he does. He is being practical, and so stating the practical truth of the matter.

**7:4—the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does, and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.**

In the relationship of marriage, many of our personal rights are surrendered. One of those rights is to simply use our bodies for our own pleasure. In marriage we give our bodies for the good of our spouse, and this extends to all matters. In sexual matters, we have no right to give our bodies to another for sexual gratification. It belongs to our spouse. We have no right to withhold ourselves from our spouse. Our body belongs to our spouse.

This is an unpopular thought in our time, when it is generally held that authority over one's own body is an inviolable right. The fact however remains that if this right is not surrendered there is not much hope to build a successful marriage. Violation of the principle taught here by Paul is nearly always fatal to marriage. That principle simply stated is to meet the sexual need of your spouse even if you don't feel like it.

**7:5—stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again unless Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.**

If husband and wife are not engaging in sexual relations, it had better be by mutual agreement and they had better be praying! Paul concedes that such a season may be appropriate and that this would constitute a legitimate reason to not engage in sexual acts. It is to be a temporary thing after which they are to re-engage. If they cannot, Paul says Satan will have an opportunity and they would be very vulnerable.

When Paul speaks of their lack of self-control is not necessarily saying, "I know you Corinthians, and you can't control yourselves!" Though they were a very wanton culture. Paul is not necessarily singling them out as exceptionally lacking. He could be speaking merely of the normal lack of self-control resident in human beings. It is a dangerous thing for any human being to speak of having good self-control. It is particularly dangerous to make oneself vulnerable to the evil one thinking that self-control will prevail and thwart his schemes. Paul's words can be understood as talking down. But it is more likely that they were simply meant to be reality therapy from a fellow member of humanity.

**7:6—but this I say by way of concession, not of command.**

Paul concedes here to have an opinion about marriage. It is not a command. It is in the inerrant word of God because it is a challenge God wants all individuals to consider. It is not for all to conform to because it is not God's will or plan for all people or even most people. Paul had not received this directly by revelation from God. He was however inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this. That means it has the authority of God behind it and we should consider it as we make life decisions.

**7:7—yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However each man has his own gift from God, one in this matter and one in that.**

Paul in this verse is referring to being in an unmarried state for all one's life. He views this as a gift. A gift is an equipping for God's service. It enables one to carry out their personal mission. Paul uses singleness as something provided for him in the sovereignty of God so that he could carry out more effectively his life mission.

That is not obvious in this verse but will be in those that follow. Paul also states why he wishes that all men were single, though he realizes that would be impractical in a host of ways and realizes that it is a special calling and gifting. Such a choice in Paul's mind is out of the ordinary and out of the normal range of occurrence for a man to follow him in this.

**7:8—but I say to the unmarried and widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I.**

Singleness is an option, and a challenge Paul wants all of the unmarried to consider. He says it is good. God also said marriage is good. So Paul is not saying that being single is better nor he is saying that it is a higher road. Paul is simply saying that like marriage, being single too, is good.

**7:9—but if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.**

Paul has termed himself as "gifted" and has described that giftedness as the ability to remain single and be pure and moral. This would include it would seem, an ability to live without female companionship and an absence of the normal sexual need. We do not expect from such a one words that speak fondly of the tender things of a husband/wife relationship. Paul's words can appear clinical and even judgmental to us. They are the perspective of one who had never known the experience of marriage, and they would have appeal only to those gifted as Paul was.

Paul gives instructions for those who are not gifted as he was, which giftedness was essentially an extra-ordinary measure of self-control in sexual matters. Those without such a gifting were not to aspire to be like Paul. If an individual lacked such self-control they are to marry, for that is God's holy and righteous provision for our sexuality.

**7:10—but to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband.**

This instruction is directed to the married. This is the rule in marriage relationships where both spouses are believers. In addition, Paul makes it clear that this instruction is directly from the Lord. It is what the Lord taught in the matter of divorce or separation in marriage. It was either a matter that he taught on during His earthly ministry, or it was a matter special revelation.

Paul likely is responding to a question asked by the Corinthians in their letter to him. They had questions about divorce in different cases and likely had a different standard in their minds for men and women. That would have been in harmony with the culture of that day. One of the most notable things is that Paul holds both to the same standard. He begins by stating that the wife should not leave the husband. The word "leave" is χωρισθῆναι, from χωρίζω, meaning to separate oneself. It includes what we refer to as "separation" as well as divorce.

**7:11—(but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not send his wife away.**

Having stated the plain teaching of Christ, Paul states a concession that Christ must also have made. It is clearly not God's design that any spouse leave, but in the fallen human stream it will happen. Paul says if it does, they are to remain unmarried or be reconciled.

Some would say this applies to the exception that will be dealt with later in verse 15 where spouse is abandoned by an unbelieving mate. This does not seem logical since in that case they are not "bound," and in this case they clearly are. It is best to take this as referring to marriages that for reasons other than πορνεία (Matthew 19:3-12), or for the cases about to be stated in this chapter, become dysfunctional. It would include cases of abuse.

In such cases separation may come about to do hardness of heart and its accompanying lack of repentance. There is to be no remarriage. The spouses are to remain unmarried or be reconciled. The husband is not to send his wife away. He is not given the parenthetical instruction, but it is understood as applying to him as well. The absence of this instruction could relate to the specific questions the Corinthians asked of Paul. It likely shows us that Paul is not writing here a code that covers all situations. He is simply answering the questions the Corinthians had asked. Its absence could also be explained simply by Paul's intention that it be understood as applying to both. That would be normal in terms of communication.

**7:12—to but to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with them, let him not send her away.**

These instructions are addressed to the rest. Now, who are the rest? Here Paul is talking to another group, married people who had spouses not in the body of Christ. The previous instructions had to do with marriages in which both spouses were of the faith. The Corinthians had apparently asked Paul's advice on mixed faith marriages. He says that he speaks not the Lord. Does this mean this is uninspired and without authority? No, Paul is probably simply saying that the Lord during his earthly ministry

and during those times of a special revelation had given no specific instruction on this matter. So there was no specific tradition passed on by Jesus in this area.

The rule Paul laid down was that such mixed faith marriages did not have to be abandoned simply because a spouse had come to faith. We can see how this idea might be taught in view of the Old Testament Scriptures where marriages of Israelites to non-Israelites were condemned and in times of revival abandoned. Some would wrongfully teach that when a person became a believer, they had to put away their pagan spouse. Paul says no to this idea first to husbands.

**7:13—and a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, not to send her husband away.**

Paul states the same rule that he has previously stated for the husbands applies to the wives. There is no demand on the part of God to separate oneself from an unbelieving partner.

**7:14—for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by her believing husband, for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.**

This teaching is to combat any thought that could arise of a mongrel race, children that were cursed or abandoned by God because of a mixed faith marriage. Paul clearly teaches that this is not a legitimate worry, concern, or reason for dissolution of a marriage.

God blesses a home when there is one of His people present in it. Neither the marriage or the offspring will be cursed by Him. In fact they will be viewed as holy due to His covenant relationship with one of the spouses. This is not to say that an unbelieving spouse will be saved by virtue of the faith of the believing spouse. It is simply to say that the marriage is viewed as sacred by God.

**7:15—yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, God has called us to peace.**

If the unbelieving spouse elects to leave the marriage, the believer is free from obligation and should not fight the marriage dissolution. We are called to peace and that should be remembered when a marriage comes apart for this reason. God's calling us to peace is set in contrast to the idea of bondage here.

It is God's will that our homes be places of peace, and that we experience peace in our personal lives. In the event of an unbelieving spouse leaving the marriage, a believing spouse is released from all obligation. The same kind of terms are used in Romans 7:1-3 to describe what happens to a marriage with the death of a spouse. The surviving spouse is not "bound." I take that to mean they are free to re-marry, and the same is true in this case. Such a spouse who has been abandoned by an unbelieving spouse can be at peace with that and find peace in a new marriage.



**7:16—For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, oh husband, whether you will save your wife?**

Just walking away from an unbelieving mate as a matter of rule, as some Corinthian people were apparently advocating, ignored an important potential. For while the foreign spouse of an Old Testament Jew could never alter their race, the heart of an unbeliever can always be changed. To stay with an unbelieving spouse who is willing to stay in the marriage, allows for the possibility of prayer to be answered and belief to come about.

**7:17—only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in that manner let him walk. And this I direct in all the churches.**

Christianity as a faith was settling in. In its early days, as recorded in Acts, all sorts of things changed when one became a believer. Property was shared, and there were daily gatherings. One gets the impression that much of the normal living simply stopped. There is that tendency when the imminent return of the Lord is properly taught.

Paul directed that there should be a certain normalcy to our lives as Christians. There was to be a certain stability to our lives so that we carried out the responsibilities that God appointed in the lot He placed us in. Paul's desire is that we not find ourselves on the day of the Lord to have been unfaithful in those matters we have been assigned. He first states this general principle. There are of course exceptions, but it is a good general rule that Paul set forth for all Christians everywhere. Not all things are to change, though the way we do them may be radically altered.

**7:18—was any man called already circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised.**

Paul will apply this general principle of remaining in the state in which you are called to several areas, and perhaps the most emotional he speaks to first. The first half of this statement on circumcision deals with an impossibility, a circumcised person becoming uncircumcised. It allows the second half of the statement to be a strong one, by casting it alongside the impossible. Among Jews of Paul's day, circumcision may have been the number one flash point of tempers. Paul pursues that here and in doing so leaves no doubt about what is proper to expect of a believer in this matter. This being an emotional issue, Paul will make a further statement about it.

**7:19—circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.***

Circumcision was a command of God to the Jews. One can only imagine the contradiction in the mind of many Jews that would have read this statement as it stands here. One can only understand it in the greater context of what Paul taught regarding the ceremonies of the Old Testament era, specifically that circumcision was not a command for the present time. It was a command for the era of the old covenant, the symbol of the coming new covenant when God would circumcise the hearts of his people—indwell them with the Holy Spirit. The real reality having arrived, it was senseless to continue practicing what was symbolic. It was time to practice reality, that being to listen and respond to the Holy Spirit who had been placed in our hearts.

In obeying Him in the practical matters of real life for all to see, our inner circumcision would be made visible to all. The commandments of God are written in our hearts when we are baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is the event which circumcision symbolized, and when the event came about, the symbol was obsolete and could be discarded.

The bottom-line is obedience. What God desired to symbolize through circumcision was that a man belonged to a peculiar people who belonged to a particular God whom they all revered and obeyed. Circumcision was a mark of ownership, lordship if you will. But it was done in the body and had no real power in terms of changing the person. And so circumcised men could still be blasphemous and disobedient, and they were. The event circumcision foreshadowed was the baptism of the Holy Spirit that would happen in the moment of belief. This was performed on the inner man, and it produce obedience from the heart.

**7:20—let each man remained in that condition in which he was called.**

Paul restates the principal. It is a principle of a certain responsibility and stability that new birth should produce. There is a radical side of conversion. Sweeping changes can come about in an individual as they listen to the promptings of God. Paul had been an example of that. But there is this side to conversion as well, the sense in which regeneration helps stabilize us. We are enabled to fulfill certain fundamental responsibilities in life better, the responsibilities of a husband, a father, or an employee. This principle of remaining in the condition in which we are called is repeated three times in verses 17-24.

**7:21—Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that.**

Again, we are not to assume that our conversion means that everything should change. Some of Paul's readers were slaves. They were told not to worry about it. That is, do not think God is calling you to make some radical move, such as running away, to change your lot. Don't think you are being disobedient by remaining a slave.

This does not mean you are called to be a slave forever. If the opportunity comes for freedom, take it. You are not confined to it because that was your situation when you were called. But neither are you sinning to live out your earthly obligation or to fulfill your duty. Carry out your current responsibility well, fulfill your obligations, and then seize the opportunities that God brings your way. That is the rule we live under in terms of many of our relationships in this life.

**7:22—for he who was called in the Lord while the slave is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.**

In the discussion of slavery it was of first importance that Christians not to be excessively in love with earthly freedom. Such freedom is seductive and tantalizing. But it cannot deliver what it appears to promise. It is for the most part a mirage of happiness. The things we think are found in freedom are found in the life of submission to Christ. In slavery to Him we find freedom. Apart from that our spirits are simply not at rest. In Him they can soar.

Our earthly status can be that of being a slave, but we can have freedom within because of Christ. Or our earthly status can be that of being free, but we have learned to submit ourselves to Christ and in this way we find true freedom. In either case the individual has learned the secret of feeling free, and it is something that no one can rob them of.

**7:23—you are brought the price; do not become slaves of men.**

One could become a slave in those days by failing to fulfill an obligation, such as a financial debt. One could also perhaps due to fear of not having the necessities, voluntarily become the slave of another. Or one could be born into slavery. The latter could not be controlled. The former could, and Paul has laid out the principles that were to guide Christian's thinking on the matter. The principle he sets forth is simple. If you become a Christian while you are a slave, fulfill your obligation. You are not sinning by doing so and you can find freedom in Christ.

But if you become a Christian as a free man, do not do the things that result in you becoming a slave. You are one who belongs to Christ, bought by Him for a price, paid for by His blood. Live to have freedom to serve Him with all your strength.

Now, are not the seeds sewn in this command to bring an end to slavery? If slavery is something we should avoid, is it not also something we should avoid bringing on others? Though the Bible nowhere condemns slavery as an institution, it plants the seeds for its abolition, at least among believers.

**7:24—brethren, let each man remain with God in that condition in which he is called.**

With God, that is the big difference between the life before belief and life after belief. It is not that God instantly calls you to a different station in this life. It is simply that He calls you to Himself. You'll likely continue with the same obligations and responsibilities you had before, but you will be with God. The preposition is *παρα* used with the dative, conveying the idea of nearness, or being in one's presence.

Once again this is the general rule. Do just what you've been doing, stay married, keep your job you had before, don't worry about getting circumcised, begin by being faithful in the things you're already doing. Do those things with God. Let others see the difference He makes in you, in your normal routines of life.

**7:25—Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.**

Though it is not the main idea of the verse, it is important to observe a personal habit of Paul's, to reckon his own position because of the mercy of God. It is an important discipline of thought to maintain this perspective.

Again, when Paul says he has no command of the Lord we are not to leap to the conclusion that what he says is therefore not of the Lord. He simply means that in Christ's revelation, in which Paul had direct audience with Christ, or by the witness of those who had been in Jesus company during his earthly ministry, there was no specific teaching on this subject that came directly from Christ. So Paul was not moving out from under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

That activity of inspiration had been a work of recall, the Holy Spirit helping Paul recall what Jesus had said. It became a different work on these types of subjects, that of inspiring thoughts and words that will accurately and precisely express the thought of God on this issue. Now, what was the issue? It seems to be how a father should handle giving away of their daughters in marriage. Now if the institution of marriage was being thought of as something which a believer should perhaps avoid, then this would be a natural offshoot of that question. Fathers would wonder if they should give their daughters in marriage. So Paul will give his thought, which is being directed by the Holy Spirit at this point to express the mind of God.

**7:26—I think then that this is good in view of the personal distress, that is good for a man to remain as he is.**

Paul again states the principle he has been propounding. It applies to the married, the unmarried, and to those "not yet married." This is the over-arching principle to adhere too particularly in view of the trouble that faced Christians in the first century. It was a good principle for those in Corinth and the entire set of circumstances they faced. The principle is this; don't complicate your life by assuming additional responsibilities and stresses induced by change, and don't neglect any responsibilities.

**7:27—are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.**

This is the application of the principle in the previous verse to marriage. Wherever you're at in terms of the relationship of marriage, stay there. Paul addresses those married, and he seems by his choice of words perhaps to address the divorced, since he uses the term *λυω*, meaning loosed. He is probably wishing to use a term that will include those who are unmarried for any reason at all, and so chooses this term loosed, which is true both of those who have been married and those who have never been married.

**7:28—but if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I'm trying to spare you.**

Marriage is not sin. It is not sin for those saved after being released from a wife and is not sin for those who never been married. Paul says they will have trouble in this life. I do not believe he is contradicting God's blessing of marriage here and saying marriage itself is trouble. He means that the times were such that marriage will mean pain.

The ensuing verses indicate that Paul expected the consummation of the age. He knew it would be preceded by trouble and persecution, by the rule of the man of sin. That persecution would be that much harder for those with spouses and family. There would be torture, death, and all manner of suffering. Paul's view of the times is clearly driving his words here on marriage as the context indicates.

**7:29—but this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none;**

Again, Paul's view of the times is clearly shaping his words in these verses. What is he speaking of here when he speaks of the time when those who have wives should be as though they had none? Verse 31 will clarify this. There he will say that the form of this

world is passing away. The marriage institution relates to the present form of the world. Its time has been shortened. The days are approaching when believers will neither be taken or given in marriage but as Jesus said, they will be "as the angels." So Paul is looking ahead to the coming of the Lord, which was and is imminent. When that happens a few things will simply be unimportant. He will speak of some of those things that will pass away in the following verses.

**7:30—and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess.**

When the time comes when we are translated into the kingdom of light, our sorrow will not matter, nor our earthly joys. The things which caused us pain will seem insignificant. The things which brought us joy and happiness will be surpassed by better joys. Our possessions will have no meaning, and we will be full, craving none of earth's goods.

**7:31—and those who use this world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of the world is passing away.**

Those who use the world system for their profit, to get ahead by it, will be as though they had done nothing, as though they had neglected opportunity, because all the forms of the cosmos will vanish. What had meaning will have none. Those who counted on the world for their security will be found to have squandered opportunity, to have not taken care of business, the victims of missed opportunity, the very thing they loathed in others during this life.

**7:32—but I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord;**

Paul's desire is that the Corinthians might be free from concern, meaning worldly concern, anxiety related to this life. This comes much more easily for the unmarried. They can be more ministry focused. This is a perspective offered from an unmarried man who is called to be so and who is challenging those who may be called to follow him.

It is not that a married person cannot be concerned about the things of the Lord and pleasing the Lord. It is that in the Lord he has the responsibility of his wife and family to be concerned with. He can have considerable anxiety, as can his family, when marriage and ministry are mixed.

We must remember though, that marriage is still the norm. Singleness should be considered by every person. But in most cases a "helpmate" is what will be declared as good. We must remember that it was in doing God's work that Adam discovered he needed a helper, and God provided Eve to meet that need. That was in a perfect world. Because the world is troubled, marriage can be troubled, and Paul is holding before the readers a way to consider in which they will be free from such trouble.

**7:33—but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife,**

By virtue of the covenant one enters in marriage, certain responsibilities are incurred that must be taken seriously. The married man is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it. So there is sacrifice and it is right and proper. It can be no other way. The responsibilities of marriage include things that relate to this life. There is the provision of food, shelter, clothing, and there is concern about protection, nurture, health, and happiness. There are legitimate responsibilities that a married man must keep his eye on, and they relate to this life.

**7:34—and his interests are divided. And the woman who is unmarried and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about things of the world, how she may please her husband.**

The interests of the married, male or female, are divided. It is a fact of this life. It is not wrong; it is simply the way it is. This is not a call to the married to be less divided in their interests. It is a statement of what the practical implications of marriage are and an invitation to entertain the idea that not everyone is called to marriage.

There is a person who can, for love of holiness, set aside any desire for marriage, and live a life totally focused on the things that concern the Lord. Of course, populating the earth and producing godly offspring concern the Lord as well, but here Paul is challenging the readers with the idea of godly celibacy.

**7:35—and this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.**

Paul's words are spoken from the perspective of a man called to apostleship. His travels took him throughout the known world, and it is doubtful that any married man could have done what he did without incurring much anxiety for himself and trouble for his family. Paul makes it clear that this is not a rule they are to follow, literally it is not meant to be a "noose" on them. Speaking from his perspective as an unmarried man who believed the time was short, he wanted to put forward what made sense. He also wanted to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. For some, this means singleness. This is Paul's challenge here, to remain single and so more single-focused.

However, the chapter began by conceding that the desire for romance and all that goes with it, if one is not gifted to deny it, can be so distracting that marriage is a means of securing more undistracted devotion to the Lord. The decision comes down to the goal, and what state will enable one to be less distracted and more devoted to the Lord. For the gifted few this means singleness. Among the majority it means marriage, and this too is in harmony with the purposes of God. Paul is not seeking to restrain or alter this natural order, but in view of marriage trouble, which has always been a curse of ministry, he urges some to remain unmarried.

**7:36—But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly to his virgin daughter, if she should be of full age, and if it must be so, tell him to do what he wishes, he does not sin: let her marry.**

Who this verse is addressing has been a matter of diverse opinion. Most have opted for the interpretation of the NASB and injected "daughter" into the text, where it read simply "virgin." Thus it is addressed to fathers, who in the world of arranged marriages, and with some suggesting marriage was wrong for believers, wondered what their responsibility was regarding their daughters. One can imagine the angst for such a man.

Others are suggested the verses are addressed to young men engaged to young women who wondered if marriage is proper for believers. This interpretation puts strain on the text, particularly in verse 37.

So all in all, the interpretation of the NASB seems to work best. To be at peace with the text one must see it through the culture of the day, where a father set forth a plan for a child's life and this was perfectly appropriate. Both the daughter and the entire culture were at peace with this. Anything less was the equivalent of neglect.

In this cultural context men are told that they have no mandate in this matter. There are three "ifs" in the matter of arranging marriage that they would have to consider. By refusing marriage, would they be acting in an "unbecoming way." This is a rather broad term that could include several circumstances, from considering their daughter's wishes in the matter to being considerate of her needs in the matter. Is it appropriate in her case to be a married woman or to remain single? Dad would have to ponder this matter carefully.

The second "if" was her age. It should be "full." She should be mature physically and emotionally for such an important responsibility.

The third "if" is "if it must be so." This again is a general statement, inclusive of several practical matters we would guess, such as romantic involvement, the man in question's own ability to financially support her, and so on. The point is that a man who wisely arranges a marriage of his daughter does not sin.

So with these ideas Paul has begun to answer the question he started to address in verse 25. He brings to the issue no direct word of the Lord, neither written or oral tradition. And so there is reasonable latitude, as the following verses will indicate in this matter.

**7:37—But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well.**

If there is none of the practical restraint mentioned earlier in this matter, if it is purely up to dad, and he makes a commitment to keep, meaning to accept financial and emotional responsibility for his daughter, he makes a good choice by doing so. Such a decision in breaking with the wisdom of the day and the times, which was to get rid the financial burden of a daughter, would be honoring to God and the man who made such a decision was "doing well."

**7:38—so then, both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well and he who does not give her does better.**

There is this latitude, in that both are within the scope of God's will and good pleasure. Now why does Paul suggest that the one who does not give her in marriage does better? Again we must view this in terms of the culture of the day, where getting out from under the financial obligation of the daughter was the norm as well as recouping costs through payment of a dowry.

The man who determined that marriage was not God's will for his daughter, and agreed to continue caring for and supporting her was doing a noble thing. It was elevating marriage from being a simple means of freeing one from a financial obligation to a matter which should be entered into carefully with God's mind in the matter. It elevated women from being a simple liability to being seen as an asset for the kingdom, those who could contribute significantly to the advance of the church if free from domestic responsibility. "Keeping" the daughter was an investment in eternity not a financial burden.

**7:39—the wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.**

Paul begins to wrap up his discussion of various issues relating to marriage with this statement. And we must remember that he is writing this section of this epistle in response to some questions he had been asked. We do not know what those questions were, but we suspect that they had some very errant views on Christianity and marriage. Some must have been thinking that married people who became believers should leave their marriages so as to be purely dedicated to Christ. Others were thinking that those who became believers, but who had spouses that did not come to faith, had to leave those marriages. There was apparently the thought that all sexual activity should cease even among husband-and-wife. It seems there were some who thought that the unmarried should not become married. And then there was a question about divorce and separation.

It is a very mixed bag that Paul has dealt with and surprisingly little he has written given the diversity of the issues he was discussing. We might have tried to set forth many more policies to govern these matters. When one stops to ponder the breadth of the issues, what is said is impressive as well as what is not said.

Here Paul addresses the marriage obligation of the wife. We assume that the same is true for the husband, though we are aware that in that culture their legal obligations were very different. We are left to wonder why Paul did not specifically mention the man in these concluding verses, except to say that it is likely because the Corinthians asked only about widows in their letter to Paul, and so he answers the question they asked. It is always dangerous to base a position on what is not said in Scripture, so we should not conclude that because Paul does not mention the husband here that they are not under this same obligation. He is simply answering the question asked, which was probably, "can widows remarry?" To this Paul answers, "yes." He then explains that the marriage obligation ends in death. Marriage is not an eternal bond. It ends with this life.



**7:40—But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.**

This is not a command against remarriage. It is a perspective offered by a man, who by the leading and direction of God's Spirit, had found untold happiness in pouring himself into God's work, with no conflicting relational ties or responsibilities. It is a perspective that the Spirit of God now led him to record in writing for all who found themselves single to consider carefully. It is a perspective on happiness.

There is the possibility that one can find greater happiness in being unmarried than in being married. That has always been difficult for many to imagine, and many have gotten married to find happiness, something we can derive from God alone. They unfairly charge their mate with that responsibility and their marriage is destined to wind up a disappointment. Only people who have learned to derive happiness from the Lord should enter marriage, and they should enter only the marriage relationship the Lord is happy with. Our happiness is derived from the Lord. To make Him unhappy is to make ourselves unhappy.

Marriage was instituted for happiness, but it is wrong to think that we can be happy only if we are married. That has proved untrue in every generation of human history. Paul wants the widows to consider remaining unattached, considering the potential impact on their happiness. That is foreign to much human thought on this matter.

## 1 Corinthians 8

**8:1—Now concerning the things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.**

Paul now moves on to give understanding on another issue that the Corinthians had asked him about. From what Paul goes on to say we assume that the question had to do specifically with meat that was sacrificed idols. We don't know much about how this meat was used, and how it ended up available in the marketplace for the public, but somehow it did. So question about eating this meat arose in the minds of the Corinthians.

Some were no doubt thinking that such meat defiled a Christian who ate it. They were probably pharisaical about it, believing it contaminated the believer. There was no doubt at all about this issue. On the other extreme there were some who saw no reason for restraint in the matter. "It's just meat!" was probably their rallying cry. Paul begins addressing the matter by laying down some guiding principles.

The first of these guiding principles is given here. Proper and fitting behavior is not just a matter of doing what you know the truth and the facts allow. Knowledge of the truth and facts alone can cause us to conduct ourselves arrogantly. Knowledge, if it is not balanced by something, simply makes us arrogant. On the other hand, love builds up. It is a catchy and true saying, "knowledge puffs up, love builds up." That is the first principle to remember in shaping our conduct. It is to be shaped by what we know but balanced by loving concern for the welfare of the faith of others.

Paul states that we all know some things, and the implication of this is that there are those we have contact with that are not party to this knowledge. When this situation exists, where some know the truth and others don't, there's potential to become proud. The result is even though one has the truth, they have no impact. A better outcome comes about when those who know truth also are loving. These impact the lives of others. Shaping our conduct involves much more than simple knowledge of the rules.

**8:2—if anyone supposes that he knows anything, he is not yet known as he ought to know;**

Arrogant people project a very self-assured image. They can flaunt their knowledge. They can choose a course of action that "there's nothing wrong with," and pursue it in such a way that they project nothing of Christ. All the while they speak confidently of all they know. Such a person may indeed know a great deal in terms of the objective facts of the faith. But knowing God's heart in a matter and His will for our course of action in a manner is a different challenge. There the answers are often not objective and are not gained by mastering a list of facts. They are gained through a relationship, through the leading and prodding of the Holy Spirit.

So one who arrogantly sets a course of action based purely on the facts he knows to be true, can find themselves in a position where they don't really know what the heart of God is in the moment before them. They have not known as they ought to know, because they are not conducting their relationship to God rightly. They've captured the objective element of the faith, which is a critical step we must not set aside. But they have not moved on to use that truth to cultivate subjective development in the faith, the moment-by-moment fellowship with the Savior.

**8:3—but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.**

This is a very powerful thought. It provides a profound conclusion to the thought expressed in the previous verse. We find here the love Paul is aiming them toward is first love FOR God. It is thinking of Him ahead of ourselves. It is thinking of the things dear to Him as being of first importance to us. It is communicating with him and it is listening to Him. It is caring for and loving His children and seeking their highest good.

When someone gives themselves to love FOR God they will find as the verse says that they are known by Him. Paul uses the word γινωσκω, a word used to describe the intimacy between husband and wife. And what did Paul mean by that except that those who think of God ahead of themselves experience His presence and His help in a greater way? God begins to show them His heart, because they have shown a desire to take responsibility for those things dear to His heart. To those who show such love for Him, God gives more of Himself, even as we open ourselves to those who love us, and they reciprocate.

And so in terms of the present issue of the eating of things sacrificed idols, we should know that knowledge of the rules is not the key element that will guide us, but our knowledge of the Lord, our understanding of His heart in the situations where all such matters arise. If our relationship to Him is that of love, where we are putting His interests first, He will guide us. The following verses will show that knowledge of the facts will lead to only one answer in this situation, an answer which may not serve a greater good.

**8:4—therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.**

Paul begins with knowledge. Though the decision of what to do in circumstances is not based purely on knowledge, it is very important that the facts be clear. We must always behave in a way that does not conflict with the truth, and we must state the truth clearly as we behave so that our actions send the right message about Christ. It was Christ who said, "let your light (your understanding of the truth) so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16). Good works only glorify God if they are interpreted in the context of the truth. Otherwise they are simply good works, which all people do some of the time. So knowledge is critical to the mission. I must know why I do what I do and be careful and able to clearly state the reason. So Paul begins with what "we know."

The facts on idols are that there are none. They are a figment of man's imagination. There is no god of the sun, or moon, or stars, no goddess of love. These are merely ideas, and false ones at that. All the phenomena we witness of divine origin are not the works of multiple gods, but only one God, Yahweh. So there is a sense in which there are many gods, and Paul alludes to that in the next verse. That is a reality of the

cultures we attempt to minister to. But from the point of view of what is true there is only one God. The rest exists only in the imagination, as set forth by men trying to explain what they see. It is all conjecture and superstition!

This is not to say that there is no spiritual force connected with these, for we know that demons work wherever false and untrue theology exists and they lend it a kind of spiritual energy. But our knowledge tells us that all other so-called gods are really just imaginary. This is what we know, and we must hold that firmly in hand.

**8:5—for even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,**

Here Paul states the cultural reality, that there are many things touted by the world and the world system as gods. He is speaking here of the view from earth, apart from the knowledge of special revelation. Those without our knowledge have this perspective, and we must be very aware of it.

**8:6—yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.**

This is what special revelation tells us. Things did not come to be as result of the multiple plans, desires, and abilities of many gods. They came because of the plan, desire, and ability of one God, Yahweh. Not only were things ordered by only one God, but only one brought them into existence. There is not a head god and multiple lesser ones who carry out his commands as the Greeks believed. Rather that God, in the person of Christ, created and sustained all that is, including us. This we know by special revelation. We exist for this one God, to bring about His plan. We also exist through Him. We are, because of His efforts in our behalf.

**8:7—however, not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to idols; and their conscience being weak is defiled.**

We must remember what knowledge is being spoken of here. It is the knowledge that idols are not real. They are lifeless with no power. It is this knowledge that not all have.

Now, how does one eat food "as if sacrificed to an idol?" It appears from the following verse that they eat it expecting that it commends them in some way to their god. It was a means of imparting good standing to an individual through eating this special food. So to eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol is to eat it expecting that it imparts some kind of spiritual benefit.

Now, what is a weak conscience? The weak conscience is one that is not functioning in accordance with the truth. We are given by God a mechanism that reminds us of the moral nature of things and makes us aware when we are doing something wrong. But that conscience, when not "programed" by the truth is weak. It sends wrong signals to us. It allows us to do what is wrong and not feel bad, but also to do what is right and feel bad. So a conscience, when not "programed" according to the truth, has the wrong software. It is not reliable as a guide to what is good.

What is a defiled conscience? It is a weak conscience that has been continually reinforced in the wrong direction to where its signals are completely out of sync with truth. It allows someone to feel right with God when they are not. It allows someone to do that which is completely against God's will and not feel any pangs of conscience at all.

One further question remains. What person or persons is Paul concerned about here? Is it the weak Christian who is not yet acquainted with the truth to the degree necessary to have a reliable conscience? Was it all men including both weak believers and unbelievers?

It is most likely the former, the Christian with a weak conscience that Paul is thinking of here. The phrase "until now" indicates this. The fact that it was an issue in the minds of the Corinthians in their church indicates this. Verse 11 seems to directly state this. And so the persons whose consciences are weak and are in danger of being defiled are believers.

We surmise then, that it is possible for believers to negatively impact the development of the conscience of these weaker Christians. A conscience is meant to be governed by the truth and the leading of the Holy Spirit. The consciences of the weak become unreliable guides to them in shaping their fellowship with God. This is why strong, consistent, hands-on declaration of truth is a must. This is the means by which a conscience becomes a means of hearing from the Lord.

**8:8—the food will not commend us to God, we are neither the worse if we do not eat, and other better if we do eat.**

The word for commend is *παριστησει*, from *παριστημι*, meaning to stand by or stand before. The food offered to idols was purported to have the capacity when eaten to enable one to stand before the god to whom it was offered. It imparted standing and induced some type of experience. Paul adds to the Corinthians knowledge this important teaching that food has no power in terms of improving one's standing with God, nor does it improve one's experience with God.

The word translated "the worse" is *υστερουεθα*, from *υστερεω*, meaning to lack, have need of, or fall short of. It implies being inferior. No man has inferior standing with God at any moment either positionally or experientially because of not eating a certain thing. Conversely, the word translated the better is *περισσευεν*, from *περισσευω*, meaning to be left over, to excel or exceed. There is not an advantage to be gained in eating certain foods. It imparts no spiritual increase. So food is a neutral. There is nothing to be either gained or lost by eating a certain type of food.

This was important in the church because both Jew and pagan would stumble over this. It was critical to the "programming" of their consciences that this principle be understood, and firmly embedded in their minds. Therefore if their conscience prodded them with guilt purely on the issue of food, it was sending them a false signal. Spiritually and morally, the food itself is neutral, neither good or bad. But that does not mean that a Christian is at complete liberty in the matter of food.

Through Paul's explanation of this principle we can understand what was happening in Corinth that was of concern to him. For that matter it was happening everywhere in the ancient world. It happens to this day. There were vulnerable Christians who had not gotten free from the superstitions involved in idol worship. They were likely eating

food in idols temples out of superstition, likely to appease spirits. They desperately needed to be coached and led out of such fears and superstitions. This has always been a key issue in people turning to Christ from their worship of false gods. They need coaching. It remains true to the present time.

**8:9—but take care lest this liberty of yours somehow becomes a stumbling block to the weak.**

Paul urges caution against developing a mindset that anything at all could and should be eaten. While food is morally and spiritually neutral, and therefore they had liberty to eat all things, they were to consider the welfare of others faith in doing so. While they were at liberty in the matter of food, and logic and knowledge completely supported that liberty, they were not free from the responsibility to love other Christians, to do what was good for their spiritual welfare. Paul says that the Corinthians should take care, or exercise caution in this matter, or their freedom could trip up the spiritual walk of one weaker in the faith. The next verse will explain Paul's concern.

The principle here is an important one. We've not fulfilled our responsibility simply by determining what is morally okay and doing it. Morality extends beyond our actions themselves to their impact on the faith of others. Knowledge can make us arrogant, aloof from the needs and concerns of others, self-centered. Behaving simply based on what we know can be self-serving.

Behaving based on love tends to strengthen those around us. This is the high ground Christians are to occupy. Knowledge puffs up. It creates an illusion of spiritual strength and stature. Love produces that strength and stature. The word "liberty" is ἐξουσία, meaning authority. There is an authority that comes with knowledge that must be managed with care.

**8:10—for if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining at an idols temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed idols?**

We do not know why a person who is a believer, who had knowledge of the truth, would have been eating at an idols temple. It could be that they would eat there for social reasons. It could be as simple as that it was cheap food, quick, and always available. Whatever the reason, in and of itself it was perfectly legitimate. This means believers were doing it with no thought of pleasing some god or any of the other superstitious reasons other people were part of these cultic meals. They were just eating a meal, or just hanging out with friends. Paul cautions them about this, not for any spiritual danger that could come about in themselves, but the message they could unintentionally send to the weaker Christian.

A weak conscience occurs for a couple of reasons. We know that conscience is the God-given ability to hold truth in hand and based on it make proper moral choices. The key is to hold truth in hand. So our conscience is meant to serve as a moral compass or guide.

When sin entered the human stream, it did so because Adam chose to let go of truth. Every human since, except one, has made the same choice. By repeatedly ignoring the care of one's conscience, the conscience becomes largely unreliable. Armed with untruth it becomes a liability. Such people become devoid of conscience as it was

intended to function. They behave instinctively isolated from the truth. Devoid of conscience, they set out in a direction consistent with what they have embraced as truth. Once traveling that direction more falsehood is added, and superstition creates fear which has a similar feel to conscience. So they live doing as they please but participating in those things that their truth system inwardly compels them to do.

When the truth of Jesus Christ comes into their lives, and the inner work of the Holy Spirit begins, His word in essence is the work of rebuilding their conscience. This takes time. They must learn to listen to that which for years they've ignored. But as they listen to their conscience it is still defiled, having been programmed for years with untruths. They must root out each untruth each in its time. Each defiling idea must be replaced by the truth.

Such a person in Corinth would have been conditioned for years by superstition regarding false gods. They would be fearful of the consequences of not participating in certain rituals. They would feel something like the pangs of conscience about not doing so.

If during such feelings they saw a mature, respected, believer eating in a temple they might wrongly conclude that as a believer in Christ, they were still obligated to placate through special ritual the false gods. In such a case their conscience has been "built-up" (the word used is οικοδομηθησεται), but in the wrong direction. The mature believer has unknowingly and accidentally confirmed the remaining superstitions in the weak believer. Instead, the weak brother must be encouraged to deny their superstitious fears, to redirect their inner being by discerning the difference between the voice of truth, energized by the Holy Spirit, carried out through his conscience, and the baggage of his past religious life with its superstitions and fears. He needs to learn that there is no need and no value in the ceremony and ritual of his old life and so no need to continue it.

**8:11—For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.**

Literally: "for is destroyed the weak one, by your knowledge, the brother because of whom Christ died." The situation that can emerge is very ironic. Destruction comes about (and that is the first word in the sentence, lending it emphasis), because of proper thinking that is not carried out in love. So, a right-thinking Christian produces a mixed bag of the spiritual and the superstitions in the life of a weaker Christian because they do not behave in love.

The work of Christ is brought to bear on the discussion by Paul to show the absurdity of such an outcome and give greater emphasis to his words. Christ died to reclaim those enslaved to false gods and superstition. His work on their behalf, and His ensuing work of sending the indwelling Holy Spirit, was all aimed at this goal of reclaiming the lost and enslaved. It is a work of love, and we participate and advance it only when we behave in love. Knowledge puffs up. It is through love that we build up.

We are to live based on what we know, but also on the basis of what love for our brother and his growing faith dictates.

**8:12—and thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.**

With these words Paul drives home the seriousness of this matter. It is an offense, not just a rough edge. It is a sin not just against another human, but against Christ. It directly thwarts what He is trying to bring about in a life. It falsely portrays His character. It is also, if not done in love, done in direct disobedience to His command. It is something which wounds another's conscience. It strikes a blow to it that inhibits their ability to use it.

It is easy to see how this happens. If a person's conscience is telling them, based on what information they have, not to do a particular thing, and they see someone whom they wish to emulate as a Christian doing it, they are faced with an inner dilemma. Is their conscience right, or is the other Christian right? Apart from loving guidance of a mature Christian they are likely to conclude their own conscience is in error and so begin to distrust it. When they do this, they do the opposite of what God is trying to get them to do. They move backwards, in the direction they used to live in. They should be living by the dictates of a conscience that is slowly being conformed to the truth. Instead they become followers of man. Where their conscience should be shaped and made more useful, it is neglected, and that is in the long-range detrimental to all that God is seeking to do. And so we must live with a view to strengthening all that God is trying to do in the lives of those who are part of this family we are a part of.

**8:13—therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.**

Paul has fully embraced love and living with the welfare of other's faith in mind. Now we know that Paul stood strongly against legalism and especially so with those who were his spiritual peers. But he was apparently careful to take such stands only when dialogue would allow facts to be presented and proper thinking to be cultivated. He did not just live with his own freedom in mind.

Paul will fully develop that idea in the next chapter. Here he sets forth the principle, most likely making good use of hyperbole to emphasize the point, that his own desires will be set aside for the higher good of strengthening the faith of a weaker Christian. Paul used the subjunctive of emphatic negation—οὐκ ἔσθω. It expresses this idea: "I shall by no means eat meat." The word "again," is the rendering of "εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα," unto eternity. The language employs every possible device to state the point emphatically.



## 1 Corinthians 9

**9:1—Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?**

Paul was being attacked by various ones who questioned his authority in the churches along with his rights and privileges. Some were suggesting, we surmise from his defense, that he was something less than an apostle, one who was simply out there on his own gathering his own following. So Paul begins to answer them and their personal attacks.

Paul begins by affirming his freedom. It is hard to know the exact meaning or reasoning behind this statement. Paul apparently wants all to reflect on the fact that whatever he is, he is by his own choice. He is not obligated to any master or to any cause. Now, when one is free, they have certain rights. When they lose freedom, they lose rights. The primary right that Paul is addressing in this verse that follows other rights to the hospitality of the churches, and the right to receive pay for one's work in the church without having to be gainfully employed on the side. There seems in this statement on freedom to be an affirmation that he is free as an apostle to receive certain customary things.

Paul then affirms that he is an apostle by the second rhetorical question. The third and fourth questions give us insight into what constituted an apostle in the eyes of the early church. From Paul's question, "have I not seen the Lord?" We surmise that this was a requirement in the minds of the first Christians. Paul may have seen the Lord as a boy, we know he saw him on the Damascus Road, and we know from his testimony in second Corinthians that there were subsequent encounters with Christ that were of a very dramatic nature.

The final question, "are you not my work in the Lord?" indicates that an apostle was one who's calling was affirmed by practical results in ministry. Certain fruits were expected, and in Paul's case were probably patently obvious, especially to the Corinthians.

**9:2—if you others are not an apostle, at least I am to use; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.**

Paul continues the thought begun in the last rhetorical question of the previous verse, "are you not my work in the Lord?" The attacks on Paul's apostleship were brought by roving false teachers. Paul tells the Corinthians between the lines that of all people they should not be taken in by such foolishness. He had stayed with them much longer than was his ordinary custom, so that for a year and a half they watched him and learned from him (Acts 18:11). The Corinthians of all people, new the impact and power of his extraordinary life. They should not be questioning his authority and his authenticity and his right to receive money and other support from them. Paul's tone in these verses is that of one who is perplexed by the mental processes of his audience. "What are you thinking?" May have been the question on Paul's mind.

### **9:3—My defense to those who examine me is this:**

This introduces another series of 12 rhetorical questions that Paul will ask. They are meant to settle the minds of any who are legitimately wanting to treat Paul rightly and justly, in accordance with how God would want it done.

### **9:4—do we not have a right to eat and drink?**

Even the lowest of slaves in the Corinthian culture had this right. The master had that responsibility, to feed his slaves. Now if this is the responsibility of a master toward those who render him service, how much more the Corinthians who were receiving spiritual service from Paul, a free man? Assuming he had this basic right to eat and drink, how did they intend that he be able to exercise that right? Was he "on his own," or did they bear some responsibility in the matter?

### **9:5—do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?**

In the case of the slave, the master cared for his family. In the church certainly those who work in the church should be cared for along with their families. The apostolic band practiced the faith in this way.

The issue apparently arose over members of Paul's group, perhaps Barnabas, and the support of their wives, since it seems Paul was not married. We see that this idea of family support was by this early date the accepted rule practiced by the Lord's brothers and Peter, referred to here as Cephas. Paul's argument is strengthened as it progresses so that here the language clearly affirms that this financial support is a basic right.

### **9:6—Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?**

Paul felt that there was a double standard being applied by his critics. They expected the other apostles to be paid for their work in behalf of the gospel. But because Paul had worked to be self-supporting, they somehow thought that is what he should do, and what was right regarding him. Here Paul confronts that double standard by posing this question that shows their attitude for what it is. Again, the term "right" is used as Paul builds the case for paying ministers of the gospel.

### **9:7—Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or, who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?**

Paul builds his case for paying ministers of the gospel by an appeal to simple common sense that all would understand. He cites the case of the soldier first, whom all would agree should not have to pay his own way. The principle here is that when the services rendered that others benefit from, they should financially support that service. Paul then cites the farmer who has the right and expectation of eating the crops he works to produce. The principle here is that work done should provide for the needs of the worker. And then Paul speaks of the herdsman who drinks the milk of the flock he tends. The principle is that personal benefit should be derived from the work one does. So to summarize Paul's logic, since service rendered should be compensated, since

work should provide for the needs of the workers, and since work should provide benefits to the worker, those who work at ministries should be compensated and thus benefit from it.

**9:8—I'm not speaking these things according to human judgment am I? Does not the Law also say these things?**

Paul turns from the realm of common sense, which should have a role in such matters as this, to the authority of revelation, which must have the final say. So Paul says that the principles he is advocating are not simply logical conclusions based on the practical wisdom and logic of the observation of life. They are matters of divine concern and legislation. His ideas are supported by the Law of God.

**9:9—For it is written in the law of Moses, "you shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen is he?**

In turning from logic to revelation Paul cites Deuteronomy 20:6. He cites the prohibition in the law of muzzling oxen. The threshing process involve laying the wheat, still attached to the stalk and in the head, on a flat area and walking oxen around on it. This had the effect of detaching the grain from the stalk and breaking up the head of the dried plant. To avoid a loss of grain that could be eaten by the oxen as they worked, it was common to muzzle them so that they could not eat. The law prohibited this practice. Paul raises the question of why this is prohibited by the law. Is it because God just has a special love for cows?

**9:10—or is he speaking altogether for our sake? Yes for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thrash in hope of sharing the crop.**

Paul says this command was given to teach a principle that was to permeate God's kingdom. The key principle is that those who work are to be rewarded by the fruit of their work. They are not denied such a reward. The word "altogether" is the NASB rendering of the word παντως, an adverb meaning, surely, doubtless, certainly. Paul is saying under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that this is certainly the reason for this prohibition in the law. It is for us, the church, as we conduct ministry. We are to compensate and reward those who work at ministry and not deny them pay. Ministry is like plowing. It involves preparation, the hard work that goes before actual seed goes in the ground. It is similar as well to threshing, knowing when the time is right, then doing the hard work that puts the fruit in usable form, and that allows the process to begin again.

Part of that fruit that the declaration of truth is to produce is the offering of money, given as an act of worship, produced by hearts brought to obedience by the faithful declaration of truth by those in ministry. They should be rewarded for that fruit.

**9:11—if we sow spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things in you?**

Paul assumes that all will understand the irony of this statement. In our culture we must remind ourselves of the truth here. In terms of true wealth we should gladly spend material things to gain spiritual things. Would that it was that easy. We would

do well to exchange all we have to gain true wealth. But in the human mindset, these values can get distorted, and believers can begrudge such payment and compensation. It is a trap that we must not allow ourselves to fall into. It is a wonderfully appropriate exchange, and any amount we would give would fall short of the value that we gain.

**9:12—if others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.**

The Corinthians had apparently acknowledged this right in terms of other teachers and preachers that had worked among them. There were apparently at least some that held it back from Paul. Perhaps some false teachers had discredited him and planted such a thought in them. Paul appeals to the special relationship he had with them. If others had taught them and their gratitude inspired them to give them their support, how much more to the one who was their spiritual father? Paul quickly adds however that this is a right he has not enforced.

Paul was always willing to take the hard road in this regard to advance the gospel. We read in Acts 18 that he practiced his trade of tent-making with Aquila and Priscilla while he was in Corinth. So he worked outside ministry to support his own ministry and it is this that he is referring to here when he speaks of not using this right. The endurance he is speaking of is the fatigue he suffered because of working "night and day" so as not to be a financial burden to those he ministered to. This was often his practice (one Thessalonians 2:9).

**9:13—do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the Temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar?**

This is a return to the witness of Scripture in this matter, after appealing to them based on common sense in verse 12, Paul once again appeals the Old Testament practice. It was ordered by none other than God himself. It allowed the Levites to be supported by the sacrificial system of the nation (Leviticus 6:16ff, Deuteronomy 18:1ff). This was in fact to be their only means of support.

There are many practices instituted in the church that have no Old Testament parallel. The pay of ministers is NOT one of them. It is a practice established by God in the Old Testament, practiced by our Lord himself in his earthly ministry, and revealed by Him to the apostles as His will for the church. It would be hard to imagine anything more spiritual!

It seems from this teaching to the Corinthians and the supporting verses in the Old Testament that such pay is not simply a matter of compensation for service rendered. They share the altar, that is, they have a share in it with other workers and more significantly with the Lord. In our vernacular, they are part owners. Therefore they "eat out of the Temple," and they "share a part together with the respect to the altar."

**9:14—so also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.**

This is the crowning piece of evidence for Paul's case for his right to be paid for his work in the church. It is something the Lord has directed (see Matthew 10:10, Luke 10:7). Paul is using the term gospel here as he often did, for the whole truth of Christianity. This directive is not simply to apply in the case of evangelists, but to all those who are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit and obedient to the charge of advancing the church of God as her occupation. There are a number of traditions in the church that have no basis in the specific teaching of Scripture. Paying the workers is not remotely close to being in this category. Is a tradition that can be traced to the Exodus.

**9:15—But I've used none of these things. And I'm not writing these things that it might be done so in my case. For it would be better for me to die than to have any man make my boast an empty one.**

When Paul says he has used none of these things, he uses a perfect tense. He has not and continues not to use them. That is the meaning he is conveying. The other phrases that follow simply explain the position he has arrived at. He quickly clarifies his motive in writing these things, it was not to receive the pay.

It seems that Paul was asking only for the respect and devotion that went with the position of the vocational minister. Here he flatly states that he has no desire to be paid, and in fact is very passionate about not receiving such pay. His goal in not receiving pay is not to openly bragged. It is to have pride in one's work, to have held oneself to a certain standard of excellence above and beyond normal, to be fulfilled, satisfied, and gratified by the final product. Paul was to go above and beyond what was necessary, too in some sense put his personal stamp on his work. He wanted it to bear that something extra, and so he chose to do it without pay. This was a life commitment at least in the case of the Corinthian church. It was very important to him on a very personal level that such an opportunity is not taken from him. So he begins the verse with the emphatic statement, "I myself." He then employs the perfect tense to describe the state of thinking he has arrived at and that this position is the reality of the matter. Then he clearly states his desire in the matter. The result is a very clear statement that Paul's motive in bringing up the matter of pay was not out of a desire to get the money.

**9:16—For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.**

Again the term "boast" is used in a good sense. It is not wrong to take pride in one's work, to do it thoroughly and seek to add a special touch to it. It is not wrong to seek to do it particularly well because it is being done for the Lord. It is not wrong to add that intensity to it that makes work an act of love done for the Lord to show Him we care. It is not wrong to want to please Him. These are the things Paul is speaking of when he seeks something to boast about.

Merely preaching the gospel would not do it for Paul. Simply being obedient was not his goal. Just discharging the responsibility he was placed on earth to carry out was not Paul's goal. He did that because of the inner conviction of the Holy Spirit. There was no love in simply doing his duty. So Paul wants to go beyond the call of duty. For

this reason he preached the gospel free of charge. He worked to earn a living. This was his personal gift to the church and to the Lord. By this his work becomes an act of great worship and love. It is not that simple obedience is not enough. It is, and it is an act of worship. But this was a personal thing between God and Paul, Paul's way of achieving a personal standard he had set for himself. In this practice we do not find the norm or standard for Christian ministry. Paul had forcefully set forth what the norm is, pay for the ministry received.

**9:17—For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will I have a stewardship entrusted to me.**

Stewardship involves a responsibility for which one is held accountable. Preaching the gospel was such a thing to Paul. It was a responsibility which he had to carry out. He had not chosen it. No one does. He was under the influence of the Holy Spirit. He gave God credit. He was under compulsion. He felt it at times when other pleasures and agendas attracted him. In this sense it was against his will. He could not yield to them because it was his divinely assigned responsibility. For him, this was simply his lot. To carry it out and be paid for it would bring nothing worthy of commendation. It was his role as a creature to do so to serve his creator.

However to offer his ministry without pay, and to work hard to provide for himself, this was worthy of commendation. It was something not required by God of him, in fact, it was God's plan and desire for him that he be paid. This was the norm. Paul voluntarily added this to his duties, and this would earn a reward from his master. But that is jumping ahead to the next verse. Here Paul is saying in effect that if this preaching of the gospel that he was doing was the result of his personal choice, an act of his own will, then he would expect a reward. However the truth was that it was not. It was an act of God. That means that in doing it Paul was not being noble. He was simply being obedient. He was being true to what he had been called and enabled by the Holy Spirit to do.

**9:18—what then is my reward? That when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.**

Paul says what then is my basis for reward? That I give myself to preaching is God's act which I'm privileged to participate in and which I really deserve no recognition for.

What kind of thing brings reward is a faithful servant? The answer to this question is critical because it should shape our lives. It should give us an agenda. The answer is that we gain reward when we set aside our personal rights and transform ministry into a labor of love and worship. Paul did this by not accepting paid, by doing it freely. This meant long hours of labor making tents (Acts 18:3). But it was his way of doing more than what the job entrusted to him required.

We are repaid by God when we do such things. Even ministry has its own rewards that are built in by God to it. There are others that can be gained by us if we lay aside personal rights to advance the gospel.

**9:19—for though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.**

Paul restates the fact of his freedom. He is speaking here of freedom from the expectations of other men. In the spiritual and religious realm that is a great blessing, because people have all sorts of expectations once the religious realm is entered, though usually not of themselves but of others.

What does Paul exactly mean here? Are we really to be slaves of every expectation of others? Obviously, Paul did not so enslave himself to false teachers or the Jewish establishment. We must conclude that Paul sought to meet the expectations of those who are legitimately seeking the truth, and to do so until they could be guided into right-thinking in these matters about which their expectations were an error.

The determining factor seems to have been for Paul to answer this question in his mind, "will this help us win?" By "winning" he means that he is striving to win their minds over to right-thinking regarding God, Christ, and the gospel message. To gain this great victory, Paul is willing to meet on their turf, conforming to the cultural expectations of his audience in seeking to win them over. He was not being two-faced in this, because his beliefs remain constant. It is cultural sensitivity, strategic to the successful spread of the truth. "A slave to all..." meant that Paul was willing to set aside his personal freedom to help others win their freedom.

**9:20—And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, though not myself under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.**

Paul begins to cite examples of how he carried out this voluntary submission of himself to the religious expectation of others. Now we know that in seeking to win the Jews he did not pretend to believe as they did. Nor did he submit to all the expectations of their leaders, even for a moment (Galatians 2:5). But we know that Paul met them in all the towns he traveled to in their synagogues and behaved in a manner appropriate to being in the synagogue. While he did not obey every dietary regulation and expectation they had, he did not flaunt his liberty in such matters, and was likely very careful publicly when Jews were present.

It was the same with those under the law. Paul was gracious in his approach to them. He clearly did not place himself personally under the law, he only tried to respect the practices of such people when their presence was not to personally offend them and thus cut himself off from opportunity to impact them.

Those seeking to convey the truth should consider themselves as needing to be very gracious guests in the homes of sensitive and self-conscious hosts. They should make every attempt to put them at ease especially in the realm of external expressions of religious conviction. There is little significance in these to those who understand the true worship of God, and so there is little to gain by offending the sensitivities of others in this regard (2 Kings 5:15-19).

**9:21—to those who are without the law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law.**

Paul's ministry was ordained of God to extend to the Gentiles, who did not live under the law. With them he lived as he states here. This does not mean he lived with no restraint. He had the law, which had pointed him to Christ. Serving Christ became his law, his rule of conduct as he lived. He is released from the obligation of the ceremonies of the law, through Christ, no longer bound to it. When with those not under the law Paul was not bound by the law of love to respect their sensitivities, and so he was free from the law in every respect as he served the greater principle of following the moment-by-moment promptings of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

It is because of this greater thing that has come, this new covenant, that we can be all things to all men. We are free to adapt to culture. We are not tied to form. Our worship is spiritual, and it will be expressed differently in different cultures.

Paul is saying he focuses on the essential, serving the law of Christ and his inner man, and allows that faith to be expressed through the ceremony of the law when in that setting, or in other ways when in other cultural settings.

**9:22—to the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.**

Not all will be saved. Not all saved will be saved by the same means. Paul saved some by reasoning from the Old Testament Scriptures. Others he saved by adapting to their system of reasoning (Acts 17:16-34). Here he expresses the need to adapt in a very direct way. Ministry is becoming all things to all people. It is, for the sake of love and stopping short of compromising the truth, a step into the mindset of others in leading them to higher ground. It is setting an example for others in their context that will guide them to their next step. Paul was not weak, but he knew that the weak needed someone to come alongside them and show them by example the next step. And so Paul could always find a way to win some. He reasoned with a specific group in ways peculiar to them and did so long before the term "target audience" was coined.

**9:23—and I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I became become a fellow partaker of it.**

There is something good that we take from the gospel, long after we have believed it and received eternal life through it. It happens as we involve ourselves in advancing the work of the gospel in others. Paul had years earlier become a partaker of the gospel in terms of receiving eternal life. But here he describes something he continues to do, and a benefit he continues to receive.

This greatest of activities comes about as we do "all things for the sake of the gospel." As Paul gave himself selflessly to the advance of the truth, others received great benefit, but he himself received something back from the truth as well. This is undoubtedly that ongoing aspect of our salvation, called sanctification, where each moment our salvation can bear in new areas of our life fruit in our conduct, and so bless us. We become a little more "saved," and the vain way of living we once were caught up in grows a little more distant. The key is to let the advance of the gospel become our agenda. When that occurs the gospel will keep on yielding its peaceable fruit.



**9:24—do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.**

Try to win something! That's how we should live. Not just to spiritually survive but to gain ground. Not just to keep ourselves on track, but to bring others along with this. This is not a metaphor about individual spiritual achievement, though it might seem so at first glance. The picture is individual, but the meaning is that we live in such a way that others, by our sacrificial choices, are brought to Christ and thus are "won."

Every entrant in the race runs. Running is not the goal, or one need not enter race. The prize is the goal, and this is awarded not simply to one who runs, but to one who wins. What is the lesson Paul is driving at? Live to achieve the goal of building up others, that's the prize. Live so that in this way you win others, they are both the race and the prize. This prize leads to the ultimate prize of reward from the master.

**9:25—Do you not know that everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.**

The ancient games, the forerunner to today's Olympics, were in Paul's mind. The trappings have changed in the centuries since then so that the world of the Olympic athlete is all-consuming and glitzy. One thing remains constant, the need for self-control in all things.

One cannot adequately run the race simply by being good at running. They must be good at saying no to several things along the way and saying yes to others. It is a life of denial in many areas. The reward for such effort, if it culminates in winning, is a perishable token of some sort. In those days it was a crown woven from a green plant, like a wreath, destined to quickly dry out and become nothing. The reward we gain by being self-controlled, by denying ourselves for the advancement of the truth in others, is that we win others, and people pass on with us into eternity.

But it stops short of all the Paul writes elsewhere simply to say that people are our reward. It seems that God rewards us in some other way in eternity for faithfulness in the portion of the mission entrusted to us. Ultimately, as was the case with Paul, it is Christ's approval and commendation that we seek, the consummate imperishable prize. This will be embodied in something we will be given by Him in our eternal home. It will recognize His faithful working in us and our faithfulness in offering our bodies as a living sacrifice for His purposes. The race we run is to bring about spiritual gain in others. The challenge in doing that is to lay aside our own desires and wants. When we do that, we are enabling ourselves to "win," to bring about fruit in the lives of others. In this we accomplish work for which there is eternal reward.

**9:26—Therefore I run in such a way, not as without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air.**

Paul runs to win. He has an aim, a purpose. He is not interested in getting either himself or others to simply engage in activity. He wants us to engage in the purpose. So his mind focused on the long-range goal of pleasing Christ, and the intermediate goal of winning various people. In gaining them he will ultimately gain Christ.

Paul then switches the metaphor to what we call boxing, to create a vivid image. He does not just launch big haymakers into the air. He punches strategically, with a

specific target in mind, with precise timing. He punches to hit, and to bring about dominance of his opponent. It would be folly to lace up the gloves and do anything else. No one would have the folly to repeatedly step in the ring against an opponent bent on flattening them, to just defend themselves and not to hit the opponent. That would be madness. They would enter the ring to methodically work the opponent over to bring them into submission.

Now, the fascinating thing is whom Paul views himself getting in the ring against. The next verse reveals it.

**9:27—but I buffet my body and make it my slave, less possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.**

Paul's opponent is his own body. It is not Satan. It is not people. It is himself. Our bodies, and I assume that Paul is seeing his body as his entire earthly existence including the desires of the flesh in mind, can be our downfall. The desire for our own glory, our own gratification, and our own creature comforts can completely dominate our thinking and so set our course. It is in fact the thing that will happen apart from ongoing decisive action on our part.

Paul says in effect that he is continuously in the ring against this part of himself. He directs repeated blows, and that is the force of the word "buffet", against those ideas and desires that rear their head against the purpose and person of Christ. And this Paul does to prevent that awful potential we all have, of engaging the noblest of works, only ultimately to fall short of God's goals and objectives for us. It happens to us because we get diverted, or because we were lured into a trap through our own unfaithfulness.

This greatest of tragedies is avoided only as we daily "lace 'em up," and pound those desires into submission to the grander purpose of pleasing Christ. The tragedy is not that we can be disqualified from eternal life, since we know Paul was saved. The tragedy is to disqualify oneself from receiving the prize.

## 1 Corinthians 10

**10:1—Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.**

This chapter begins with ideas that continue the thought of the previous chapter, that build in some way on them as marked by the conjunction "for," γὰρ in the original. The previous chapter ends with the thought of being "disqualified" due to a failure to exercise discipline over the desires of our own flesh. Paul transitions into a discussion of Israel as an example of those who failed to conquer themselves.

It is important to re-state that we are dealing with the danger of being disqualified from receiving the prize not from eternal life itself. Paul's desire is to raise the level of spiritual thinking in the Corinthians and draw them into the way of living he himself had chosen so that they would gain full reward as good stewards of the truth.

In this matter it is relatively easy for us to be unaware of the truth and of personal responsibility. We can think that spiritual achievement is largely a matter of God's choosing, and that of folks who are the lucky recipients of special spiritual power and strength. We can get to thinking that God simply chooses to show Himself stronger and more intimately to an elite group while the rest are destined to a lower level of spiritual experience.

Paul will begin to show that all the Israelites had a series of common experiences which only a few responded rightly to, that most undervalued and treated far too flippantly. The difference between the spiritual achievers and the also-rans was not in the experiences they had been party to. Paul begins by speaking to the fact that all were under the cloud, the miraculous protection of God against the heat of the sun and his great guiding presence. All passed through the sea, experiencing first-hand God's miraculous power and strong work of salvation.

**10:2—and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea.**

Now what does this mean to be "baptized into Moses?" It means that they were seen as being identified with him by God so that whatever God did with and for Moses, they all experienced. They are in God's eyes joined to him through these experiences. By trusting God and believing him enough to follow Moses into the parted sea, they are seen by God as His own children. He enters covenant with them and obligates himself to them based on their faith and making the choice to leave Egypt for the promised land and their subsequent experience of his salvation at the Red Sea and his presence within the cloud as they journeyed. Thus the term baptism is used to describe the act of assigning someone a new legal standing, the special position God views them as having in relationship to Him. As was Moses to God, so it would be with these people. They had equal opportunity with Moses for intimacy with God. They shared his uniqueness and were objects of God's loving choice and care even as he was.

This is not to say that they were equal with him in terms of leadership and wisdom and in their understanding God's will for the nation. There was a time they began to think this way, that they were equally holy as Moses and the result was Yahweh's intervention in judgment against them.

### **10:3—and all ate the same spiritual food.**

All of Israel ate manna. It was God's miraculous provision for their physical needs. But here Paul is referring to spiritual food. In that term he is speaking of those things that sustain the spiritual man. They include revelation, teaching about revelation, the fellowship of other children of God, the wisdom of other children of God, proper and regular worship of God, right standards of holiness, dealing rightly with sin, and other things that God provided for them to strengthen and nurture their trust in Him. Any spiritual difficulty they would have would not be the result of the lack of God's provision for such spiritual sustenance.

### **10:4—and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.**

On two occasions that we know of, water flowed to the people to drink from out of a rock. The average reader would assume that this rock was simply one found on location. This may not be true. There is a tradition that says it was a rock they took with them on the journey, and there is nothing in the text that would disallow such a tradition. There are some statements that would favor it in both instances where the people are seen drinking from the rock (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13). The tradition is that the rock remained in Israel's possession, then Jeremiah took it from Jerusalem when the remnant left the land for Egypt along with the daughters of the King. That tradition says that the rock found its way to Scotland where it remains to this day and where that country's kings and queens lay their hands as they are crowned. Any such tradition is of course impossible to confirm. It has given birth to such excesses as British Israelism. It could also have a grain of truth in it, mainly that the rock was one that Israel carried with them as some sort of memorial or symbol of their salvation.

There are two things that mitigate against this. One is that nowhere do we find such a custom in the written record, which would seem strange given its significance. Second, nowhere is the rock enshrined and worshipped, which given Israel's bent to idolatry and their worship of other objects such as the serpent on the pole (2 Kings 18:4), would seem likely though definitely not a foregone conclusion. These are interesting details on "the rock."

Here, Paul says it is a spiritual rock. This helps us understand the rock he is speaking of is not the physical one that provided for their physical thirst. It was a spiritual one which he specifically identifies as Christ. Christ was Israel's deliverer and Redeemer even before His incarnation. We believe from Old Testament studies that he appeared and carried out His work as "the angel of Yahweh." Whenever "the" Angel of Yahweh is mentioned, not simply "an" Angel of Yahweh, but "THE" Angel of Yahweh, we believe we are dealing with the pre-incarnate Christ. We find that this angel is one with exceptional power and authority of a sort that is only ascribed to God himself. We find this angel is the instrument of Israel's salvation at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:19). His presence continues to accompany them and is noted on several occasions.

Paul's point here is that all the Israelites tasted this benefit and partook of the experience of deliverance by Christ. None of them missed out on the glories of that experience of deliverance by Christ. None of them missed out on the glories of Christ in the ongoing benefits of His continued presence with them. They experienced with their own senses and in a very visible way His purpose and work, even as all believers today experience His purpose and work. Whatever individual differences there were in the actual experience and practice of that faith in the individual lives of the people in

view, it was not attributable to the fact that Christ was only experienced by chosen few. All experienced Him.

As an aside, what we see from Paul's choice of words is that the physical rock, which got told Moses to strike on one occasion (Exodus 17), and to speak to on another (Numbers 20), was likely to be a symbol of Christ. He would be smitten once by Israel. Then because in that smitten state He would atone for sin, He could be spoken to by all for all the blessings associated with the care of God. This explains the severity of God's discipline of Moses in response to his striking of the rock on the second occasion instead of speaking to it. God was seeking to establish a consistent revelation, which Moses trifled with, and thus did not treat the things of God as holy. Moses handled revelation to serve himself and not reveal Christ.

**10:5—Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-please; for they were laid low in the wilderness.**

Paul's entire point in this section seems to be to make the Corinthians aware that there is a way we are called to live as believers that we must be diligent to adhere to. It seems he is warning them of the danger which they needed to be aware (10:1). It was, we see in relating this present verse to verse one, a danger most of "our fathers" fell into, so that with most of "our fathers" God was not well-pleased.

This is critical wording. Were the Israelites who were disobedient children of God, or were they just masquerading as such? Many would say that some were "elect", they were "the church." Those who were the elect were obedient and so God was pleased with them. Those whose faith did not rise to a level pleasing to God were not elect, thus not regenerate, and this explains their low level of spirituality.

But here Paul calls those disobedient ones "our fathers." Now we know that many of the Corinthian church by now were Gentiles so in what sense would the wilderness generation be considered "their fathers?" They were not in the fleshly sense of being their ancestors. Now if they were not elect, they were not in terms of spiritual ancestry either.

The only option seems to be to say that they were God's elect children, our spiritual ancestors, and we are not to make the same mistake they made. It is a very real danger, so much so that Paul is giving this grave and definitive warning to the Christians in Corinth and through them to us. This can happen even to the elect. It could have happened to Paul had he not "buffeted his body." (9:27).

The result of this condition is that though we are in a privileged position as members of God's family, He is not pleased with our conduct. It is that simple. It is just like the experience that happens in countless cases in day-to-day family life relationships between parents and children. There is delight in the children on the part of the parents. There is love for them, no question of their identity, no sense in which that identity is in any way at stake. But there is displeasure with their conduct and there is disciplinary consequences of that conduct.

God was not pleased with the wilderness generation because they had been saved by faith but failed to live by faith. They did not journey in faith, which led to all manners of disobedience and loss of blessing. This can happen today to us. That is the danger that Paul guards himself against and that he warns us to avoid. Thus those redeemed from Egypt had the experience of the unredeemed, away from God's blessing.

We must avoid that awful condition of being laid low in the wilderness. What we know of "our fathers" is that only two saw the place of blessing, plus all who were under the age of 20 at the time of the reported the spies in numbers 13 – 14. Were the others not of the elect (and we must remember that even Moses was not allowed into the land)? No! They were elected and chosen people who fell into the discipline of God because they did not trust Him. The same can happen to us. Take care! It involved a huge number of people who became trapped by their poor choices.

**10:6—Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.**

We must choose those things we allow ourselves to desire very carefully. We must discern their nature, whether holy or unholy, profitable for godliness or unprofitable. Then we must regulate our pursuit of them accordingly. All of Israel's history is a pattern for us.

The word "example" is *τυποι*, which is a word for a pattern followed in making something. Paul uses patterns in making tents. We follow patterns in choosing lifestyles. The pattern of Israel is one we should reject because they allowed themselves to pursue the very things that would lead to their destruction. All of Israel's pain can be traced to the things Paul will mention in these verses, and this is an important one. We must not allow ourselves to pursue what we know to be evil.

**10:7—and do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "the people sat down to eat and drink, and sit up to play."**

We commit idolatry when we allow something to take God's place in our life, when the desire to please him is replaced by desire to please something or somebody else including ourselves. For Israel the objects of their idolatry were actual deities and images of those deities. Why did they get caught up in such things, allowing them to replace the worship of Yahweh?

There is first the power of superstition/fear which they did not regulate with the truth as revealed by God. Faith and truth hold such influence in check. The lack of attention to truth allows these to fasten their grip on us.

Second there were lustful and sensual ceremonies and "sacraments" associated with the pagan worship of the day that drew the Israelites and for which they mortgaged their welfare. Much of the problem could be laid at the feet of the men, who were attracted to foreign women and so allowed practices of idolaters to infiltrate Israel at the deepest level.

The quote Paul utilizes comes from Exodus 32:6. The occasion was when Aaron made the golden calf and mixed the worship of the calf with the ceremonies of the worship of God. Aaron declared, after the leaders had presented the calf to the people as are God, "tomorrow shall be a feast to Yahweh." The next morning they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and it is at this time the account said that they "sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."

Likely, what was happening is that they were feasting and "playing" (the word also means to dance and is likely a term used of all that goes with what we would call "partying"). They were likely doing so in the manner they had observed other people celebrate during their pagan rituals. So their feasting and playing were just an

opportunity to pursue the lust of the flesh with Yahweh's name attached to it by a bad leader—Aaron. Idolatry is and always has been an easy sin to get caught in. It happens to people like Aaron who should know better.

**10:8—nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and 23,000 fell in one day.**

The event referred to here is recorded in Numbers 25. It is the occasion when many Israelites united with the Moabites in the worship of Baal. In conjunction with that sexual relationships were randomly and blatantly pursued with the women of Moab. So uncontrolled was it that God simply intervened with a plague that killed 24,000. The plague was stayed when Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, took a spear and pierced through one such couple having sexual relations in the tent. Thus we see that God's judgment is spared as long as one individual is willing to take decisive action against evil.

This all happened Israel while they were staying in a place called "shittim," the English language thus ironically providing its own appropriate label to the occasion! Immorality always brings consequences that are disastrous, and this event provides a useful "pattern" to us for unwise and regretful decisions. The numeric discrepancy between the accounting numbers in the account here is to be explained by an error of recall by Paul. Though many have tried by this discrepancy to attack the integrity of Scriptures, the fact remains that Paul's false statement is true. His statement remains within the boundaries of the truth—if 24,000 died then certainly 23,000 did.

**10:9—Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.**

We "try" the Lord when as the Israelites did, they become impatient in the journey (Numbers 21:5) and forget His benefits that we've enjoyed all along the way. From there we begin to speak against Him, instead of in prayer to Him. It seems that He is very patient with those humans who through prayer question Him. Instead we openly begin to question His plan in particular his leaders over us. We begin to believe He is not good and so believe as if He is not with us to care for us. It is a casting aside of faith.

The word for "try" is *εκπειραζω*. It is a term which means simply "to tempt." We use it to speak of tempting someone to do evil. Since we know that God cannot be tempted with evil, in what sense can we tempt God or put Him to the test? Only in the sense that we can resist that which He is wanting to bring about in and around us. We can, in human terms, make His objective more difficult due to our lack of faith. Through lack of cooperation with Him, we put another obstacle in His path. The "trying" of God seems to occur when He is no longer taken for who he is, when his innate goodness righteousness and holiness are called into question. This is where faith ends and something very different takes over, when God must prove himself all over again. It is as if we have put Him on trial. Since that is impossible for humans to do a sort of spiritual stalemate results, which is exactly what came about in the case of the wilderness generation.

In doubting God's goodness the Israelites brought evil on themselves, in the form of some sort of venomous snakes that took away the lives of many. Yahweh then provided the means of salvation through the bronze snake on the pole, and so proved Himself as the source of Israel's salvation, the one who gave care to those of faith. But

again in our terms, He had to stop to reteach a lesson that should have been learned except for great hardness of heart. Eventually this hardest of hearts settled in, and a generation relegated themselves to the fruit of unbelief, never experiencing the promised land, the place where they would rest from their wanderings and settle into the experience of the deepest form of God's blessing possible on fallen Earth, as close return to Eden as could ever be known. It is what God has always promised to take us back to if we will simply believe in him. We "try him" when we doubt this intention of His to bring about restoration and good.

**10:10—nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.**

The final command is not to grumble. It is a particularly galling thing that humans tend to slip into. It defies all that both logic and revelation tell us about God and us. But it is an emotional reflex that quickly sweeps over us the moment we become self-centered. Its offensiveness is not lessened by its common occurrence, nor by the ease with which we pass into it. It remains monumental in its ability to deprive humanity of their experience of God's wonderful favor. It seems so ordinary to us that we are hardly aware of it. But here and elsewhere God's heart in the matter is recorded. The facts are that when we grumble, we have ceased thinking spiritually and have moved from the realm of faith and obedience into the realm of evil and rebellion. It is a symptom of something really significant.

**10:11—Now these things happened to them as an example, and they are written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come.**

The exhortation of verse six is repeated. These things that Israelites fell into are meticulously recorded in writing for us to examine and reflect on. When we realize, we are conforming to this negative pattern, we must recognize what the end will be and run from it.

The end of the ages are times that present the same challenges and the same sort of journey as the Israelites set out on from Egypt. We must constantly ask, "to what are we being conformed?"

The end of the ages is upon us. This refers not to a shortness of years, but to the fact that the Messiah has appeared once for forgiveness of sin. In Him all nations are blessed. The next great prophetic event is His return to earth to reign after the day of His wrath ends the present age of the Gentiles.

**10:12—therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

The greatest advice for those who would run well as they live in a fallen world that is moving toward its great day of reckoning with its creator is written here. The goal is not just to learn to stand, but to keep standing. The nature of standing in the spiritual sense is that one can fall very quickly and very subtly. There are number of things like the ones just mentioned by Paul, that can work their way into a life even though that person is amid the whole Christian experience. The lesson of the wilderness generation who fell even though amid one of the most profound experiences in salvation history is to be remembered. It is an example of what can happen, and an example for us. We're no different unless we make ourselves different.



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

Temptation has a way of overtaking us when we walk the road. Like another traveler it catches us and then travels with us for a time. This illustration though not specifically a part of the language of the text provides a great picture for us of temptation. We are to understand the temptations that overtake us are not bizarre or unique to us. They are not of a different nature than that encountered by others. Like travelers on the road they have overtaken others and now they overtake us. We hurt ourselves when we believe that our temptations are uniquely intense, or that they are of some uniquely strong and powerful nature. They are *ανθρωπινος*, of a variety common to human experience encountered by others on the road, and soon to move on the lives of others.

When they arrive however something else arrives—the means of coping with the temptations and to escape its trap. This is due to the faithfulness of God His sovereign and intimate knowledge of us. He will not allow that which is beyond the resources we must resist. If we fall, it is by our choice in each case, that much is certain.

And so in the matter of temptation, several important truths can be embraced from this verse. When tempted, I must not feel uniquely persecuted or isolated. I'm in good company and in God's company because He is faithful. When tempted I must look for the way of escape. It is specific to the situation and to me in it and has been placed there by God. Temptation never arrives alone; God arranges for grace to arrive at the same time. When tempted I must remember that my task is to endure. Like a car that overtakes men on the road, temptation will pass.

Now in the Greek, the word rendered "overtaken" is *εἰληφεν*, from *λαμβάνω*, a perfect tense meaning to have taken or grasped with some ongoing consequence. So the idea is not so much that the temptation comes and goes but that it comes with an ongoing state or result, and we must act through the means specifically provided by God. We CAN endure through it.

The travel metaphor exists through the English rendering and clarifies that about temptations commonplace nature, which is very important in the overall message of the verse. It was not part of the thought of the original hearers. Instead the idea of finding oneself in a state of being "taken in" is presented. When we find ourselves in that state that we must look for the exit door provided by God.

**10:14—therefore my beloved brothers, flee from idolatry.**

The means of enduring the temptation to worship that which is not God is to run from it. If we look back at the sins of Israel catalogued in verses five through ten, and think of them in their historical context, most went hand-in-hand with idolatry. It is the nature of sin that it begins with errant worship when worship is understood in its broadest and deepest sense.

It was true of Adam and Eve in the garden. There Eve was deceived by wrong thoughts about God, and Adam simply chose in that moment to place Satan, Eve, and ultimately Himself, over God. Though there was no idol there, there was idolatry, and it has existed ever since. In most instances of idolatry, there is not a visible image, but we must remember that sin occurs with the act of placing something in God's place as

the controller and shaper of our thoughts and actions. When we see ourselves focusing on an object or person, a dream, or an idea in such a way that it takes the place of God as the rightful determiner of our agenda, we have fallen into idolatry, and we must flee. If we would flee at such a time, our lives would be instantly more holy.

**10:15—I speak as to wise men, you judge what I say.**

We might say, "I want to address you as thinking people." We would be calling on those we address to think their way logically through the issue. It is a way of showing respect, but also of strengthening one's argument, of saying in effect that proper thought on this issue will lead to only one conclusion. The "you" is emphatic, through which Paul further stresses the fact that there is only one logical conclusion to the practical matter he is about to bring up. They really do not need his advice. There is no option on this matter.

**10:16—is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?**

To apply his teaching on fleeing from idolatry, Paul takes us to a genuine act of worship familiar to all his readers—the observation of the Lord's supper. It is what we have come to call the Eucharist, or communion. The cup he refers to as "the cup of blessing." It commemorates the greatest blessing ever bestowed on humanity, that of being blessed with a covenant of grace which has been offered to us through Christ's blood by our God. It is a blessing of incomprehensible magnitude!

When we commemorate Christ's provision for that covenant, we are commemorating our sharing in His blood. We are re-affirming that covenant. This sharing in His blood is both a legal and a relational idea. It is legal in the sense of what all the sacrificial ceremony the Old Testament taught. His blood atones for our sin. The covenant would be a breach of God's justice were it not for the legal provisions afforded by Christ's substitutionary death. It is relational in the sense of the ancient ceremony of covenant. Their wrists were cut and joined together so that blood was shared between two parties, and they became symbolically one. They said in effect, "all that I am and have is yours, and all that you have is mine." We have such a relationship with Christ. We share His blood in this sense, we are brothers of Him and of each other in the eyes of God. We celebrate this relationship through communion. It is in this sense a "sharing in the blood of Christ." We are in that ceremony proclaiming a covenant relationship with Him.

The bread of the communion service is also a proclamation of something both legal and relational. The taking on of human flesh in the giving of that body to be our substitute provides the legal basis for our standing with God. We share in that body and what it brought about, and we celebrated whenever we partake of the bread in the communion service. There is a relational sense also in the sharing of the body of Christ celebrated in the eating of the bread. It is that when we believe in that body, that it was indeed that of the Son of God, that it was crucified for us and so pays for our sin, and that it was raised from the dead, at that moment of belief we are given the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit that filled that body, and so we are organically linked to Christ and to all fellow believers. We share in His body and are a part of it. The bread of communion celebrates these great legal and relational truths and when we take it we align publicly ourselves with them. We proclaim and affirm them. We share in them all over again.

**10:17—since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.**

The gospel record shows that Jesus took bread, and after breaking it gave some to each of the 11 who were with Him. Each of their portions came from one, that which He took and broke. It was highly symbolic and is what Paul is likely referring to here. One piece of unleavened bread from which all were served, symbolized the one body of Christ, the spirit of which, after the physical body was sacrificially given was itself given to all believers, who then together make up that which makes Christ visible on the earth today. That body, our spiritual entity, is His hands and feet, His eyes, and ears, that through which He does His work in our world. And it is not simply that it is an organization with a diversification of jobs, with a contrived unity based on a product or service goal. It is an organism, where the Spirit that energized the physical body of Christ resides in each one of us, and we are guided, lead, and strengthened by that one mind.

All this great truth is symbolized as we each eat together a small piece of bread that comes from the whole. We are many in numbers, but one in terms of our spiritual being. Thus when we take part in the Communion service, we are declaring a reality, and re-committing our own bodies to the service of that reality. That is Paul's point here. Such a public embrace of spiritual truth has a power and effect in the spiritual realm. It confirms and seals ownership and designates one for service.

It would also appear to have a practical consequence in one's life and that is the primary point Paul wants the reader to reflect on here. We must remember, while getting absorbed in the detail of this illustration, that it is meant to function here just as that. Paul is making a point about idolatry and concerned with the spiritual impact and power of religious ceremony. Ceremony is more than just an outward demonstration. It is a host for and creates an environment for unseen spiritual activity and transaction. Communion is a prime example of the good side of this.

**10:18—Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?**

Literally this verse reads, "look at Israel according to the flesh." As an aside, by this time Paul wants to make a distinction between obedient Israelites who accepted Christ, and those who had rejected Christ and were being "faithful" to the former beliefs. There were Jews in the Corinthian church and many Jews in the city, so this figure would be of considerable relevance to Paul's readers.

We know from the Old Testament that the Levites were given the right to eat from the things sacrificed on the altar. This example has been cited previously in 9:13 as Paul's rationale for paying those who worked at the things associated with the proclamation of the gospel. Here Paul is simply saying that in the Israelites system Levites that rightfully ate the sacrifice others made became part of the sacrifice itself. The altar cooked it, and they ate it. The entire system worked practically but said something spiritually. The Levites shared in the altar in this sense.

**10:19—what do I mean then? The things sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?**

Paul wants to clarify what he is saying. Though the NASB will inject a simple "no" at the start of the next verse, Paul asks this as a simple rhetorical question. The answer to them should be obvious. Paul has stated earlier in his letter in 8:4-6 that false gods have no basis in reality. In this verse he wants to make sure that is understood. He is not suggesting that by eating food sacrificed to the god of the sun for example that one can thereby fall under the jurisdiction of the god of the sun, for there is no such thing. And some Corinthians were no doubt participating in the reveling of idol feasts with this attitude. Their thinking was, "since such a god does not exist, it is impossible to worship it in the true sense or to fall under its influence in any way." Paul concurs that this is true but warns of another spiritual hazard they need to be aware of in the matter of idol worship.

**10:20—No, but I say that the things which Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.**

While there was no basis for the various deities worshiped in Corinth, there were spiritual beings who lent a kind of divine aura and a certain visible experience of power to these false gods. These were demons, and they were hazardous. They still are. They have the potential of causing difficulty for the Christians. Paul did not want the Christians to unwittingly open themselves to demonic oppression by participating in an idolatrous feast. By participating in that they were in a sense "owning it," or in Paul's words "sharing in it," literally "fellowshipping in it." This, because of the demonic activity could be hazardous to their spiritual health.

So we see the principle that one of Satan's ploys to keep men from the truth is, through the activity of his demons, to lend credibility to a false system of worship, to validate them and authenticate them by creating the appearance of their practical effect. The danger inherent in such false movements then, is not the god they embrace. That is simply an idea. The danger is in evil beings, the forces of Satan that use such superstition and untruth to advance their own agenda. In all that is not truth there is this danger, and so we are told to walk in the light that is in the truth, and not in darkness, meaning according to falsehood. We will in this way protect ourselves from Satan and his angels (demons) who would seek to take us away from the truth into the realm of ignorance and superstition.

**10:21—you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.**

It is a moral contradiction to embrace Christ and embrace a false god as well. It is a moral contradiction to participate in a feast honoring a false god and then to sit down for communion. But it is more than an externally contradictory message. It is impossible to enjoy completely the fellowship with the Lord that the communion both promotes and represents if one has given a hold in their souls to a demon. It will rob you of your Christian experience. It will keep you from laying hold of all that you should in your relationship with Christ, because it is a violation of that covenant relationship. When we give a demon a hold in us we have committed adultery and violated a covenant with Christ. In sharing His blood we have something of Him and us, and we create an immense conflict within us if we invite a demon in. We cannot partake of the Lord, it becomes impossible, if we give demons a hold in our lives.

**10:22—or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than Him are we?**

There is much written in the Old Testament on this idea of provoking the Lord to jealousy, and it is always associated with idolatry. The picture of what happens when He is provoked in this way is a fearful one. With that build up Paul writes these words to warn against a causal relationship to idols. Our relationship to God is a cherished love affair. Why would we want to put that at risk by dabbling in something we don't even believe in just for a cheap or in some way enjoyable meal? Thinking this side of it through, and thinking of passages like Deuteronomy 32:21, Ezekiel 16, 20, 23, Isaiah 44, helps us understand that regarding idols and all that goes with them we will follow in the counsel of verse 14, "flee from idolatry." It is the best advice since "buy low, sell high."

**10:23—all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edified.**

Since Christ is the end of the law, there is a sense in which all things are lawful. There were teachers moving into the churches who were teaching this perverted doctrine of grace and turning grace into license. We believe that Paul in this verse is quoting their favorite saying—their motto as he did in 6:12. It was "all things are lawful."

There is some truth in this motto. One must remember that where there is a proper doctrine of grace, this twisting of it usually springs up, so great is our freedom brought about by God's forgiveness and pardon. The solution is not to watered-down grace, though that is often a practical strategy that Christian leaders resort to. It is always disastrous and leads to legalism and bondage.

The solution is to handle it as Paul does with the Corinthians. In chapter 6 he had given two principles to balance this statement. First, "not all things are profitable," and second, "I will not be mastered by anything." Here he repeats that not all things are profitable, and he adds the idea that not all things build up. So there is now a test for our conduct. It is to test it by the principle of profitability. The question is not simply, "is it legal?" The question is, "is it profitable?" Two questions help us determine an activity profitability. Will it master me in some way, hindering my ability to obey God? This question was given in 6:12. Here is an added second question, will this thing or activity build up my faith? The following verse will expand on the idea of edifying or building up.

"What good will this bring about?" Is the question posed in the minds of the Spirit-filled person. "Is it against the rules?" Is the mark of one who is still moving in the flesh.

**10:24—let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.**

The grand cause fostered by the leading of the Holy Spirit is that of the cause of Christ, that His glory might be realized and advanced in the hearts and minds of men. The Spirit-led person will be recognizable because they are being led in this direction, to bring more of Christ into the lives of those around them. Their heartbeat is the good of their neighbor, and they recognize that their neighbors highest good is served when they are led to embrace Christ in a deeper way. The rule, if such a word can be properly used in the case of free persons, of our conduct is simply. It is this; what course of action will bring about more of Christ in the lives of others? When we live this way, it is a result of living in harmony with the leading of the Holy Spirit. When we

do not, then our heart is not beating for the greater faith of others. We can be assured that whatever is setting our agenda is not the leading and prodding of the Spirit.

**10:25—Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience sake.**

Having laid down some principles such as seeking in all our actions the good of others, the building up of their faith, as well as protecting our own spiritual purity, Paul now applies these principles in a couple of hypothetical situations. The first is in the marketplace. The question might be, do I need to investigate the background of food that I buy to keep from some sort of spiritual danger? Paul's answer is no. He says not to ask questions, literally not to investigate, for conscience sake. In other words, you have no fear of evil in the matter of what food you buy. Your conscience need not be served, there is no danger. You have no need to train or interact with your conscience in the matter of meat purchases because there is no sin incurred or danger incurred in buying meat, regardless of its history.

This is instructive in the matter of the power of demons. They follow where belief allows them power, for instance in an idol ceremony or feast, but to believe that their power or influence can someone attach itself to the food and contaminate the unwilling non-participant just because he happens to eat it is to enter the realm of the superstitious. What is our course of action then? Don't feel like you need to do a background check on food. Buy it and eat it. Avoid making it a matter of the spiritual realm. The next verse says why we can have this freedom.

**10:26—For the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains.**

This is a quote from the Old Testament (Psalms 24:1). Nothing on the earth belongs to anyone but the Lord. Nothing is owned by a demon or a false God. It is all the Lord's. Again, there is power in the belief in false gods, and power can be gained by a demon through someone's belief in a lie, or simple wrong thinking. The demons have no power apart from that. It is the power of the bluff, ultimately our fear. To walk in the light—the truth, is to be safe. And so we must be careful not to involve our minds and hearts in the religious ceremony, where we affirm a belief system and submit our thinking to that influence. It can then gain power over us and allow demons their influence. But there is no danger in the food should it find its way on to our tables after being used in such a ceremony. It belongs to the Lord, still.

**10:27—If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, and without asking questions for conscience sake.**

This is the second hypothetical situation to which Paul applies principles of conduct he has set forth. The question he anticipates is, how should I conduct myself toward the food unbelievers set before me? Paul gives a similar answer in this case to the question of what to do in the meat market. Eat it, a do not feel the need to do a background check. There is no danger inherent in it, nothing will happen, and you will not be guilty of any sin.

**10:28—but if anyone should say to you, "this is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you and for conscience sake.**

Here's a third hypothetical situation. Here you are in the unbelievers house ready-to-eat what is set before you when someone informs you that it is meat sacrificed to idols. This now presents you with a new challenge. Now you are modeling conduct out of knowledge not out of ignorance. What do you do? Paul says, "don't eat it."

Paul gives two reasons not to eat the meat in this case. First for the sake of the one who told you, and second for conscience sake, a remark he will explain in the next verse. Why does Paul give this advice? Because we have knowledge, but likely the unbeliever telling us the background of the meat does not.

An important piece of information is missing with respect to understanding Paul's advice. We don't know why people would buy this meat. Was it a bargain? Or did they buy to serve expecting that it was a good omen. I suspect it was the latter, though we don't know. It would be consistent with what we know of various pagan practices. I think it was believed by the host that this meat would bring with it a good omen, Truth dictates in such a case that we do not participate. At that point the meat becomes a religious practice. If the meat was not served with this expectation, if it was simply meat used in an idolatrous ceremony, such a "bad background" does not matter. So the question is really the conscience and thinking of the person serving the meat.

Another thing one would want to be sensitive to in such a case would be how the Holy Spirit might be working in such a person, seeking to draw them into the truth. By eating meat you might give them permission to take it one level further and participate in an idolatrous feast. Has the Holy Spirit been convicting them about their false worship practices, and will your behavior strengthen them to ignore that conviction of their conscience? It could, and so it is not worth the meal, because the next verse explains the development of their conscience as a matter of concern. Bringing them to faith might be at stake.

**10:29—I mean not your conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?**

A conscience can be programmed wrong. We can feel guilty over things we should not, and we can feel freedom where we should feel guilt. It depends on what we accept as truth. The unbeliever in this hypothetical situation has accepted a lie as truth. His conscience gives conviction about what is not true, and freedom about what is immoral and false by all standard of truth. We must not aim at getting them to ignore their conscience. That will backfire, for people must be people of conscience.

Our challenge is to bring truth that will re-program their conscience. If we eat meat that has been believed by another to provide some good omen, we confirm the testimony of their weak conscience. If we refuse to eat, we are introducing a new idea, offering an opportunity and alternate thought pattern. We are confirming any work in their conscience the Holy Spirit is doing or wishes to do. We are offering something that will strengthen their conscience, for a conscience is weak when it is not used at all or when it is not functioning in a way that is based on truth. So we must behave in such a way that we do not simply follow the dictates of our own conscience, but we seek to develop the conscience of those around us.

The second half of this verse can only be understood if one clearly understands the point Paul has made thus far. It is the first of two questions Paul asks; the second will be asked in the next verse. We must assume that by asking them he is reinforcing his argument, not questioning it. This is important. Some might wrongly say that Paul has been teaching that our conduct is to be shaped by the judgment of others. If that is true, then this question would be interpreted as an expression of his frustration at a loss of freedom. If we do not have freedom, if we are bound by the expectations of others that that is not congruent with Paul's overall message here nor would it be congruent with other truth, he expresses in other places about being free.

What is true is that Paul had suggested a course of conduct that is shaped by a desire to alter and influence the conscience of others by impacting their thinking regarding truth and untruth. It is that principle that this first question reinforces. It says in effect, don't get yourself in a position where your freedom in this type of situation is judged by the wrongly programmed conscience of an unbeliever that is saying something other than what you embrace is the truth. Paul's concern is that our freedom, based on our knowledge of the truth about things such as idols, could be construed by an unbeliever to condone idol worship, and endorse the superstition that surrounds it. Why would we want our free conduct to be judged as saying this? How much better not to eat the meat, and by that clearly draw truth lines for the unbelieving one, reinforcing what the Holy Spirit is seeking to do in their conscience. With that Paul asked a second question to further strengthen his argument for this "other-oriented" behavior.

**10:30—if I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?**

This is Paul's second question, and it is meant to give added reason to his simple statement in verse 28, "don't eat, for the sake of the one who informed you." His question boils down to this, "why be slandered?" The idea is that if by your actions you are seemed to be validating idol worship, you've innocently given yourself a bad reputation as a Christian. Why get yourself in that position? It is better not to eat.

**10:31—whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

Do nothing for yourself and do nothing for your own glory. This is the essence of the matter in all issues of Christian conduct and behavior. It is a great statement of purpose that should be reflected in any purpose statement, whether of an individual, organization, or kingdom on the planet. Instead it is the great exception because it is the greatest of individual challenges to subject one's own gratification to the greater cause of bringing glory to the Creator. It is not that the rhetoric is missing, the words are written and spoken. But the bottom line in every sin committed by non-believer and believer alike, every quarrel that breaks out in churches and Christian organizations, and every instance of the demise of a Christian leader, lies this fundamental failure to submit one's own motive to this grander objective.

We must remember that it is not as if one is asked to set aside the meeting of their own needs or to sacrifice their own happiness. God is guaranteed these things to those who will give themselves to His glory. They are easy matters for Him and none who have pursued His glory have done so to their regret. "To the glory of God..." is a phrase introduced by the Greek preposition *εἰς*. This identifies it as a statement of purpose or perhaps result. It contains the formula for personal peace and contentment



in this life, and for great eternal reward in that which follows. It is a statement that is beyond profound.

**10:32—giving no offense to Jews or to Greeks or the Church of God;**

There is enough offense in the cross, enough in a righteous example, enough in the name of Christ, without us personally doing these things that destroy credibility. That is the issue in this context. The kind of offensiveness Paul is speaking against here is not that which can occur when the gospel is declared. It is the kind of offense that occurs when we insist on exercising our freedom in the company of those whose conscience are conditioned and programmed by blind ignorance, by false standards of morality. There is enough offense that occurs in the work of the gospel due to the nature of the gospel without us adding to it by insisting on flaunting our freedom. Don't pick unnecessary fights. Instead, sacrifice your freedom to create a relationship and to build credibility so that the truth can eventually be accepted, whether by unbelievers or immature believers. The next thought expressed by Paul clarifies this.

**10:33—just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, the profit of many, that they may be saved.**

Paul declares himself as the example to follow, and in the next thought, which is in the next chapter, he takes us to a higher example whom he himself is following. He seeks to do what pleases man, whenever that is possible and even when it means setting aside his own pleasure. There are enough times when we must stand firm and confront, without creating more on issues that are not essential to the movement. And there is a time for every battle. But that time is not generally when one's personal profit is at stake. The profit of many, leading to their eventual salvation, that is how our actions should be shaped. The power of our sacrifices is seen here. Christ's sacrifice makes salvation possible for all. Our sacrifice will often provide the relational basis for the truth of his death to be received.

This verse and the previous one should not be construed as teaching that if someone is offended, the offender has done wrong. That thinking can lead a leader down many a dead end and can result in years wasted being people-pleasers. Paul here is stating a general approach in relationships. Seek to do the things that nurture faith in others, that meet them where they are in their thinking process and help to establish relationships of trust with them so that you can at the appropriate time pull them up to stand on higher ground. This is the general model of conduct we are to follow realizing that there are moments when the line must be drawn in the sand and the truth declared. Paul never shrunk back in those moments simply to please men.

# 1 Corinthians 11

## **11:1—Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.**

Paul provided a visual of Christ. That is a wonderful gift to give those we lead, a flesh and blood example in real-life situations of how Christ lived. The Greek word is μιμηται, sounding like the English word mimic and having that meaning. That is our task as leaders. People need someone to mimic. Most cannot find that way of Christ even though it is described in writing in Scripture. That is not a matter of a lack of intelligence. It is a matter of gifting. There is in leaders that special ability to put Christ in their world and follow Him. That then provides an example for others to follow.

Leaders initiate this mimicking of Christ. In Christianity it is the most important thing they initiate. They must never do other things at the expense of this most basic issue. When they do, they will lead on the downward path where tasks and goals may be accomplished, but Christ is left outside looking in. This is an awful place for an organization to arrive and it is quite normal. Leaders must be good at repenting, because the thing they cannot do is lose sight of Christ. When they do, they must change their course and get back to when they last saw Him.

With this thought Paul concludes one section that had begun in 8:1 and begins to move into another matter that concerns him regarding the Corinthian church.

## **11:2—Now I praise you because you remember me and everything in hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.**

Having just told the Corinthians to mimic him as he himself was following Christ, Paul now praises them for the fact that this has been the pattern in all things. They've been faithfully adhering to certain traditions. The verb translated "remember" is a perfect tense of μνησκω. The sense given is that they have called it to mind and are continuing in the state appropriate to that recollection. They are holding down (κατεχω is used) the traditions.

Tradition is a two-aged sword. There are times as historically when tradition becomes the enemy of faith, when it keeps us from the free movement of the Spirit. The struggle to free oneself of such life-choking tradition can leave us thinking that all tradition is bad. It is not bad where it relates to the truth. It can be when it relates to how that truth is celebrated or fleshed out. Truth never changes. The appropriate way to express that truth is largely a product of culture, which is human tradition, subject to change and appropriate to change. Be aware however, that it usually only changes with the shedding of blood!

We must realize that in Christianity there is much tradition. Some we must hold onto very loosely. But much we need to grip to never let go. Already, just a few decades into Christianity there were traditions that were important to keep. Paul will begin to remind them of certain ones. In all cases the truth is the tradition they are to hold onto. In discussing how that truth is expressed Paul is careful to emphasize what that truth is and reinforce it. We have no freedom about whether we believe and express truth. We have freedom with respect to how it is expressed. Dissecting tradition, dividing the truth from its cultural expression, must be done with great care.

**11:3—But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.**

The sentence begins with the conjunction  $\delta\epsilon$ . This conjunction links this thought to the one just expressed, namely that there is a tradition regarding what is true we need to maintain. What Paul expresses here is a truth that is important to hang onto. He would delve into the way in which it was expressed in the Corinthian church's worship service. But he first states the truth. It is the truth that relates to headship.

Much has been made of the Greek word here for "head". Its usage varies from that which allocates authority and rank to describing the headwaters of a river, the river's source. So there is a range of meaning that involves on the one hand authority, but on the other an originating influence—what we might call a nurturing pacesetter. It would appear from Paul's three examples here that to simply read something like "boss" for the word "head" is to miss the depth of the idea. On the other hand to remove all intimation of the story is to miss the obvious.

Paul presents these examples of headship. There is God as the head of man, man as the head of woman, God as the head of Christ. Whatever we say is true of man with respect to woman, must be true of God with respect to man, and God with respect to Christ. The best way of understanding the idea being expanded here is to say it conveys the authority enjoyed by a nurturing pacesetter. It is one who lovingly summons someone else to the high ground of the plans and purposes of God and becomes a source of enablement for them to gain that ground. There is authority in this idea, but there is both service, nurture, and love in it as well.

This is a relationship that exists within the Trinity between God and Christ. There God is the One whose plan prevails, but He is the one who serves nurtures and always enables Christ through His love to carry it out. It is the relationship of Christ to mankind, and it is the relationship of man to woman.

A man, because of sin, tends to lapse into self-serving agendas and uses authority to meet his own needs. So the number one need men have and must check themselves on is the need to love. Women, due to sin, will tend to ignore the authority of their husband and seek to be their own head for selfish reasons. So the number one need wives have is to subject themselves, placed themselves under the headship of their husbands. This order had implications in worship services. There was a way of expressing the headship of Christ and the headship of husbands in the culture of Corinth.

**11:4—Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.**

With this statement Paul applies the principle of headship, specifically Christ being the head of every man, to every man's conduct when worshipping. Here cultural elements came into play, because how one's actions are perceived is everything. There was a custom of removing one's hat or head covering out of respect when in the presence of one with greater authority. And so not to do so when conducting business with God in that culture sent the message of disrespect. Paul urges the man through these words to remove their head covering when praying or prophesying. It was an outward gesture that reflects submission and respect. That continues to this day in Western culture.

**11:5—but every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved.**

It seems that in both the Jewish and other cultures of the day that a shaved head sent a message. Shaving of the head was the penalty for an adulterous. It was apparently the mark as well of some of the shrine prostitutes of the day. In Greek culture women were rarely seen in public, and the wearing of some type of covering from a veil to a simple headdress, was the norm when they were out in public. It could be that in the Christian church, realizing the equality of the sexes in Christ, all such practices of the culture were being tossed aside. Paul is conditioning against that because there is a certain divine order that is to be maintained, and it is this order of headship. While sin had warped the world's understanding and practice of the divine order and led to all manner of abuses by males over females, there was still the basic order of creation to be observed and cultural things to be sensitive to in the interest of furthering the mission. To discard all head covering in that culture said too much.

Now it was as true then as now that women are of equal standing with men Christ. But it is going too far to remove all distinctions in the role. Paul wants men and women to maintain some culturally sensitive symbol of authority and headship. In the case of the man it was to remove his head covering, reflecting his submission to God. In the case of the woman, it was to wear such a head covering to project one's submission and proper relationship to her husband.

The truth of headship is an absolute that we must cling to. How it is expressed remains an issue to which we must be culturally sensitive. Paul is giving a charge here relevant to the culture that existed in Corinth in his day. We have considerable freedom in how we express this truth.

**11:6 for if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.**

Paul, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, felt that a woman without the head covering of some sort brought disgrace on her husband, and ultimately therefore on herself. If you wish to do this Paul says, why not go all the way and shave off her hair? Then again, in that culture she would be making a more profound and powerful statement of disgrace. Paul's real point is in the second statement, a conditional statement that we should understand as starting with the word "since" instead of the conjunction "but." His point is that if a woman does not want to make a statement about herself being a disgrace, she should wear a head covering.

**11:7—For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.**

Genesis 1:26 states that both male and female are created in the image of God. What distinction is Paul trying to make here? What exactly is he saying? Careful observation shows that he does not state that woman is NOT the image of God. He says that man is the image and glory of God, while the woman is the glory of man. The contrast stated is in "glory." Since the Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself, it would seem likely that Paul is saying, "man is the image and glory of God, woman is the image of God but the glory of man." The nature of this contrast is significant to Paul, he uses the Greek terms *εἰκών* and *δόξα*, meaning on the one hand-on the other. What he means is

developed by the statements that follow. Is a contrast in what is "weighty" about man and woman, a contrast in where their primary and general impact is found. This is the basic meaning of "glory." It does not seem to be an issue that can be explained simply by culture or by opportunity. It seems to be an issue of creation.

**11:8—for man does not originate from woman, but woman from man.**

To support his basic premise, that woman is the "glory" of man, meaning that her life impact generally grows out of her relationship to man, Paul cites the creation story. We should note as an aside, that Paul approaches the biblical account of creation as a literal event not a literary representation of an event. The details reported in Genesis happened in the way they are reported to have happen, and Paul is very comfortable using them as evidence. They are that man was created from the "dust of the earth," from existing matter in other forms. Woman was created out of man (Genesis 2:18 – 25), and so was given the name meaning "from man." So in the creation of humankind, God led the way through creation of man. This has been the general pattern of His dealings on earth ever since.

**11:9—for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.**

Paul makes a second observation from the creation account in this statement. It is further support for his premise that man's chief impact comes as he furthers God's agenda. A woman's impact comes as she helps man in that work. The record shows that she was created to come alongside Adam, and we take that to mean physically, emotionally, and spiritually. She was given because God observed that it was not good for man to be alone. In terms of what God created man to be and do, his being alone was not good. So woman was created from the man for the man, to alleviate a condition that was not good. It is in these senses that woman is the "glory" of man. It is not a matter of value, and the word significance is even too strong. It is a matter of function and role in God's plan.

We should understand this as we do the person of God, where we see three persons, each with a distinct role, yet one in essence, equally God, yet both the Son and the Spirit being subject to the Father. We could say that the glory of the Spirit is the Son without diminishing one bit the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and indeed that is our general understanding. It is one of our greatest challenges to separate one's role from their value, and it is so in this case as well.

**11:10—therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the Angels.**

The word "symbol" does not appear in the original, though it is probably rightly placed there as expressing the intent of the words. In the Greek it is simply said that the woman should "have authority on her head." Again we must remind ourselves that in the Greek culture, of the first century, the lack of a head covering said something quite different than it does in American culture. Here, both the head covering and no head covering, and short hair or long hair are simple fashion statements. There they were more than that, and so Paul lays down this which he desires the woman to observe. The principle at stake is that Christians, male and female, to have credibility must be perceived as being in submission to authority.

Perception is to a large degree dictated by culture, and so our freedom must not lead us to do things that would send the wrong message to the culture we're relating to. We must look for culturally relevant symbols and be sensitive to them.

The phrase "because of the angels," adds an interesting twist to this verse. Does it mean evil angels, as some would suggest, who oppose those who leave the boundaries of protective authority? Does it mean good angels, who were observing and learning from humans? Does it mean that woman is to be careful to maintain the relationship to her husband's authority because of the lessons of the evil angels, who fell from heaven because they do not submit themselves to God's leadership. I think it most likely means the latter.

We should remember that the command being enjoined here is that of wearing a head covering. We want to be careful suggesting that the failure to wear a hat left one open to demonic oppression. That is borderline superstition. It would seem better to say that we should respect and guard clear lines of authority that God has designated because of angelic history, specifically the loss of their abode by those angels that did not respect God's authority. This shows the absolute nature of the principles of headship in God's economy.

**11:11—however, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.**

After giving remarks that we interpret as being shaped to a certain degree by culture, Paul begins this verse with the word "however" in the English rendering, *πλην* in the Greek. It makes a contrast. The words that follow, "in the Lord," allow us to understand the previous words as relating to being "in the Lord in the Roman world in the times of Paul." We're allowed to see ourselves as not bound by the practice of the early church with respect to head coverings.

The phrase "in the Lord" introduces teaching that shows that the warpage brought about by sin, where a designated role as head began to be understood as superior and led to all matters of abuse and subjugation of women, is itself evil. It is to be cleansed from our thinking. The fact is that it was not good for man to be alone. He was from the start dependent, in need. "In the Lord" declares reality, aside from all the prideful self-serving rhetoric.

The truth of the matter is set forth. Yes, headship of the male in marriage is clearly God's order. But that does not infer superiority. In the human world that is tough to comprehend. In the divine world, it is a way of life, God Himself being one in essence while being three persons. All are equally God yet rightly submitted to the Father. In the Lord there is this mutual dependence and need between husband and wife. The husband is the designated head, but he is not by this designated superior. The relationship is one of mutual dependency.

**11:12—For as woman originates from man, so also the man has birth through the woman, and all things originate from God.**

Man cannot point to the creation events and say that he exists independent of women, nor can we deduce from this order of creation that woman owes her existence to man. Both owe their existence to God. Men since Adam need only think of their own birth to realize the folly of arrogance in this matter. Nor can women camp to pridefully on the

matter of their own childbearing, since this is a role granted by God. This is the heart of the matter; all things originate from God. Husbands must not suppose their assigned role as head means anything more than an assigned responsibility for which they will be held accountable. It is not a matter of superiority or an inherent right to be served. It is a stewardship that is to be discharged with a loving and serving heart by a God who sustains all things. He will call people to account for their actions in the body.

**11:13—Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered?**

Paul asked this rhetorical question which expected a "no" answer and expected it quickly without much thought. This was made possible by some cultural element. No head covering made a statement that was totally contradictory to the act of praying, in the Corinthian culture. This helps us understand the teaching, and the standards set down by Paul. The actual cultural implication is not recorded for us in Scripture. History gives us some strong clues. The presence of this rhetorical device and Paul's willingness to call as a witness "common sense" together tell us that a strong cultural element demanded this standard of appearance.

**11:14—does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him,**

By "nature" Paul is not referring to a law of nature as we would use the term. He is referring to the natural order of culture as the Corinthians experienced it. Viewed in this way we are reminded of the cultural element that always shapes perception and that must be considered in behavior in public worship. To read into the word "nature" our meaning of that word brings about confusion and veils our understanding of the entire passage. To assume that "nature," meaning "culture," did teach this to the Corinthians, sheds light all that is written here. The culture and styles of the day shaped how women with no head covering and men with long hair were perceived. It was not a perception that was harmonious with the truth of Christianity. So Paul prescribes limiting personal and individual freedom in the interest of casting a good and clear light on the truth and the faith.

**11:15—but if the woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For hair is given to her as a covering.**

This completes the thought begun in the previous verse. Again, Paul is appealing to the witness of common sense in this whole matter of dress and appearance in public worship. "Nature," the natural thought by which things were perceived in Corinth by the common man apart from the knowledge of revelation, taught these things. They're not necessarily true "in the Lord." They were true in Paul's time in that part of the world in the minds of the average person. The truth was that in terms of the cultural thought of people in Corinth long hair was a covering in which women could "glory." The "knowledge" of others must be a factor in the shaping of our behavior.

**11:16—But if one is inclined to be contemptuous, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.**

In these matters, Paul says, we have no special custom that supersedes that of the culture. Do what is appropriate, what will accurately project the truth in the culture of the place, that is the practice in these matters in the church of God.

Culture has been a struggle ever since, in a different way than at Corinth. There they were tempted to cast off cultural standards of dress because they were too confining, and because they felt freedom in the matter. They had to be "brought back" to cultural dictates. Since that time, we have tended to think that the church of God does have a specific practice in these matters that should be clung to regardless of culture. So tradition has been born in many cases where women are required to wear head coverings in church, though there is no such parallel element in the culture.

The church has struggled mightily with the issue of culture throughout its history. The "law" we are under is to be culturally sensitive. That is what Paul is promoting in this passage. The Corinthians had to restrain their freedom, due to the restraint of the culture of the day. We must not enter into the freedom of the culture of our day, but must remain under the moral restraint of the truth.

**11:17—But in giving this instruction, I cannot praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.**

Paul prepares the Corinthians for some negative words. There was a matter that was out of line, that caused them to bring damage to one another during their meeting together. That is a sobering idea, one we should ponder often. When things are not done properly, God's way, our church services do harm rather than good.

11:18—For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it.

There were divisions among the Corinthians. All divisions are not bad, as Paul will say. It is not that at a church meeting no divisions can exist for God to be active and present because in one sense His work divides. This is why Paul says that "some part" of the division he believes. He accepts it as inevitable. But the fact remains that when there is division in a church there is a problem of some sort, and it shows that not all are discerning right the voice of the Spirit. In the Corinthian's case things were so bad that there needed to be divisions to show God was present! Some were that far off course. This was a sorry situation.

**11:19—for there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you.**

In some cases of disunity in the church both factions have fault. But there are those which are a normal part of a group of Christians traveling through the sanctification process, in which one party has chosen the correct and righteous way, while the other has not. One side is "approved," documented by God to be of Him. The other side has chosen to go their own way apart from God. That is "legitimate" division, that is, it is understandable in a fallen world with people at all different levels of maturity. These kinds of divisions are to be expected.



Some people will "hit the wall" in terms of their level of obedience and not move along as they should. They will fall out of the ranks of the believing and growing and may even be angry and malicious about it. They can even be certain they are right. Not all division is bad, and we are not trying to keep all division from happening in the church. Not only is it impractical, but it is unspiritual and unwise. Division should not surprise us. But we should not allow arrogance to make us think individual situations where there is division are of a right versus wrong nature without carefully examining them.

**11:20—therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's supper,**

This was the stated function of the Corinthians coming together, to eat the Lord's supper. But their supper was not a tribute to the Lord because it is not done in a manner that He approved. It had become simply at that point a religious ritual. This was happening in Corinth.

What was to be a testimony to the Lord Jesus and a witness to the Corinthians faith in Him and there being saved by Him and their being in covenant relationship with Him instead was a testimony to their own fleshiness. The reason was the way Communion was being observed, and the following verses enable us to reconstruct to some degree the problem. The problem was simple in nature but profound in its impact.

**11:21—For in your eating each one takes his own supper first; one is hungry and another is drunk.**

The communion service was done in the context of a meal eaten together, even as it was when the Lord instituted it. It was a moment of remembrance during the special Passover meal. Now we don't know exactly how this meal was provided in Corinth, whether by a person or by the collective group, potluck style. What this verse indicates is that some were hoarding the food. They were taking such a large share for themselves that others were going without. They were using the occasion to indulge themselves, rather than for worship. The result was some were overindulging while others had nothing. The moment of remembering was not the shared one.

**11:22—What! You not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the Church of God, and shame those you have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.**

Paul's tone is one of amazement. He cites several ways in which their practices were shameful by asking these questions. First, they are turning a church gathering into something that should be done just as a routine of life. It would become just a survival routine, not a spiritual activity. Their own homes were the places for that, not the church. Second by doing what they were doing they were using the church to serve their own selfish needs. They were not holding it in the lofty position it deserved, and some of its members they were degrading. They were undoing publicly the very thing Christ's work on the cross had accomplished, that of purchasing for Himself a people among whom He could live and move and work. There was nothing Paul could say in this regard to support them. They were on a different mission than their Lord was in this matter. They were not obeying their Head, the very one the occasion was to honor.

**11:23—for I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night he was betrayed took bread;**

Literally, "I myself received from the Lord what also had been delivered over to me, of the Lord, in the night he was delivered overtook bread." The word παραδίδοι appears twice in this account by Paul of the tradition he had written to instruct the Corinthians in. He instructed them in the exact way he had received instructions, and he had received his instructions from the Lord himself. The tradition was born on the night of Jesus' betrayal. It was a ceremony within the ceremonious meal. It is this former ceremony that Paul goes on to delineate. The Passover meal during which it occurred is now set aside. Paul focuses in on that moment when Jesus took the unleavened bread of that meal and did something special with it.

**11:24—and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."**

Literally, "my in-behalf-of-you-body." Jesus took upon Himself human form for one reason, His body was in behalf of us, for our well-being. In saying "this is my body" there is no reason to read any more into it than to say the bread represents in symbolic form Jesus' body, and eating it represents believing in Him. This is in harmony with the symbolism He had used when speaking to the Jews in John 6:54, "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." This was a "difficult saying" (John 6:60), even for his disciples, but he was speaking of belief in using the figure of himself eating the "bread of life" (John 6:48). Eating the bread then is symbolic of belief in the fact that God became a man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and in doing that became the source of eternal spiritual life to all who believe. We are to return to the remembrance of that idea often.

And so communion is one of the only ceremonies and rituals we are given to observe in the church and even if it is remarkably lacking in terms of the description of procedure and liturgy. It appears that exact order and procedure involved in Communion had already been understood by the early Christians as insignificant since it had lost all the trappings of the Passover meal. We surmise from the apostles teaching that when Jesus said, "this cup" he was not specifically referred to the Passover cup, and when he said "this is my body" he was not referring specifically to the unleavened bread of the Passover. They took him to mean any bread so designated and any cup so designated, so that as part of any meal Christians took together the bread and cup could be so dedicated. In making such a designation His people would be faithful in remembering Him.

We must remember him because we so easily forget acts done for our welfare by God. Like nine of the 10 lepers, we quickly move on to the next thing. We easily forget the basis of our standing with God and slip into some type of merit system. We easily forget grace and seek to minister in our own strength. So we need to remember as an act of regaining our bearings, as an act of respectful and reverent worship. Remembering is the only reasonable thing to do considering our loving God, and so communion is a very significant tradition to follow and to engage with right hearts.

**11:25—In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."**

After the Passover meal had ended (though some would argue the technicality of this), Jesus took a cup and with it in hand spoke these words to the 11. Some argue that this was a particular cup that was part of a specific portion of the Passover meal, and it may have been. The apostles gave no such tradition to the church. They took it that any cup at any point could be so dedicated. The significant thing was the remembering not the using of the right cup.

The cup so dedicated is a reminder of the new covenant God entered into with man through the blood of Christ. Is a covenant that requires only faith—belief in Christ and His work. God's response to such faith is to allow that individual's sins to be forever atoned for by the blood of Christ, and to enter forever into solemn union with God Himself. By virtue of that union God bestows on them the rights associated with being sons of God. We are to remember this as often as we drink such a cup, and leaders are to designate such a remembrance during church life so that such a great truth that involves the essence of our identity, is remembered and reflected on frequently. That is the key to a healthy Christian experience and to success in the work entrusted to us. Christ's work in our behalf brings about everything we have come to know as Christians.

**11:26—for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.**

Again, it is appearing that the terms "this bread" and "the cup" refer to bread so designated and a drink so designated, that the type of bread or drink or the season of its being offered are not the issues being distinguished by the definite pronoun and article. As often as it is done, and there is no set limit or interval in Scripture, something important is done—Christ death is proclaimed. The word rendered "proclaimed" is καταγγελλετε. It is formed from the preposition κατά, meaning down, against, according to, throughout, joined to the word ἀνγγελλω, meaning to give a message. The idea is to announce and proclaim, but also to laud and celebrate.

In communion we announce, laud, and celebrate all that the death of Christ is and means in symbolic form. It is profound in its depth so that its various nuances could never be exhausted. It is something instituted among God's people "until He comes." We will celebrate with a different feast at that time. And so our communion has its roots in the Passover supper and will evolve into something of greater fullness in connection with the marriage supper of the Lamb. It is ours until He comes.

But this verse is not meant to stand alone. It is set forth to provide a backdrop for the next point Paul will make.

**11:27— Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.**

This is a chilling verse. To be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord is something we want to avoid. Whatever it means, we will find as we read that some of the Corinthian believers were under judgment in this very matter. And so we surmise that it is possible for a Christian to fall into this sin.

We see first that this is a matter of eating and drinking unworthily. Now we know that this cannot mean inherent moral worth, or the death of Christ would not have been necessary. Some have suggested that the problem occurs when there is unconfessed sin, and that may well be a part of the issue. Some insight is provided by the word unworthy itself. That word is an adverb that describes the way the action of eating and drinking is carried out. So the NASB has rightly placed the word "manner" in their rendering. The way the Corinthians were eating and drinking was therefore what was the cause of concern. The word for manner *αξιος*, means deserving or fitting or suitable. Paul places the *α* privative prefix in front of this word *αξιος* creating an antonym for the word *αξιος*. It describes a manner that is the unbecoming or not fitting or unsuitable.

Earlier in the context Paul has described how they were eating and drinking. There was gluttony and drunkenness on the part of some while others were left with nothing. It was a self-feast not a love-feast. This was not a fitting way to engage in this activity because communion was a memorial to the body and blood of the Lord. It was meant to laud and honor the sacred act He gave Himself to for us. The way the Corinthians were celebrating flew in the face of all that the Lord was seeking to do among them.

Now, is Paul saying they were in the same company as those who had crucified the Lord? In a sense they were. We must remember that there is a sense in which any sin is blasphemous against the body and blood of the Lord. It is siding against Him, taking our stand with His enemies including all who crucified Him. It seems better however to say that the person who partakes of communion without proper reverence and in a way that does not fit the profound truth that it commemorates, is behaving unworthily not just toward the ceremony, but towards the body and blood of the Lord. Communion is a legitimate "ritual" or "ceremony," in the mind of God. He has not given the church many such rituals, but this is one. We spend much of our spiritual energy freeing ourselves from belief and ritual and ceremony and rising above them. We should not set aside the profound and holy nature of communion. Our manner, from our outer behavior to our inner thoughts is important as we approach this great sacrament. Approach it as holy and do so reverently, focused on the sacrifice of Jesus and honoring that great act carried out in our behalf.

**11:28—but let a man examine himself, and so let a man of the bread and drink of the cup.**

Another way of understanding Paul's exhortation here is this; "let a man prove himself." The word for examined is *δοκιμαζετω*. It refers to documenting oneself or proving oneself legitimate. Paul is saying let an individual embrace an attitude and mentality appropriate to such an act of worship. This would include confession and repentance and then reverence for the sacredness of the expression of gratitude to God.

Paul is not calling us to prove by good works that we have the right to participate in communion. He is calling us to having the right spirit and heart attitude in the moment. In the spirit that proves one's sincerity the bread and cup should be taken; literally the Greek says thusly let him eat the bread". Communion should be taken with a transparency before the Lord, with no hidden motives, no covered-up sin, and not on "automatic pilot," as a mindless exercise done by rote.

**11:29—for he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.**

Communion we see here is a two-edged sword. It is a great blessing and privilege, where Christ is uniquely present. But when done mindlessly so that its sacredness isn't acknowledged and respected it can become that which invites God's discipline. The key is to judge one's body rightly. In the case of the Corinthians this demanded that they deny the body's desire to overindulge at the expense of others who would then have nothing. The broad principle is that in communion we must have a right spirit that then rightly directs our outward behavior, so that the whole thing does not become a sham. In the Corinthian church the Lord's supper was beginning to take on the look of idolatrous feasts at one of the pagan temples. This was because bodies were not being controlled and made to submit to the truth. The key was to individually judge the body's desires and urges and then conform them to the truth.

**11:30—for this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.**

The eating of judgments to oneself was no superstition or groundless fear. It was happening and in full bloom. Guilty people in the Corinthian church were weak, sick, even dead, and it is said that this was happening in many cases (an expression of plurality occurs twice in the text in different ways). So there is a basis in fact for believing that sickness and death occur among believers as result of disobedience, but it is important to add that this does not mean that all sickness and death among Christians is attributable to their personal sin. We should limit our discussion of the linkage between disobedience and sickness to this general observation, and then let everyone arrive at the particular understanding of their personal situation.

**11:31—but if we judge ourselves rightly, we should not be judged.**

If we are examining our lives and make proper conclusions about it and then take proper action, we do not need God's discipline. Such self-discipline when carried out in the guidance of the Holy Spirit is in effect of the divine nature. It takes the place of "attention-getters" like sickness and death. God uses these to bring about repentance of His children. It is an on-going activity we should never let go of the activity of examining our actions and motivations.

**11:32—but when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.**

Paul makes it clear that this action of the Lord is carried out for our benefit. The word rendered disciplined is παιδεύω, a derivative παιδιον the term for a child. The term refers to the various forms of discipline for training purposes used with children. The Corinthians were being corrected. God was seeking to purge them from behavior that placed them in some very bad company and numbered them among those who blaspheme the Lord. The discipline of the Lord marks us out as His children and assures us that we belong to the family of the Lord, since He only disciplines those are His sons (Hebrews 12:5-11). God does not want us to be guilty of the same sin that is characteristic of the world. He does not want our behavior such that it condemns us. So in place of us losing our standing with God, as would certainly occur were we on a merit standard, we are disciplined as His children, which privileged standing remains ours being based on the merit of Christ.

**11:33—so then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.**

From the realm of deep theology Paul moves to the realm of the practical, a movement that should always be made by us. The essence of this deep theological issue of communion to the Corinthians is simply this – wait. Don't overindulge at the expense of someone else. Wait to fill yourselves until others have had something.

**11:34—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment. And the remaining matters I will arrange when I come.**

The meal together was to have as its purpose the remembering of the Lord. Hunger was to be satisfied at home. This was a practical way of mitigating against the situation that had developed in Corinth. There were apparently "other matters," about which we know nothing, that needed to be addressed but which were not of as urgent a nature and could wait until Paul's visit.

## 1 Corinthians 12

### **12:1—now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.**

The word “gifts” does not appear in the original text and will not be introduced until verse four. The thing about which Paul does not want them to be unaware is “πνευματικῶν,” “spirituals,” or perhaps better “spiritual phenomena.” Understanding this word in this way is critical to understanding the rest of the text. Understanding this as a discourse about spiritual phenomena is much more in line with the next thought that Paul expresses, the danger of being led astray. Wherever there are spiritual phenomena there is great possibility for error, and great possibility for stable Christian people to suddenly become unstable in their belief. The discussion that follows in chapters 12 to 14 all relates back to this idea that Paul does not want the Corinthians functioning in the realm of spiritual phenomena ignorantly. He wants the Corinthians to have their eyes “wide open” in this matter. So Paul’s concern is not just spiritual gifts, though these are part of the broader category of “spirituals,” or what we are calling here “spiritual phenomena.”

As the Corinthians moved by the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit, they would rightly experience spiritual phenomena. Their meetings and relationships together would be shaped by His leadings and promptings. They had not been doing so well with the communion service. They were not keeping it spiritual. It was becoming just a feast for gluttons and drunkards. It was important that they move in the right direction with spiritual experiences, avoiding misuses and absolute counterfeits. The experience of the genuinely spiritual will be encouraged at every turn in Paul’s words. They had to know certain things however, to conduct themselves rightly as they move down this road.

The word “unaware” is ἀγνοεῖν, to be without knowledge, ignorant. There is much ignorance in the realm of spiritual phenomena. It shows itself in the fear of some, who have in their fear erected a theology that removes any experience of the movings of the Holy Spirit. It shows itself in the fact that some get drawn into those phenomena associated with the worship of Satan and demons. Much of the rhetoric surrounding spiritual phenomena is fueled by ignorance. Where we find ignorance, we find every form of excess, but we do not find the truth.

The life Christ lived and passed on to the church is a life characterized by divine movement. It is nothing if it is not that. There will be those things, if that life is rightly lived, that are genuine Spiritual phenomena. There will be activities produced by the Holy Spirit that are not explained by human factors. That does not mean however that everything that cannot be explained by human factors is of the Holy Spirit. That is the concern Paul was addressing with these words of instruction.

### **12:2—you know that when you were pagans, you are led astray to the dumb idols, however you are led.**

The Corinthians were no strangers to spiritual phenomena. It had been part of their experience before they were Christians. They had experienced “leading” before, and the result was idolatry. This is because of their ignorance of truth. To the degree that truth is not present there is capacity for such error. It is important for them to understand that they were led astray. Acknowledgment of this fact would be evidence to them that there is false spiritual activity.

The uniqueness of the Christian faith does not lie in the phenomena associated with the experience of the leading of the Holy Spirit. There are such phenomena outside the boundaries of truth and the Corinthians had experience them. Such phenomena exist wherever there are spirits active. Before coming to Christ the Corinthians had been led astray by such phenomena into idolatry, though Paul does not choose to delineate exactly how that leading came about. His statement indicates it could have come about in several ways. His point is they were led. He is concerned that boundaries and criteria be in place so that such false leading does not happen again. Instead he wants them to be led toward truth not away from it. So Paul will set forth truth that will illuminate the path for them and help them to walk it right.

The times have not changed this situation. There is still much ignorance about spiritual things, and multitudes are led astray.

**12:3—therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.**

Because they had been led astray and because Paul did not want them to be vulnerable to such false leading once again, he sets out two very practical and easy tests of any message prompted from the spiritual world that we might hear. The question that should be asked of any message is this: what is the source of this that I'm hearing or sensing? Is it of the Holy Spirit, or of some other spirit? And so Paul says that a message can be judged by what it says about Christ. Does it proclaim him as Lord? That is what the Holy Spirit does. He exalts and proclaims the Lordship of Christ. No message of God will suggest that Jesus is anything less than the Lord. Neither will any message prompted by the Holy Spirit say that Jesus is accursed or rejected by God. These then, are two easy tests of messages that come out of the spiritual realm.

Messages that take away from Christ's essence are sourced in a different spirit. And so with a simple knowledge in hand we are better equipped to deal in the world of the spiritual and make judgments regarding all the various spiritual phenomena we witness while pursuing truth. The message about Christ is not diverse. The truth about Him is very precise and exact. Don't make allowances for divergent messages about Him. The Holy Spirit will prompt no one to do that. There is diversity within Christianity, but not in our understanding of Christ. The Holy Spirit has a single leading in that regard.

**12:4—now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit.**

Our dogma and dogmatism on the person of Christ is legitimate, well-founded, and even essential. But let not that narrowness regarding the message translate into a narrowness of how Christ is experienced and revealed to His people. The next three verses will talk about the diversity of our experience of Him. So again, the message is narrow and very precise about Christ. The expression of the message and the phenomena that accompany our individual expression of that message are quite varied and diverse.

This verse speaks of a variety of gifts. The Scripture shows that the nature of Christ, the God-man, perfect humanity and undiminished deity united forever in one person, transcends our understanding. So vast is Christ that it takes multitudes of His people, viewed collectively, to adequately reflect Him. It is not a matter of a single super-gifted person or even a group of super-gifted people. It takes the whole family, with



each one demonstrating a portion of the great picture of Christ. And so the immensity of Christ is reflected in the diversity of His children and one of the results is that we are each gifted in a certain way. We then contribute to one another some, specific aspect of Christ's ongoing care for the welfare of his church—His family. Collectively we have among us all we need for our spiritual well-being. That well-being comes about through a variety of gifts, each one valid, exercised in community with one another. So in evaluating spiritual activity and phenomena we must remember that we are not looking for a particular giftedness or ability. Christ is expressed through a variety of different giftings.

In Romans 12 Paul has spoken of seven different gifts. There he spoke of the gifts of prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and the showing of mercy. There is great diversity in these gifts, each reflecting not just a different way of expression but a whole different personality. In this passage in Corinthians we must zoom out and restate the impact of why Paul has said this.

In the world of spiritual phenomena we must not be ignorant. There is spiritual danger in ignorance. In discerning legitimacy of spiritual phenomena we must make sure the right message of Christ is being advanced, that he is Lord—THE sovereign. In such declarations we can expect to see a variety of gifts being used by the Holy Spirit to express Christ in the church.

We must not make the mistake of looking for one gift, in judging whether something is of God by the gift used to express it. There are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit orchestrating them. We should not overwork the concept of the Trinity as it is set forth in this and the following verses and so compartmentalize the works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For when we examined up close church life, we are essentially studying the work of all three, though the Holy Spirit tends to be the immediate agent.

#### **12:5—and there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.**

In seeking out authentic spiritual activities and phenomena we are not looking for a certain type of ministry. There are a variety of ministries that are directed by the Lord in his Church. Ministry should be understood as any activity directed by the Lord and carried out on behalf of Him for the benefit of a person or persons whom He wishes to affect. In His ongoing work of conforming humankind to Himself He assigns many different ministries. The term we know in the English language as “ministry” is used in Scripture for everything from serving food to the work of the twelve apostles. And so this verse summarizes well the way the term “ministry” is used in the Bible. It is used for a variety of activities directed by our Lord. All, if directed by Him, are equally spiritual, that is the unmistakable conclusion to be drawn from this verse.

It is also true that within the scope of each gift, there are a variety of ministries to which the gift can be applied, so that people with the same gift can be found using it in distinctly different ministries. If they are doing it at the Lord's direction it is good. Not all leaders need to be elders. Not all teachers need to teach in adult settings. Not all mercy showers need to minister in jails. There are a variety of diverse ministries, all directed by the same Lord.

**12:6—and there are variety of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.**

The word for effects is ενεργημάτων, meaning workings or energizing. It is then said that God is the One who is the source of such working or energy. He is the Sovereign One who through us, as we use our gift to do ministry, brings about a certain effect or we could say impact. This is important to understand. In seeking to discern authentic spiritual activity, we are not looking for a certain level of impact, for this can vary greatly depending on the sovereign will of God. Through some thousands are impacted. Through others a small number are impacted.

Among the people of God the effect of God working through their giftedness and ministry will vary greatly. It is a shallow judgment that "discerns" God's presence and pleasure in a person's work by the effect that they see. The fact is that ministry at all levels is a miracle and is all His work.

We can surmise from this verse as well that what we observe in the practical realm of church ministry where we see varying strengths in different people's giftedness can be attributed to the sovereign workings of God. So one might impact thousands through their dynamic giftedness, while another might impact dozens. It is not a matter of one being more spiritual. The effect is a matter determined by the sovereignty of God.

**12:7—but each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

To re-cap, there is diversity in the gifts we will see exercised by people in the church, and they are all spiritual. There is a diversity of the ministry's people will carry out through the giftedness. In fact, two people with the same gift might use it in entirely different ways. There is diversity in God's workings in people. He energizes the gifts of some so that they impact tens of thousands. Others impact only a close circle of friends. Both are spiritual. The common thread amidst all the diversity is the experience of being used by the Holy Spirit to bring about good in the lives of other family members. The Holy Spirit shows Himself through every believer and uses them to bring about good in other Christians.

The first result of godly spiritual activity is right-thinking about Christ. This is now a second result or test. Spiritual activity that is orchestrated by God results in the common good. The church is built up by it—not simply the organization, the individuals. This comes about through "each one" of its members as they behave in harmony with the Holy Spirit. So each one is an important part of the whole.

It would seem best to understand this "manifestation of the Spirit" spoken of here as consisting of more than everyone's giftedness. The previous verses can be understood as teaching that each person has a gift, each has a ministry they are called to use that gift in, each has an energizing, likely meaning an empowerment to bring about a certain effect. The combination of these three things in them composes their spiritual fingerprint, the unique impress they will make on the church. It is unique in each person, but the purpose is the same, to bring about the common good.

What follows is not a list of various examples of gifts, but a list of some manifestations of the Spirit, that is, real-life results that happen because of a person's giftedness, their specific ministry, and their energizing. The gifts should be understood as being listed in Romans 12. This is a listing of ways in which we see the Holy Spirit ministering through various people with diverse gifts, ministries, and empowerments. We should

understand these as occurrences that are typical of church life, observable in healthy congregations. We should not be bound by the idea that they all occur in a particular service.

So we are suggesting is that the term "manifestation of the spirit," is not synonymous with the term "gift of the Spirit," though they are related. Romans 12 deals with the gifts. This passage deals with the legitimate activities or phenomenon of the Spirit that should be observable in the church. Giftedness is a factor in what we observe as the spirit manifests himself through people. The discussion here is broader than just giftedness.

**12:8—For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit.**

There are separate, distinct manifestations of the same Spirit. The grammar and language is that of making clear distinctions in this verse, but the message is also that of commonality. Diverse manifestations come from a common, invisible source. Most understand this verse to be the beginning of a list of gifts, and so "the word of wisdom," and "the word of knowledge" are commonly thought of as gifts of the Spirit. This is largely the result of the rendering in English Bibles of the word "spirituals" in verse one. The addition in almost every version of the word "gifts" leads us to believe that gifts are the subject that Paul is turning to in Chapter 13. But if we say he is turning to the subject of spiritual things, or as we have suggested spiritual phenomena, meaning the workings, leadings, and promptings of the Holy Spirit in the Corinthian church, it throws the whole passage into a different light. The most immediate benefit is that verses two and three seem to fit better and are not foreign to the context. The effect on the present verse is that these things can be seen as descriptions of occurrences in the Corinthian church that came about as the Holy Spirit moved among gifted people, summoning them to a specific ministry in a specific situation, and energizing them to bring about a certain effect. They are, just as verse seven has stated, "manifestations of the Spirit," not "gifts of the spirit."

Now there is a gift involved in each of these manifestations. In fact the exercise of several different gifts could result in the word of wisdom or knowledge. The phrase "word of wisdom," just by the individual terms it is composed of seems to be speaking of a message that sheds light on a specific real-life situation where direction is needed. These are manifestations that bring to light the mind of God in the matter. The word of knowledge could have some of the same characteristics, but is used to bring to light facts, data of some sort that was previously unknown in the matter.

To understand "the word of wisdom" considering the present text it could come about through a person with the gift of prophecy, called to and equipped for an "up front" ministry, and empowered and energized to bring about recognition of the truth of a certain situation. It could also come through someone with a gift of prophecy, called to and equipped for more individual ministry, who is energized or empowered simply to utter a few sentences and by those to bring about a recognition of God's desired course of action. The gift of teaching or leadership could bring about such a "word" as well.

There follows a list of other "manifestations of the Spirit," all of them legitimate spiritual phenomena meant to promote Christ and bring about the common good. They each are the result of the things stated in verses four through six, individual giftedness, that giftedness supplied to a specific "ministry," and a special and unique "energizing" of God to bring about the effect that serves as He has planned.

**12:9—to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by this one Spirit.**

One of the great manifestations of the Spirit is faith. It is everywhere associated with His presence and works, and faith is an important factor in using one's gifts (Romans 12:6). As Christians minister to one another and ponder the Spirits prodding and leadings, it is not uncommon for individual's faith to be added to or multiplied or in some way stirred. This faith that one is given here could be initial trust in the truth of the gospel, or conviction as to God's mind and heart in a practical area of individual or corporate life. Ultimately this is when a church meeting has been effective, when the faith of individuals has been stirred and added to.

We're told that to another (singular) is given gifts (plural) of healings (plural). The word gifts (χαρισματα) never occurs in the singular in this chapter, it is always plural. It occurs four times. Two of these uses are in the general sense, in verses four and 31, where the statements are made about "gifts" in general. Only twice in the chapter is the word tied to a specific type of activity, like our present-day use of the word "gift." In both cases it is used with the word "healings" (plural). So in this chapter, though most translations do not render it in this way. We do not find in the original the phrase "gift of healing," or even as the NASD renders it "gifts of healing." What we find in the original is the phrase "gifts of healings". This refers to multiple gifts and multiple healings.

Such grammar seems to lend credence to the idea that Paul is here listing "manifestations of the Spirit." Rather than speaking here of the ability to heal others being bestowed on a person, he's talking about an individual being healed of multiple maladies because of the Spirits moving and working among those in the church. The gift is the actual healing, not the ability to heal. How it happens, whether through the prayer of others or the faith of others is not discussed here. We are proposing that as a matter of course in church life God heals people on a variety of occasions and that this is all connected with the Spirit manifesting Himself in the lives of those in the Church.

One can easily visualize this happening, as it did in the countless cases in the Old Testament, through the ministry of a prophet. We also easily imagine it happening through one through the gift of showing mercy, who is called to minister to the sick and is energized to bring about the effective healings.

**12:10—and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.**

In this discussion of "spirituals" Paul continues to list other legitimate phenomena that we can expect to see during the Holy Spirit's manifestation of Himself through "each one" in the church. Amidst the "varieties of workings" mentioned in verse six will be the "workings of miracles" mentioned here. The presence of the miraculous is to be

expected. Again, the gift involved we can speculate on, but as result of individual giftedness, ministry and energizing it is to be expected that miracles will come about. Prophecy will come about as the church is gathered and in this case the gift being exercised is readily identifiable—the gift of prophecy. The distinguishing of spirits is constantly needed in church life and is carried out through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in "another" in the church. This person though whom the Lord carries out this work might be a teacher, or a leader, or a prophet in terms of their giftedness. Again that is open to speculation, but the presence of this activity within the church is a legitimate one, a legitimate manifestation of the Spirit.

Another legitimate phenomenon of the Spirit, or manifestation of the Spirit is in "kinds of tongues." The word rendered "kind" is *γενη*, from *γενος*, a term that expresses lineage or one's family roots. It is the expression one would expect to find for strains of human language, though not too much can be made of this. Christians empowered to speak in other languages is legitimate spiritual activity. It is another example of a way in which the Holy Spirit shows Himself. Its use and purpose and other details is not disclosed here, only that it is something that should be considered normal. It follows logically that the interpretation of such language is carried out by the Spirit as well. The term "interpretation" is in *ερμηνεια*, which involves giving not only a good grammatical rendering of words but giving the sense of the words as well—their application.

**12:11—but one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.**

The list just given from verse eight to verse 11 is described here as things that were "works" of the Spirit. The term gift is not used, but the term working is. This is the third use of a form of the verb *ενεργω* in verses 5-11. These are all things "energized" by the Spirit. Paul is saying as we contemplate "spirituals," these are the sorts of things we should anticipate seeing where He is working.

The word "distributing" is a participle, indicating that it speaks of an action that goes on in conjunction with the action of the main verb. So part of the Holy Spirit's work in energizing these things mentioned is to distribute them. Two things are noted about this distribution. First, it is done "respectively" to each one, that is, His working is apportioned out appropriately to individuals. Second, His work is done according to His design or will. So each person receives in the Spirit an energizing appropriate to the Spirit's will in each moment.

We should specifically note that the thing attributed to the Holy Spirit here is the working or energizing. Ephesians 4:7-8 attributes the giving of the gifts to Christ. The best way of harmonizing the two is to say that the things listed in verses 8-10 are not gifts. They are manifestations of the Holy Spirit, observable phenomenon He brings about (works) through variously gifted individuals. So the things listed in verses 8-10 are "worked" by the Spirit, they are done through appropriate individuals, appropriate with respect to the Spirit's will, in conjunction with how Christ has distributed the gifts.

**12:12—for even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.**

This verse provides further explanation of what has gone before. Paul has just made a statement about the working of the Spirit being carried out individually according to the Spirit's will. Now he will show that His will is not arbitrary, but purposeful. There is a designed master plan that encompasses many individual parts and roles.

This is the way "Christ" is. By this Paul is referring to our corporate experience in Christ. This is what we'll find as we observe the Holy Spirit working in the church. It is like a body. Is it composed of many different parts, each distinct. Yet it is also proper to refer to it as singular. In fact it is both characteristics that make it a body. We have come to use a particular phrase to express this characteristic of the church as "unity in diversity." It has many different parts each with a specific design and function. Together they enable the body to sustain itself and do all that it does.

**12:13—for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we are all made to drink of one Spirit.**

The conjunction *γάρ* (for), indicates that Paul is continuing to add detail and provide explanation to his readers as to the grand design of God in His diverse work that He does through diversely gifted people in his family, the church, what is described here as His body. Having stated in verse 12 the great concept of "unity in diversity" Paul now adds this statement that describes our unity. Our unity is no mere "esprit de corps." It is not simply the camaraderie of a common experience. It is a wedding of spirits by the Holy Spirit.

Paul mixes metaphors to illustrate this great reality. There is an act of the Holy Spirit Paul describes as a baptism. It is a word which speaks only of ceremony to us, but this is the reality we symbolized by our ceremony. Baptism, the actual act, happens when the Holy Spirit takes us and places us in something. Unlike the ceremony where we are taken back out, in the real event we remain there. So this baptism involves the Holy Spirit taking us and placing us in something which Paul names as "one body". Paul is referring to the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer now of their belief. They are immersed in Him, that is, our own spirits are wedded forever to Him so that our spirit is one with the Holy Spirit. Because that is true of every believer, we are also joined through the Holy Spirit forever to each other. The presence of Him in all of us becomes the more significant part of our identity.

Having indwelt us, the Holy Spirit then orchestrates even our ethnic and social diversity towards a coordinated and combined effort that can be compared to the normal and routine functions of the human body with its varied parts, its organs and limbs. This is the thing we are placed into; this great organism of which Christ is the head and to which the Holy Spirit gives life and function through communication, coordination, and direction. To put it another way, it is the Holy Spirit that we were all made to drink of. He is that common thing we have all partaken of together that works its unique effect in us. And we who have that experience are the church, His church, which crosses all human lines of faith and denomination. That is not to say it includes all faiths and denominations, but that it crosses all such lines and embraces those of faith in Jesus Christ whom He baptized in the Spirit.

**12:14—For the body is not one member, but many.**

With this verse Paul repeats what he began this section and verse 12 with. It is the key thought, and it will be stated in several ways in the verses that follow. It is an important thought and almost impossible for the human mind to accept, that there can be such diversity as result of the same basic experience. The human mind need search no further than the body of which it is a part for a prime example of how this can be.

**12:15—If the foot should say, "because I'm not a hand, I'm not part of the body," it is**

To emphasize this important point of the diverse nature of the manifestation of the Spirit in every person for the common good, Paul asked a series of questions that are both absurd and yet plainly obvious in their point. Imagining that each part of the body can think, speak, and have feelings, he asked these questions for which the answer is obviously "No!" His point is that a person's belonging to the sphere of the Holy Spirit's care as a believer, is not validated by their having a particular ability to make a particular contribution to the church. They will contribute, but there are diverse ways in which that contribution is made. Each person has a role. Their roles will vary vastly by God's sovereign design and will.

**12:16—If the ear should say, "because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body", it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.**

This restates in the same way the point of the previous verses, that the body is not one member but many. To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. How a person is esteemed by others or themselves is irrelevant. They are part of what God is doing through the Holy Spirit, and the following verses will emphasize not only the diversity of roles, but the significance of all roles.

**12:17—If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be.**

Not only are the roles of individuals diverse, and that by design, but each of the diverse roles is significant and essential for the overall function of the whole. That is the point that Paul wishes to hammer home here. It is very significant. We must not only embrace the diversity with which the Holy Spirit manifests Himself, we must embrace the critical nature of each person to the overall health of the organism, what we know as the church. The whole will function to the degree that its parts are healthy.

**12:18—But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.**

Having reinforced the principle of diversity, Paul now turns to the matter of God's deliberate design. The diversity is not "helter-skelter"—arbitrary or random. Just as God has designed the physical body so that the immense diversity results in grand potential amazing achievements, so it is with his spiritual body, the Church. And with this statement the illustration and the reality become indistinguishable because both function the same in this respect.

The members of His church are individually placed. There is care and attention to detail conveyed in these words. God is meticulous and following his own design. It is carried out without error or inaccuracy. This design and placement is to be discerned and observed by us. To alter it is to damage the outcome. It is disobedience, of the worst sort. Sure personal disaster will follow. So Paul says that in the case of His church, "God has so shaped each member through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, that together they will function exactly according to design. Don't mess with the design!"

**12:19—If they were all one member, where would the body be?**

To expect the Holy Spirit to manifest himself in exactly the same way through every believer is like expecting each part of the human body to look and function in the same way. If it did you would not have a body. Instead you would have pile of arms, ears, or kidneys. To have a body is to have a unity composed of diverse parts.

**12:20—But now there are many members but one body.**

By using the word "now," Paul is saying "in the present case we are considering the church." "Now" is used this way in this verse and verse 18. Paul re-states once again this important point of unity and diversity. This is what we see in the church.

**12:21—And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you;" or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."**

Not only is there unity in diversity in the church as in the human body, but there is also interdependence in the human body and in the church. What good would one function be apart from the others? The good comes only in the coordination and unification of their individual functions. And so in the church there are these individual manifestations of the Spirit, each wonderful in its own way, and yet their real purpose, significance, and value, is in their collective achievement. It is what they do for and with others "for the common good" that is of profound significance. The realization of everyone's potential comes only as they allow the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself through them in concert with the manifestation of Himself through others.

**12:22—on the contrary, it is much truer that the members the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;**

In the human body there are parts that are "weaker," that is they are not capable of accomplishing certain physical tasks, they are more vulnerable, and they are fragile. They are "weaker" in terms of their appeal to the eye. They are "weaker" in terms of their known function. Yet they are necessary. The body would be to some degree impaired without them. This is true of the whole body from the limbs to the vital organs. No matter how weak a member might be compared to others, it performs a necessary function. So rather than the members that are very visible being most important, the case could be made for the opposite being true, that is those invisible and less attractive parts are the ones that make it all happen. So though they are weak in terms of overall appeal, they perform a very vital function.



**12:23—and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness.**

Literally: "and that which we consider without honor to be of the body, to this honor more abundantly we bestow, and our private things more abundant modesty (or respectability) have." Though we are not created this way since the entry of sin into humanity certain parts of the body have brought a shame. They become "private," and in modesty we cover them. Yet by covering them we are in a sense honoring them and allowing them greater care. And so these members that are in one sense shameful, are nevertheless honored by us in this way so that the result is that they come to have a special honor even though they are not displayed.

**12:24—whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked.**

Our attractive members, or what we might call stronger members, have no such need of any special honor. Their value and function is obvious and continually affirmed in the normal course of things. With the conjunction "but" Paul is making a shift. Though it is in the middle of a verse it marks a significant turning point. He has been speaking of the human, physical body since verse 14, though the parallels to the church jump off the page to the reader. With this conjunction Paul is switching from speaking about the physical body to drawing parallels to the spiritual body, the body of Christ, the church.

God has so composed the body of Christ, the church, that more honor comes to rest on those members that from a human standpoint, lack significance. And we see this throughout the history of the church since the times when "ignorant" Men were used to establish it. God used the plain, the ordinary and the weak in glorious ways. It is often those who have been rejected by all human standards that are used by God to do mighty works. This does not mean we look only to those who are weak. We look for those the Lord is using and should not be surprised when we find them that from a human standpoint are weak.

Significance is not found in what we appear to be by all earthly standards of judgment. Instead we find great significance in our function in Christ's body, the church. Though this is not to be our motive in service, it is one of the greatest benefits. By our sacrifice in service to His body, Christ ministers to one of our most heartfelt human needs.

It is also true that all the functions in the body of Christ are significant. Some of these from an earthly standpoint may not appear to be as essential. The reality is however that they will be found to be critical in time to the function the body, essential to the mission.

**12:25—that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.**

Though there is division of labor and function in the body of Christ, the body's built-in dependency allows that there be no schism, what we call "bad division." There is no line drawn to distinguish between "Haves" and "have-nots," or the valuable and the dispensable. All need each other. To take away from one inevitably affects the other. In this sense there is no division in the church. There is no legitimate feeling of

worthlessness among obedient, right-thinking members of the body of Christ. There is mutual care given as one would for their own body.

**12:26—and if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.**

When the body of Christ is functioning in the power of the Holy Spirit there is this level of empathy. Apart from Him, this cannot happen. It is one thing to have sympathy, it is another to suffer with someone, to be a bearer of the burden. It is one thing to suffer with someone, it is quite another to rejoice with them, particularly if it is a member with a similar function as your own. This is God's intention in the Christian experience that through the filling of the Holy Spirit we arrive at the point where self-focus has been replaced with the love and concern of Christ for the other members of His family. It is to exceed the normal human response of pity, condolence, well-wishing, or celebration. When it is of the Lord it is genuine not just proper or appropriate and it is effective in bringing greater Christlikeness in others not just in helping them cope.

**12:27—Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.**

This is a deeply profound statement. The "you" of course is plural, meaning all who believe. It is also emphatic, meaning you, you yourselves. Believers are the body of Christ. They are together what makes Him visible in the world. No one person can adequately portray Christ, but together His church can. If someone was to look at the work of Christ in each individual and put each of those pieces together, they would have a picture of Christ Himself, both in terms of character and ministry. Christ reveals His character in us collectively and He does His work through us collectively. Each one of us is a part of that great puzzle so that the picture is complete.

Here in this context Paul is speaking primarily of the way in which Christ carries out His great work of building up His church. He does that by equipping and empowering each leader to do a part of it. So the result is that we are something collectively, the body of Christ. We're also something individually, a specific part of that body with a divinely imparted role or function in it. We have an apportioned lot.

**12:28—And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.**

This verse is speaking of diversity in the body of Christ, but it is also making a statement about order of some sort. The question is whether that order as it is listed here is the historical order in which God energized various spiritual phenomena or brought about certain manifestations of the Holy Spirit, or is it a statement of authority?

It would seem impossible to choose which is the intent with absolute certainty. It is likely that the first is the intention, with a certain implication regarding the second. I mean that this is the order in which God brought the various "members" of the body of Christ into being, the order in which the Holy Spirit began to manifest Himself through individuals in the church. He began with the apostles, that energized the prophets then the teachers and then perhaps in quick succession the others, though such as sequence is hard to demonstrate biblically.

We are to understand from this order that certain manifestations of the Spirit are foundational in nature, and those through whom they come have by virtue of the choice of God in them a certain innate authority. So Paul, having established the equal value and worth of each member now comments in this way on authority within the body of Christ.

A couple of things about the grammar and word choice in this list are important. The numbers stop after "third." Subsequent manifestations of the Spirit are introduced by "then." "Gifts of healings," as mentioned earlier is the only thing in the list stated as χαρισματα, and it is plural, multiple gifts, multiple healings. The term "gifts" can clearly only go with healings and should not be construed as going with helps, administrations, etc. It is an accusative, "healings" is a genitive, and helps and administrations are accusatives. So the natural rendering would be to view healings as a genitive of description, describing the gifts mentioned, and "helps and administrations" not as more gifts, but parallel to the "gifts," another manifestation of the Spirit.

**12:29-30—all are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?**

In these two verses Paul asked seven questions to which the obvious answer is no. These rhetorical questions are meant to emphasize the fact that there is diversity in the manifestation of the Spirit in individuals. The combination of one's giftedness, one's ministry, and one's energizing makes for a host of combinations, even among those with the same gift. The whole point being made by Paul for the final time is that there is diversity of role and function within the body of Christ.

**12:31—but earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.**

The first statement in this verse can be taken either as a present indicative or present imperative. If it is meant to be an indicative, then it is simply commenting on the present attitude of the Corinthians. It could then be understood as this "but you are earnestly seeking the greater gifts". The NASB has rendered this verse as an imperative, a command to continue the practice of desiring the greater gifts. Grammatically speaking both renderings are equally possible the decision must be made based on context.

If this verse is a command to continue with an action already in progress, as is the force of the present imperative, then it undercuts to some degree what Paul has taken time to express, that is, the importance of all the gifts. It seems to reintroduce into the equation a concept that will negatively impact the very things Paul had set out to produce in the thinking of the Corinthians earlier in this chapter. It also means, if it is a command that Paul is commanding them to do something when a more excellent way is about to be articulated.

It would seem much more likely that Paul is commenting on their historical thinking. This is something they have been in the habit of doing. They have viewed some gifts as "greater," and have been seeking them out. Paul's teaching has been meant to help them see the manifestation of the Spirit as a matter of divine providence, and all the

different combinations of giftedness, ministry, energizing as good and necessary. There are no functions that are "greater" than others. This distinction existed only in their minds and led them to this errant way of thinking.

Paul has just asked seven rhetorical questions to emphasize the fact of the need for diversity. Why would he follow that with a command to earnestly desire the greater gifts? It is much more likely that he is stating the actual condition he is seeking to correct. He's seeking to lead them to higher ground, a still more excellent way. They have been earnestly seeking to project themselves into roles for which there are not equipped. He has shown them the error of that thinking. It is a way of thinking that has had the effect of weakening the body.

Now he will set before them the high road, the one governed by love. They will see the greater calling we are under. It is not to great deeds but to state of being that can only be characterized as selfless. Paul's point will be irrefutably made in chapter 13, but for now his point is that this that he is about to tell them about is "the way" they should be honestly seeking. This is the high road they should be aspiring to, not to the mere outward performance of certain functions. If our sights are set on simply performing a certain function well, we've not entered in the true heart of God.

There is a more excellent way, a much higher way. Paul would begin to lay it out by showing us that if we focus on the activity of ministry, the outward manifestation of the Spirit, and judge of success on whether we have done such things, we have missed the heart of the matter and activity. As noble as our work might appear, it is of no significant value. That is the real heart of the whole matter and why it was so necessary to draw the Corinthians away from their fixation with the outward trappings of spiritual activity. Paul did not simply want to reproduce the appearance of life. He wanted to produce the life. And so in his treatment of "spirituals," or spiritual phenomena, this principle he is about to introduce represents the highest and truest spiritual objectives and motives.

## 1 Corinthians 13

**13:1—If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong and a clanging symbol.**

Paul chooses to begin to make a very important point in a very abrupt manner. And so his first statement in his disclosure of a more excellent way is to introduce that concept which is the governing force of this lofty and high life in Christ, love. He uses the word *αγαπη* about which much has been written. What we can say about that word for certain is that in using it Paul is pointing them a certain direction with respect to love. This thought was not that they were not to allow occasion for their old way of living, where all forms of erotic self-love were the normal activities of the worship of false gods. Nor was Paul calling them to an emotional experience that they were to search out. This was selfless love that aimed for the highest good of the one loved, that would sacrificially give itself to attain and bring about that good for them. It was the sort of stuff that characterized Yahweh, the covenant God. It was the basis for His action, the motivation for His works on behalf of man.

So when we set about to accomplish His work, if we simply play our role and function and accomplish our task without it being immersed in and clearly demonstrating this great love, then we have left out that which is the most significant element of God's work. And so Paul cites an example of this using a manifestation of the Spirit that was common to the Corinthians, that was desirable to them, that was very miraculous, a thrill to experience and to be the instrument for. It was the role of speaking in a language unknown to the speaker the words of God. Paul says all you do in carrying out this role, if you do it apart from love is make noise, and objectionable noise at that!

This is quite a statement. It is love that makes our message palatable and attractive, not our ability to speak. It is quite possible that the noisy gong and clanging symbols were the common noises associated with the activities in the idol temples of Corinth. This constant noise was perhaps the backdrop of those acts and deeds of worship. Paul's thought was that love should be the backdrop of all that we do in service, worship and even in the routine of everyday life, because love gives meaning to our deeds. Love is the message underneath the message of the gospel, the good news that makes the good news possible. It is love in us that makes the good news credible and keeps its words from blending into the background as religious noise.

**13:2—and if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.**

The Corinthians were earnestly seeking the "great gifts." They wanted to be somebody. They wanted to distinguish themselves. Paul would not normally be drawn into a discussion of such an empty and fleshly pursuit. But he allows this statement about what relegates someone to "nothingness." It is remarkable in several respects.

It should be noted that the phrase "the gift of" has been added by the NASB. It is not a bad addition since we know for certain that there is a gift called prophecy as listed in Romans 12. Later in first Corinthians 14 we will see that the gift of prophecy was the one Paul viewed as most desirable and quite profitable to the church.

That gift is just one of this fictitious person's assets. They also know all mysteries. The things hidden to others they have in hand. The unexplained things of God, of humanity, of the universe, are an open book to them. This is true of their knowledge as well. There is no fact that is not at their fingertips. In addition they have that great quality that eludes most of the world's wise and intelligent man, faith. It is no insignificant faith, but such that can move mountains. Paul thus stirs in our imagination an image of an incredible human being.

Were such a person as this to exist he would be surpassed in greatness only by Jesus Christ from a human perspective. Yet the fact would be that such a person because they lacked love, would be nothing. This shows that love is the greatest of all virtues and the most valuable of all assets. Its absence absolutely wipes out the greatness of the other qualities, so important and critical is it to truly spiritual behavior. And so as the spiritual phenomena are examined, we must find the greatest of spiritual phenomenon which is love. If we do not it is certain that we are not dealing with things that are as God would have them be.

**13:3—and if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.**

These are no small acts of service that Paul is using as examples as he seeks to emphasize the critical nature of love. Here the willing sacrifice of all possessions and then the sacrifice of one's own body and martyrdom demonstrate the impossibility, despite Herculean effort, of producing a spiritual act apart from love. It is difficult to imagine these two acts happening at all apart from love, but the human psyche is sufficiently twisted and diluted that such things could conceivably happen. The key ultimately determining if something is spiritual or fleshly as motive, and in the realm of motive, love is the only credible one.

**13:4—love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant.**

From speaking about love as the only legitimate motive, Paul begins to define and describe love's effect, what it produces and what it does not produce in the realm of human behavior. Each statement can be endlessly developed and analyzed. Many have suggested that in all of literature there is no description of love quite so comprehensive yet concise.

Christ is the embodiment of this description, love incarnate. One can substitute Jesus' name each place the word love occurs and do no violence to the text at all. It describes what Christ desired that all his children to come to be the embodiment of that this text describes as well. Yet substituting our own names for the word love recalls many contradictions.

Five statements are made here about love. First, love is patient. We could say love working in a person produces patience. We could also say a person motivated by love reflects patients. They do not demand an immediate result. Their expressions of love persist regardless of response. Literally this statement on love is that "love is long tempered." It is a way of saying that love is not easily dissuaded, not quickly abandoned for an easier way. Love does not quickly give way other emotions like anger. Love persists.

Second, love is kind. The Greek word is *χρηστευεται*. It is a verb that speaks of kindness, goodness, mercy and what is right. It describes being gentle and benign. Love working in a person produces these kinds of actions. It is a simple thought this kindness, yet often during relationships simple kindness ceases to govern our actions toward each other. When that happens it is because we have left the bounds of love. Kindness must be the rule even in situations demanding tough love.

Third, love is not jealous. The Greek word is *ζηλοι*, a verb (present indicative third person singular from *ζηλω*), that describes various passions from setting one's heart on something to coveting. We call it zeal. Wrongly motivated it gives way to jealousy. Now, we are told that our God is a jealous God yet perfect in love and so we must understand this term in the precise way it is meant. We are by God's leading becoming jealous for what is good (Titus 2:14), and so God's will is that a certain amount of zeal stir us. We must surmise that such zeal is a good thing, but when over-done it becomes sin. That is without doubt the beauty and perfection of God that He possesses just the right amount of such emotion that can in us cross over into unrighteousness. Love is marked by zeal set within certain boundaries. It does not allow us to feel unrighteous passion toward those who have what we do not have or who threaten our fleshly need for security.

Fourth, love does not brag. This is another statement about what love is not. These are given because it is as important to know when we are not behaving in love as when we are. The Greek word used here is *περπερευεται*, another verb, meaning to be conceited or to brag. We are behaving in love when we are not seeking to draw attention to ourselves, not seeking to gain affirmation by attracting attention to something about us. It is not love that leads us to seek to elevate ourselves in the minds of others, or that leads us to use others in a way to have our needs met. It is something quite different than love that leads us to be aloof or to view ourselves as more important than others.

Fifth, we are told that love is not arrogant. The Greek word used here is *φυσιονται*, a verb meaning to be conceited or arrogant, as rendered by the NASB. It is a similar expression in effect to what Paul has just stated. This is probably meant to emphasize the disharmony of such human behavior and the noble quality of love to which we are being summoned. In discerning "spirituals," spiritual phenomena and spiritual behavior, we can be certain that where arrogance is evident, love is not the motivating force and there is higher ground to be gained. An inflated idea of one's own importance is the epitome of self-indulgence, the great antithesis of Spirit control and therefore of love. The first step in self-sacrifice is to be done with thinking that nurtures inflated views of self. Love of the sort of Paul is speaking of comes from one who is secure enough in the love of God to ignore the cry of the flesh for special status.

**13:5—does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered.**

Love does not act in a way that all would agree is improper. The word is *ασχελογει*. Its various forms can be used of unpresentable body parts (12:24), of behavior that is immoral. Love restrains us from that which brings shame to others, to Christ, and to ourselves. Because love is selfless these concerns are never far from our mind. Someone whose motive is love is not striving for his/her own interests or advantage. They are not seeking by their behavior to advance their own agenda. Their behavior is "other centered". It seeks the good, the highest good, of the ones loved.

Someone who is operating in love is not provoked. The word used is *παραξονεται*. It is a word used in Acts 17:16 of Paul's spirit when he saw the idolatry of the Athenians. In that case it was a godly anger that led to a loving act, a polite, straightforward presentation of the truth. Here it refers to just being irritable. Is speaking against that self-centeredness that causes us to be in a bad mood, touchy, easily brought to a point of anger and frustration. Love takes us a different direction because to behave in love is to focus on things other than us. Love tends to find love in the acts of others instead of being suspicious and hurt. Love tends to discover what is good and positive. It sees things to be grateful and thankful for. People being motivated by love are generally a most grateful and delightful to be around. Love leads us to let go of the offenses of others.

Love leads us to the high ground of not responding in like kind, and not even viewing that as anything but proper and right. Love is not proud of such behavior because it sees it as the only right and holy thing to do. It does not reckon (*λογιζεται*) or charge to an account evil. This is a mathematical and bookkeeping term that describes the act of entering figures of value to an appropriate account. People of love may notice a certain act done against them, but they do not enter it as evil. We must remember simple human frailty is the cause of most of the wrongs committed against us. They are mere oversights with no evil intended.

### **13:6—does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.**

Unrighteousness always produces injustice. It always leads to the advantage of one at the expense of the other. Therefore to behave in love is to recognize the loss incurred by someone somewhere when unrighteousness is embraced. So while love may lead us to understand unrighteousness and to accept and love unrighteous people, their deeds bring grief to us because we understand the pain, they produce in someone somewhere.

On the other hand, truth leads always to good and to justice. Where truth triumphs, good also triumphs. Those who are behaving in love the truth. They know that living within the boundaries of truth is to live in the light and to experience all the promise that goes with that. The light of the truth is the greatest asset that can be given or accrued by anyone. There is cause for great rejoicing where truth triumphs, because all other good will soon follow. Truly spiritual people and phenomenon will move in love and in harmony with the truth.

### **13:7—bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

To be motivated by love is to move in the direction of all that is in noble. To be motivated by the flesh, which can be understood as our "default" setting, is to inject all sorts of impurity into our motives. The person operating in the flesh bears only what causes them no loss, believes only what they want to believe, hopes for those things that provide an advantage for them, and in the end endure only what meets these criteria. That does not mean that fleshly motives are easy to spot or are readily apparent. They can go undetected for considerable time. But in the end the person operating in the normal human way is found to fall short of the character of Christ and in what they bear, belief, hope, and endure.



As we witness "spirituality" in people and spiritual phenomena, it should look like love in action on order to be understood as being of the Holy Spirit. If it is not found to be accompanied by love it is simply an activity of the human spirit or some other spirit.

This love has as its object people, but first and foremost its object is Christ. Love for Christ motivates action toward people. Second its object is all that is good and righteous. Once convinced that Christ desires something to be, the person operating in love bears all things to accomplish His work. They believe through all things. They hope through all things. And as a result they endure all things. Love covers a multitude of sins, that is, it rises above a multitude of evil obstacles to keep help bring about what God in His love has willed.

**13:8—love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge it will be done away.**

The central message of this verse is the enduring nature of love. Even legitimate spiritual phenomenon carried out by faithful saints of God relate to a time and have their purpose and end. Love never fails, it is of an eternal nature. The phenomenon we enter through the ministry of the Holy Spirit belong to time and are thus temporary.

Much has been speculated regarding this verse, the words used, and the verb tenses employed. Many have attempted to show that three "gifts" are being spoken of, that these three "gifts," prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, will cease to exist at some point in the future from Paul's perspective, in passed time from our perspective. They relate the passing of these "gifts" to the completion of the canon of Scripture.

Their position is based on some legitimate observations made regarding the verbs and verb tenses. Prophecies will be acted on in some way to be done away with. The verb is the passive voice meaning that the prophecies are acted upon, done away with as result of the action of some person or thing. Tongues will cease or stop the text says. It is a different word than that used for prophecies and knowledge and more importantly it is in the middle voice. This from a grammatical standpoint means that tongues will cease in and of themselves. They'll simply fade away perhaps by their nature or need. Knowledge is said to be done away, and is the same word, a verb in the same tense and voice as that used of prophecies. It is singular. The observations of these differences in grammar are legitimate and must be answered even though it appears that the particular answer cited above is dictated by an anti-charismatic bias.

No answer to this grammatical structure is a "slam dunk" or we would not have the controversy. The grammar itself legitimately makes the distinction. But it is probably best to let the distinction stand and discuss what will trigger the abrupt passing of prophecies and knowledge and signal the self-induced cessation of tongues. This is better dealt with in verse 10, which is a statement of time that seems to clarify when the action of this verse will come about. That will be done presently.

Again, the central message here is that these "manifestations of the Holy Spirit," and we must remember that the term "gift" does not appear in the original, will pass, whereas the great motivating force of love will continue and will produce other works appropriate to the need of God's great work in a particular time. The manifestations of the Spirit are temporary, regardless of their dramatic nature and usefulness. They relate to God's purposes in time. Love, the great source of the action is eternal.

### **13:9—for we know in part, and we prophesy in part.**

Our present life in the current dispensation is shaped in part by what we know. God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, has made certain things known to us as true and reliable. But there are those things in life that are not directly addressed by the Scripture and in these our choices are shaped by the prophetic. This work of the Holy Spirit in our behalf is carried out through those who extract divine principles that underlie what we know to be true and apply these to those situations that are unknown. That is what prophets do by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. The result is the defining of a course of action that is entered into with a reasonable degree of certainty based on the assurance of our faith in the principle we know to be true.

The result is what this verse says. There are things we know that are revealed in black and white, and there are things we embrace as true, based on what we know is true in principle. That is the way life must be presently lived, but it will not always be so.

### **13:10—but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.**

When the complete (τὰ τέλειον) comes. The partial will be done away, the same verb, tense, voice, and mood, as used earlier in referring to the "doing away" of prophecy and knowledge. This then pinpoints the time when the actions of verse eight come about. When prophecy and knowledge are acted upon to cease to be observed and when tongues by its very nature ceases to exist it will be because the perfect has come.

There's been much speculation on this. Many suggested that "the complete thing" is the completed canon of Scripture. This theory advances the idea that once written revelation was completed there was no need for what they view as the spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. For proof they point to history which has no record of the occurrences of tongues beyond the second century.

The difficulties with the view are several. First, it supposes that the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues were for the primary purpose of the revelation of God's mind in a particular matter. While this may be true in the case of prophecy and knowledge, the case for tongues being that is more difficult.

The second difficulty relates to this, that it places such personal revelation on a par with Scripture, so that the canon indeed is not closed, because if written record of such revelations surfaced should it not be added since such authority was vested in these gifts?

Third, as to gifts ceasing to exist historically, that seems to be what happened to all the gifts. As power in the church became more centralized the ministry became more concentrated in the hands of the clergy, and all teaching of gifts for ministry being given to all members passed from the scene. One searches in vain for any writing on the spiritual gifts until the mid-20th century. This became a forgotten subject due to the agenda and philosophy of Rome. With authority vested in the church hierarchy, there is neither need or desire to view the laity as equipped or qualified for ministry or any type of spiritual work. All attempt to see "manifestations of the Spirit" in the rank-and-file was squelched. So the historic cessation of the gifts was likely more due to a growing ignorance and incompleteness rather than direct the arrival of "that which is complete."

Some have suggested that the perfect thing is Christ. When He comes it will signal the end of the era of the spiritual gifts. While this could seem logical, the grammar is odd if Christ were in view. Why would He be referred to as a "thing," using the neuter gender. Would it not be more likely that he would be referred to in the male gender? Also when "it" comes to earth is this speaking of the rapture, or of His return for the thousand-year reign? Would either be appropriate to call "the complete thing?" Should that term be reserved not for when He comes here, but when He creates the new heaven and earth?

This seems to be best interpretation, to say that the complete thing is that to which prophecy pointed, knowledge explained, and tongues communicated/praised. The complete is the arrival of the new heaven and earth, with the image of God completely restored in humankind, and God dwelling with man and being recognized as all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). This is the ideological end to which Scripture points, the completion of the work of God. When it arrives these manifestations of the Spirit will pass. Prophetic utterances will have been fulfilled. The source of all knowledge will live among us. Language barriers will be done away with. All that has been a part of this era during which sin separated God and man will pass because the completed state, that to which God's redemptive plan pointed, will have arrived.

**13:11—when I was a child, I use to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.**

Paul uses the normal development and maturation of himself as a human being to illustrate the arrival of the perfect state when creation becomes complete in Christ. There are things and processes that mark us in our years of childhood. They are necessary stages of development. They are normal and proper and good for that time. We would expect nothing else. But they do pass. They give way to better things. They cease as maturity arrives. So it is with these manifestations of the Spirit that we so eagerly seek now. They are useful and important, but Paul reminds us that they do relate to this life and era. Love is the greater thing to pursue because it will never fade away. It is a more excellent way. It should be our primary goal and focus, not experiencing spiritual phenomena.

**13:12—for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.**

All these spiritual phenomena are part of an era in which we only see spiritual realities dimly. The experiences of today with the Lord through the Holy Spirit are wonderful. But there are ample references in Scripture to the idea that they are still only resemblances of the joys of the era when God's dwelling is with man and when the image of God is completely restored in man. And so Paul adds his witness to this great hope with these words. Until "the perfect" comes we see the reflections of God's glory. Then we will come face-to-face with it. Presently our knowledge is partial. There is much that God has revealed in the Scripture. In fact, it defies us to completely master its content. Yet, as deep as Scripture is, there is still more.

This verse helps us further understand what "the perfect" is, and why suggesting that it is the completed canon of Scripture is an inadequate explanation. It refers to nothing short of the era when we live with God on the new earth and in the restored relationship of Eden, when we come to know God fully even, He has known us fully. The manifestations of the Holy Spirit, so vital today due to our lack of knowledge of

God, and so critical to the health of God's church as it functions in a fallen world, will have lived out their usefulness when that day comes and will be relics of a by-gone era, relegated to the museums of the new Earth! But love will endure and indeed be more fully expressed and understood. Love will be the natural law of the new order of things.

**13:13—but now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.**

Three great virtues of the Christian faith are listed here. Who could begin to list the good done and works accomplished through faith? Who could begin to summarize the difference it brings to a life. But as great a virtue as it is, there is one that is greater love. The same can be said of hope. What a difference it makes in a life and what a powerful motivator of men and women over the centuries. What a change hope brings in our outlook and what dramatic change in behavior when one's outlook is brightened by hope. With faith it is one of the most powerful forces in the shaping of human behavior. But there is something greater. It is love.

So Paul singles out three great riches, the one that brings us our salvation and forms the basis of our relationship with God, the one that causes us to persist in that faith. Then without taking anything away from the other two singles out love as the greatest. We do not have to ponder this statement long to know its truth, for our faith and hope would have no basis were it not for the love of God. Love enables faith and produces hope, and when we come face-to-face with the object of our faith and hope they will no longer exist, and we will be left simply to live in the full reality of God's love.

To embrace this love of God is our destiny, and it is our greatest virtue were we to rise to live by it now. It is the most excellent way and the highest possible road. To enter the experiences of the Holy Spirit in this life is both necessary and good. To enter the experience of being through Him controlled and motivated by love is to taste eternity.

## 1 Corinthians 14

**14:1—Pursue love, yet earnestly desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.**

It should be noted that the word "gifts" does not appear in the original. We are to desire earnestly the things of the Spirit of which the gifts are a part.

There are two commands in these words of Paul. First, the command to pursue love. The word pursue is a word that is used elsewhere to describe persecution. The idea is a zealous, relentless following after. We are to do this about love. It is to be the thing always our sights are set on. It is to be that we plot our agenda by. It is no less intense a word that Paul uses for his other command to earnestly desire spirituals, ζηλουτε. It means to be zealous for. We are to collectively seek the things that characterize the presence of the Holy Spirit in our collective life.

It is likely this corporate behavior Paul is addressing here primarily, thinking in his mind of the broader issue he is concerned with in this section of his letter. The broader issue that began this discussion is how they behave when they are relating to each other particularly in public worship. This is not to say there is no individual application. There is no such thing as group behavior apart from individual roles in that. Yet it is undeniable that a person's behavior can and should be shaped by the welfare of the group he or she is a part of. So Paul, with the individual implication, is saying to the Corinthian church, "pursue love together, yet earnestly seek together the things of the Spirit."

Our church services should leave that image in people's minds, the pursuit of love and zeal for the things of the Spirit. And then Paul uses a phrase that begins to clarify what activity of the Spirit they should be especially zealous for. This clarification will shape the flow the rest of the chapter. Much of the rest of the chapter is offered in support of this idea.

The idea is that we should seek corporately to have a prophetic ministry. Usually when we think of prophecy we think of the foretelling of future events, speaking of God-ordained events before their time and thus predicting the future. If we examine the prophets' writings however in the Old Testament, we find that this foretelling only characterizes a small part of their ministry. They were there to "forth tell," that is, to speak forth the word of God for the moment. "Thus saith the Lord..." was their classic introductory statement. It was the "word of the Lord" that came to them and made their ministry what it was, declaring God's mind in the matter at hand. The predicting only came as an aside to this or as a means of showing the authenticity of the message. The prophet was one who declared that word and felt the responsibility to do that without regard for personal consequences or how it might make the hearer react or feel. So when we speak of a prophetic word as the term is used here, we are talking of a message one gives that indicates God's mind on a particular matter or subject, delivered regardless of public opinion and personal consequence.

Paul tells the Corinthians at this point in his letter that they should seek the activity of the Holy Spirit together as they relate with each other. But they should especially seek this activity, the plain and straightforward statement of the mind of God with reference to specific life situations. This manifestation of the Spirit is to be sought with zeal. Prophecy in this sense is to be a mark of our meetings together.

Our churches should have this as their vision, the setting forth of God's mind on the practical issues in the lives of their individual members. It is not just information about the Bible. It is not just theology. It is information and theology applied to the issues at hand and thus meeting the spiritual need of the moment. That is a prophetic ministry, and wherever it is there is life, and wherever it is lacking there will soon be death. It is what changes lives and makes churches relevant. It is what keeps a group of people in step with each other and with the Holy Spirit. And so this phenomenon of the Spirit needs to be very visibly exercised in the church. Paul goes on to explain why.

**14:2—for one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to man, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.**

The person who makes a declaration in the church in an unknown tongue is not addressing those in the audience. His words are to God, unintelligible to anyone else listening. Literally, "no one hears." They hear the sound, but they are not hearing with understanding. The individual is in his spirit speaking mysteries. This phrase "in spirit" is one word in the Greek and could be understood as "in the Spirit," meaning under the Holy Spirit's influence or "in spirit," meaning under the influence of his own spirit. The word "by" could as easily be used in rendering the phrase as the word "in." Now what exactly is Paul talking about here?

Much can be speculated about the church at Corinth and this phenomenon of tongues. It must be remembered that in the final analysis all work at this point is speculation since Paul does not plainly state the exact nature of the activity, he is referring to here. Opinions vary among Bible scholars on this issue, and the arguments have been heated, long, and very much to the detriment of the church.

Usually when the subject of tongues comes up, it recalls the occurrence in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit orchestrated speech and language unknown to the speakers but known to certain of the hearers. The effect was that hearers heard in their native language the worship of God. This is true at least of the incident in Acts chapter two. Now if this is the type of phenomena Paul is speaking of here, one must wonder why he would say that no one hears with understanding. It could be that a known human languages being spoken by the speaker, but that no one is present in the audience that knows that language. But that condition could vary and if known human language was orchestrated by the Holy Spirit it would be done when the need was present.

There is another option in our understanding of this matter. We know that ecstatic phenomena were a part of the religions of the times. By ecstatic phenomenon we are referring to activity that produced a trance of sorts. While in this trance unintelligible sounds and phrases were strung together to produce a form of speech that was regarded as speech of the gods. This occurrence has been present in all different cultures for millenniums of time. It can be regarded as both a spiritual phenomenon and an emotional one. By this we mean that it is apparently a capability of the human psyche to arrive at such a point and produce such a phenomenon. Where there is such capability there is potential for both good and evil. Peter is said to be in a "trance" when God speaks to him about cleanness and uncleanness and so prepares him to take the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile (Acts 10:9-23). Peter was in prayer and fell into this that can only be understood as a heightened state of mental focus on God. There are ample examples of this human capacity being used for evil. That is its danger. In and of itself a trance is apparently neutral. It was the common practice in religious life

of the day. The Greeks encouraged journeys into the state of "ecstasy" as a journey into the world of the gods.

Now since this was true of the culture of the day, then it could be that Paul, in dealing with the subject of spiritual phenomena, is wanting the Corinthians to exercise caution in the public expressions of such ecstatic experiences. He is not speaking against seeking them, but he is wishing to appeal to reason in the public expression of them. This would make perfect logical sense immediately following his delineation of that "more excellent way." Love does not pursue its own interests, but the interest of others. If we are dealing in love, why would we seek to speak to ourselves in the company of others as opposed to expressing something that would be of use and value to them?

Speaking in tongues, or ecstatic utterances, might be a wonderful experience for me in my relationship to God. But I am speaking "mysteries," Paul says, when I do so. My own mind does not even know what I am saying. It is an activity that goes on between me and God. A prophetic utterance on the other hand involves God using me to speak to others. It is "other-focused." That is the point that much of what follows will reinforce. In the company of others we should wish to seek God's leading to speak for Him to others. In the experience of ecstasy I speak to God, and that is it. The next verse begins to develop this contrast between prophecy and tongues.

**14:3—but one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.**

With this Paul summarizes the difference in these two activities of the Holy Spirit. It is not that one is wrong. It is a matter of thinking about which option meets the greater need of the moment. The individual need is to be submitted to the greater corporate cause. Speaking in tongues should give way to prophecy so that the church's welfare is advanced.

Tongues is an activity that edifies. We should leave off our wariness of its legitimacy and focus on the concern or implication raised here as Paul contrasts the scope of the effectiveness of these two phenomena. Tongues edifies the individual so engaged with the Holy Spirit. While that is good, it is not the best. Prophecy has the effect of ministering to all who hear and therefore serves the greater good. Therefore, we may desire fervently the manifestation of the Spirit called tongues. But it is better to seek to be used to declare prophetic word to the hearers that is understandable so that their faith will be strengthened by it.

Interlude on the "prophecy" as the underlying gift in the phenomenon of tongues: We usually approach the discussion of tongues and prophecy in this chapter as a discussion of two contrasting spiritual gifts. However, if our earlier assertion that chapter 12 introduces a discussion of a "spiritual things" or spiritual phenomenon is correct, it greatly impacts how we understand chapter 14. Add to this our earlier discussion and conclusion, that the phenomenon listed in Chapter 12, including tongues, are "manifestations of the Spirit," each of which is a product of one's giftedness, one's divinely appointed "ministry," and one's "energizing" or "empowerment," and you have added insight into what is being urged here.

It could easily be true that the phenomenon of tongues occurs among people with varying gifts including that of prophecy. It comes because of a specific "energizing" or "empowerment" of the Holy Spirit. The person with a prophetic gift is stirred to speak the heart of God in the matter. As they seek His heart and mind, they can enter the trance-like state that can result in the ecstatic utterances. So in that case a prophet is engaged with the Holy Spirit and the manifestation is in an ecstatic utterance. In another case the prophet can be given a word to declare to an audience that speaks a language unknown to the prophet. The Spirit manifests Himself not only through the content of the message but the actual delivery, it being done in language unknown to the speaker. Either of these cases seem to align with the way special visible activities, miraculous in nature, often accompanied the activities of the Old Testament prophets.

Now if all this is true, and it seems that it could be likely, that helps us understand why Paul is able to tell the readers in 14:1 to seek to prophesy rather than speak in tongues. He is not telling them to exercise a completely different gift, which there is no guarantee they would have, nor would they be able to simply "get" it. Rather, Paul is telling them to seek to exercise their giftedness in a different way, and to seek a different empowerment for a different ministry from the Spirit.

It also gives a great assist in understanding the very next verse (v.5), which raises many, many questions if tongues are a spiritual gift. Note particularly how verse five contradicts what was said earlier in chapter 12 about all the "manifestations" being significant. If we take that to be a discussion of spiritual gifts, then this verse is contradicting it or at least straining it. But if tongues and prophecy are phenomena that come from the same gift, and the manifestation of that gift is being discussed, the verse makes good sense.

**14:5—Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you prophesy; and greater is the one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.**

In contrasting these two different manifestations of the Holy Spirit, Paul makes several observations. The first is to express a desire that they all speak in tongues. We must remember this, since such a statement would not be in Scripture if tongues were a bad thing. It is an expression always for everyone. The partnership with God that marked either the experience of speaking an unlearned language or speaking in ecstatic utterances was something good.

But Paul's second statement reveals that there is something better. It is better because it results in good for others. It is prophecy, speaking forth the mind of the Lord for the moment. Paul says that such a one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues. They are greater not in terms of inherent worth, but in terms of value to the corporate body of that time. And the reason is that such a person's words have value to all who hear, they are not just a good experience for the speaker as he speaks to them. His words edify, meaning they build up other people.

The only thing which makes the utterance spoken in tongues of value is if the interpretation is given. The word interpret is διερμηνεύει, which involves conveying the meaning of what is said. In such a case where this is done, the utterance in a tongue has the capacity to edify others. Paul speaks here in such a way that it seems interpretation could be given at times by the one speaking.



Paul's main point is that the things done in a public church service should be done for the benefit of all present. The public service is not meant to be an experience where one-person spiritual need is paramount, the church service is about the welfare of the entire group.

**14:6—but now brethren if I come to you speaking in a tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation, or of knowledge, or of prophecy, or of teaching?**

Again, the bottom line is the profit of others, their personal growth in the faith. The words spoken in the church should be such that they unveil truth to us. They should add to what we know of God, speak to the practical need now, and teach a skill or a better course of action. This verse provides a good test for all that is done in the church. If at the end of the day what we have done accomplishes these things, the church can be said to be alive and functioning within the parameters God intended. What is done should "profit" us regarding the life God has called us to live.

**14:7—Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, and producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played in the flute or on the harp?**

Paul illustrates his point from the realm of music. The difference between noise and music is a planned and ordered distinction in tones. Paul will not draw the parallel thought on speech until verse nine, but it is obvious here. The player of a lifeless instrument makes the instrument useful by skillfully producing through it a recognizable distinction in tones. The result is something of beauty that contributes something to the hearers. Prophecy is superior in a public service to tongues because it brings something recognizable to the hearer, a word that relates to the living of their lives.

**14:8—But if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?**

The intention of the bugler makes no real difference. He must deliver a sound that clearly confirms conforms to pre-arranged and agreed-upon signals. If what tune he blows does not do this, it is not good communication. The issue at stake in communication is to express thought in a way that produces the desired response in all the hearers. A bugler who fails to do this is not of great value to the mission, in fact he will hurt it. This is a very powerful statement that contains God's heart in the matter of who says what before an assembly of believers.

**14:9—so also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.**

This is the point of the previous two verses plainly stated. Speech that can be understood by the hearers is essential if it is to be of value to them. Words that are not conveyed in this way are not addressed to anyone and so will not arrive in the mind and heart of anyone. They simply are launched out into the air. We might say that rather than taking aim and firing the weapon at someone, we're simply shooting up in the air. The best we can expect in such a case is collateral damage, and that is the point Paul will move toward making next.

**14:10—there are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning.**

Literally "surely, for example, so great a family of languages there are in the world, and none without meaning." There is inherent in any language meaning. The challenge in speech is not to speak words that have meaning. There are countless options to choose from if one simply wishes to state a thought or an idea without regard for the hearer's understanding. If expression of ideas is our only criteria, then any language will work. Both Paul and his readers know that would be a ridiculous criterion. Communication must be the goal in the public services of the Church.

**14:11—if then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and when he speaks will be a barbarian to me.**

Different language spoken between speaker and hearer creates misunderstanding beyond the meaning of the words. It leads us to make inaccurate judgments. Paul uses the word barbarian which can have negative connotation, i.e. uncivilized, but not necessarily so. When we have not spoken in understandable terms to one another we are certainly not benefiting one another. So when a language barrier does not exist, why create one by insisting on speaking in tongues? Why create misunderstanding and all the errors in judgment that can go with it, when it is not necessary?

**14:12—so also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church.**

Once again, the word gifts have been added to give clarification. It has the effect however, of narrowing the subject too much. We should understand it simply as "spiritual things," meaning the phenomena associated with life under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Paul knows the Corinthian zeal for these experiences of the Spirit, the real-life manifestations of His presence. Nowhere does he discourage that zeal, and we should not. He seeks to channel that zeal. He has done that by reminding readers that authentic experiences in the Spirit result in an authentic representation of who Christ is, that he is Lord. He has reminded them that these manifestations of the Spirit are varied, but that they all are significant as they come out in people and that they all serve a purpose. All experiences of the Spirit don't look the same, and that is by design. Then Paul shows them the importance of their actions being shaped by love, the virtue that supersedes the experience and gives the experience eternal value. Then, in chapter 14, he applies all that. This is his concise summary of his point so far in the chapter, pursue excessive edification! Always think of it! Always promote it by your choices! If you really want a spiritual experience, this is where you'll find it, in this pursuit of the building up of others, because that is the agenda of the Holy Spirit that He is working in all of us.

**14:13—therefore let the one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.**

Because the building up of others is the agenda the Spirit is pursuing, it is where we will "find" Him. If we are seeking the activity of the Spirit, we will experience it when we get involved in the work of building others up in the faith. Now since their faith is built up by understandable messages as delivered to them by God through our speech, we should pray for the ability to give them the plain truth in a way they will understand it. So if we have an utterance to give in a tongue, we should ask God to give us the interpretation so that it will minister to the faith of those to whom we give

the utterance. Otherwise the utterance is valueless. It has not ministered, and we have not furthered the agenda of God through the Holy Spirit. It is that simple.

Later in the chapter Paul will lay down the rule he wanted them to follow (14:27-28), in this matter in their public services, but for now it is this, focus on interpretation to bring edification.

**14:14—for if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.**

Without interpretation the mind is unfruitful. That does not negate the fact that something is happening in my being, but everywhere in his writings Paul affirms the importance of our minds. It is in and by our minds that we are renewed (Romans 12:1-2). We are to choose the things that bear fruit in our minds because to affect our thoughts is to affect our whole way of living.

We see in this verse that tongues were used in prayer. We must avoid the idea however, that they are special prayer language that somehow has greater power than that of our natural language. Paul would certainly not have suggested that our minds were unfruitful, not producing anything of value, if by such a "prayer language" we were moving the hands of God in some way. That would be fruit of the most wonderful sort.

Tongues have a purpose, but when we meet together, we are to seek those things which bear fruit in the thinking processes of ourselves and others. What my own mind does not understand will not be understood in the minds of others.

**14:15—what is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit, and I shall pray with a mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.**

Paul speaks of "the outcome," that course of action he himself would choose and that he believes should be the norm in the church. It is to pray in such a way that both parts of our being are simultaneously engaged. Our inter-most being, energized by the Holy Spirit, engages our minds to express and articulate those thoughts that are in harmony with the heart of God. It is not a matter as some have interpreted, of two separate activities. It is a merging of two activities into one, so that the result is Spirit-filled and the Spirit-directed prayer. And it is the same in our singing. It is a matter of being enabled and energized by the Holy Spirit so that our minds are engaged in activity and are in some way cleansed and equipped for more sanctified use.

**14:16—Otherwise, if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?**

The word for "ungifted" is ἰδιωτον. It means unskilled or untrained. It is not a word that relate specifically to giftedness, but most likely relates to one who is on the outside looking in in a matter. He is "out of the loop." In the case of language, it will be one who had no knowledge of that language. In the case of an ecstatic utterance, it would be everyone who heard and listened unless an interpreter was present. So we need not imagine ungifted people in the church, or a special place designated for them to sit. We only need imagine ourselves in a foreign country, seeking to extract meaning from the sounds coming the mouth of someone speaking in a language unknown to us. We would be hesitant to affirm anything said, not knowing what we were saying

"yes" to. So also in the church, if speech is unintelligible to the hearers, they are unable to enter in and affirm our words as good, bad, or indifferent. They are simply "out of the loop." We are at that point speaking code language, and no one knows the code, perhaps not even ourselves.

As an aside, we see tongues represented here as a means of conveying thankfulness to God. Thus far Paul has referred to them as a means of speaking, of praying, of singing, and now of giving thanks. This is interesting data that helps us envision how they were occurring among the believers in Corinth.

**14:17—for you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.**

We are not edified simply by observing the spiritual activity of others. That is an amazing thought that we must ponder. At the least we must conclude that there is some good that might come from such observation. However according to Paul it stops way short of the goal so that it is not worthy of being called edification. To be edified our minds must be engaged beyond processing sights and sounds. There must be thought introduced in our minds that is new, or at least from a different perspective. That should be a goal in our times together, to give to one another germ ideas that lead to new understanding. That is the path to edification, and apart from so engaging someone else's thinking processes we cannot edify them.

**14:18—I thank God I speak in tongues more than you all;**

In saying this Paul projects a balance that usually eludes us on this subject. A danger we must avoid is drawing from this discussion the idea that tongues are an insignificant activity. Here Paul is thankful for his personal experience of tongues, and specifically that he had the experience more often than they did. That is an affirmation of it. We cannot say it is of no value, nor is it the activity of the less mature, nor does it mark the stage we grow out of. It is something to be thankful for.

Now why is this? Probably because tongues were entered into as a result of times of intense focus on the Lord, the state of ecstasy when Paul felt his being was overwhelmed by his experience of God. The result was this outward activity. Now there is no doubt it can be experienced in the flesh and in fact was a part of life outside Christ in the ancient world. But that does not negate the fact that it was also legitimately done with the Lord as the focus, by no less a man than Paul and that he was grateful for the frequency of it. We must seek to arrive at this balance point on this matter, affirming tongues as a legitimate and good phenomenon when a product of an intense personal experience with the Lord. Yet it is critical that we pursue some more beneficial things when we meet corporately, as the next verse will dramatically illustrate. We must remember the thought of this verse, but at the same time remember that the thought of this verse does not stand alone.

**14:19—however in the church I desire to speak five words in my mind, that I may instruct others also, than 10,000 words in a tongue.**

Paul, having embraced his own experience of tongues and having affirmed that practice, now speaks to his personal rule that he subjects himself to "in the church." That is the key phrase here. A different rule should govern our activity when we are assembled, and the rule is to only do those things that edify or build up the faith of others. Paul makes a very dramatic statement of his feeling, and he does so right on

the heels of his personal affirmation of tongues. The numerical contrast is staggering. He would rather speak five words of understandable speech than 10,000 in a tongue when in the church, meaning not a building but in an assembly of believers. He would choose a short simple sentence over a 30-page document. What he is really saying is that there is really no choice in this matter. Hands-down, intelligible speech is what our assembly together demands. We will consider nothing else if we are thinking in line with the rule of love.

**14:20—brethren, do not be children in your thinking; in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.**

Having approached the matter from a pragmatic perspective, Paul now begins to deal with tongues from a more technical standpoint. He will begin now to speak briefly of a Scriptural function of tongues that is important for the Corinthians to remember. This verse urges them to think as mature people. Children think impulsively. Mature people think with consequences in view and with purposes and results in mind. The only thing in which we are to be naïve is in our experience of evil. In our ability to arrive at wisdom in our courses of action we are to be well-developed and skilled.

**14:21—in the Law it is written, "by men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me," says the Lord.**

Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12. That passage was a prophetic word given by Isaiah to Israel that warned them of judgment. Because they had ignored revelation, God's judgment would come to them. That judgment from the early days of the law, had been proclaimed to them. Specifically it was that they would be servants of other nations-foreigners. They would be subjected in their own land and taken as captives to a foreign land by strangers of a different language.

This passage in Isaiah speaks of revelation, the word of the Lord, coming becoming concealed to them, meaningless lines and phrases. Such a situation when it occurred would speak to them, in the sense that it would mark that they had lost fellowship with Yahweh. It would confirm that the curse, promised to come with respect to the breaking of the old covenant, had indeed arrived. The words of the foreign people would be unintelligible, but the message from God with respect to Israel would be clear through this sign. God had set his face against them.

Interestingly however the response would be one of rejection. The effect would not be their repentance, but rather their confirmation in unbelief. The near fulfillment of this prophecy was Israel's Syrian and Babylonian captors. Their language was a sign to Israel that God was disciplining them. The eventual fulfillment came however at the rejection of Christ, in the wake of which they would witness the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which they had been promised, resting on those of what would be known as the Christian faith. These were foreigners to them for the most part and they would hear the resulting strange tongues. These tongues included known foreign language, as recorded in Acts 2, and the ecstatic utterances referred to in this chapter by Paul. These would have the effect not of saving Israel, but of confirming them in unbelief. The results of their hearing would not be repentance. Instead Isaiah said, they "still they will not believe in me."

This is a very important idea. So-called "signs" have two effects. Tongues may serve as convincing proof to Christians of the Spirit's presence. But to others they seal their unbelief. Tongues would have the latter effect on the Jews, and it is this idea that Paul wants to have as part of our mature thinking about the occurrence of the phenomenon. He will draw conclusions based on this scriptural insight.

**14:22—so then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but the unbeliever; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.**

Tongues then, are a sign which confirms unbelievers in unbelief. Prophecy confirms faith in believers and leads them to greater faith. Tongues serve this purpose in the plan of God when done publicly. They have the effect of producing resistance to God. They speak to the hearer of those hard things about God to understand, His mysteries, that which is hard to believe about Him.

Prophetic words are personal words. They edify, console, and encourage (verse three). They reduce the truth to simple, concise words for the moment, and exhort the hearers to action. They are road signs along the way to believers of God's presence and direction. Where tongues speak to unbelievers of God's absence in them, confirm them in unbelief, and repel them, prophecy speaks to all of His presence and draws them in closer.

In prophetic words there is clear communication that speaks of relationship to God. In tongues there is mysterious communication, unintelligible that speaks of lack of relationship. One draws closer, the other pushes away.

**14:23—if therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and an ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?**

Because of this effect that is innate in tongues which Paul supports with the testimony of Scripture, he can go on and make this statement about the results that occur in the minds and hearts of unbelievers or even immature believers when they observed this phenomenon occurring in a public worship service. They will not be built up or taken forward in their faith. The church's credibility and the Gospel's credibility will not be advanced. Because of tongues the opposite result will be experienced.

**14:24—but if all prophecy, and an unbeliever or ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all,**

Paul speaks of the contrasting power of the occurrence of the phenomenon of prophecy. In contrast to being repelled by tongues, the unbeliever or immature one is convicted and called to account by the experience of hearing prophetic utterances. The occurrence of prophecy, that speaking forth of the mind and heart of God for the moment, brings about the great trilogy of edification, exhortation, and consolation (14:3). The next verse will continue to outline prophecies superior power over tongues to push forward the spiritual lives of others, and that is the clear point of the Spirit-inspired words of Paul.

**14:25—the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall in his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.**

The impact of tongues on the unbelieving or the immature is one of repulsion. They will say "that you are mad." The impact of prophecy is this, conviction, and repentance along with an affirmation of God's presence.

It is important to remind ourselves that our doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture makes God Himself the source of these words. They speak to us authoritatively and prophetically. They give us parameters to follow and in doing so inform us that these results are by design. Since they are recorded in writing for us, we cannot say when we do not follow them and witness the negative result that the result comes because of the "bad hearts" of the ignorant unbelieving. The results come because of our bad hearts at that point, our unbelief in these simple and clear statements of God.

Prophecy strips away pretense and the veneer of excuses. It uncovers our hearts and reveals to us what is there. Prophecy is painful yet refreshing and renewing. It is in the end comforting to know that God knows all as it really is. It brings about a setting aside of the façade. Paul describes this as "falling on his face." It brings about a surrender and submission to God in the matter. It brings about a personal acknowledgment of God as God, worship. It brings about an acknowledgment of the credibility of the church.

It is interesting that Paul is concerned here with what perception an unbelieving or immature person might have through their experience in a church service. It tells us that this should shape our conduct together and that to think in terms of response of the audience is not unspiritual, nor does it quench or grieve the Holy Spirit.

So conjoined is the Spirit's activity with the activity of our mind that we are charged with discerning and regulating through our own minds what ministries we pursue in given situations. It is both baffling and challenging work that is required and expected of the mature. It is what is meant by "doing away with childish things" (13:11).

14:26—What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a Psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

With this verse Paul begins to wind down his discussion of spiritual phenomena. Early in his remarks on the subject he had said, "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Now he returns to capture that thought in the form of a command. He begins with the question, "what is the outcome, brethren?" Paul is asking what should be the result of the Holy Spirit's activity in us if we are behaving in accordance with love? What activity is legitimate?

Paul first lists some of the diverse activities that will come about through the work of the Holy Spirit. One person might bring a song, perhaps one from the Old Testament, perhaps one he or she has written, another brings a teaching, and so on. Again we see diverse activity. The activity is not really the key to whether something is legitimate, meaning done in God's way for His purposes. Instead Paul's command that follows legitimizes an activity and marks it as being truly of the Spirit.

Legitimate spiritual activity will be done for edification, the mutual good and building up of all present. This should then be the rule we seek to follow in our various activities in public worship and it should be the clear outcome.

To this end there are some practical guidelines and implications for us to follow to protect against the mass confusion that such an open forum could produce, as well as to guard against those with self-serving agendas that are bound to try to seize the opportunity of an "open mike" for their own selfish purposes.

**14:27—If anyone speaks in tongues, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret.**

For the use of tongues in the church assembly Paul lays out the rule and it is simple and straightforward. There should be no more than two or three such utterances in the service. Each should be made "in turn." Paul was prohibiting simultaneous utterances with these words. And these utterances must be interpreted so the assembly gains knowledge of the meaning. The next verse clarifies what should be done if no interpreters are present.

**14:28—but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.**

The ministry of interpreting these utterances was apparently well-documented and those who were used in this way were apparently well-known. The result was that if such a one was not present the utterance was not to be publicly given. Instead it was to be spoken within the speaker's mind to God. This is in line with what Paul has taught throughout that the building up of others must be the rule of all that we do.

It is apparent that this interpreting was done at times by the speaker (see verses five and 13), as is quite possibly the case in Paul's mind in giving the command in the previous verse, (and one must interpret." In this verse that seems to be broadened out, but the effect is the same, there must be an interpreter present, or the utterance must not be given. The statement to keep silent is an imperative, a command in the Greek language so that this is not a suggestion but an order, the order that is to be followed in our assemblies.

**14:29—And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.**

There is the same principle of order given here regarding prophetic utterances as was given in the case of tongues. As good a ministry as prophecy is, and Paul has gone to great lengths to establish that, it must still be done in a certain way to bring about edification in the church. Two or three should speak. The others, and we assume that means the others present, do what Paul calls "pass judgment." Any word that comes from the Lord to us today through such prophets passes through the mind of the speaker. There it can be influenced by his/her feelings and opinions, their degree of holiness and sanctification, and their understanding of the realm of spiritual truths. It is important that such messages not be accepted on a par with written revelation, which we view as God-breathe, the infallible standard by which all that is supposedly truth is judged. When a prophetic word is uttered in the church, it should be measured by those present who are well-versed in the Scripture by the words of Scripture and by their own witness of the Spirit. This is an important aspect and activity of any gathering of the church that insures against false teaching and errant thinking.



Through this verse we have insight into how the prophet in the early church was viewed. Though there was great emphasis placed on this ministry, so that those who carried it out were undoubtedly held in very high regard, their words were not viewed as infallible. They were scrutinized and held up to the light by others. This also provides insight as to how we should approach "a word from the Lord." All who would expect that we would receive such a message without questioning it are in error.

We must remember that it is a noble activity to search the Scriptures to see if messages given are indeed true. In our relationships with other Christians it is our great privilege to share with them both individually and collectively thoughts the Lord has given us with them in mind. This activity is the essence of fellowship, essential to sanctification. As we communicate His thought for others, our words should be carefully crafted with this verse in mind. Rather than brash statements like "the Lord told me to tell you...? Which may be only partially true and may create a very damaging thought process, our tone should be less arrogant words along the lines of, "I had these thoughts as I was thinking of you, and I wonder if they are from the Lord." In this way we place our words in proper submission to the judgment of others.

To summarize, the simple message of this verse is this; there is to be orderliness in the way prophetic messages are delivered and a limit to how many such messages are spoken in our assemblies. There is also to be a practice of submitting such words to the scrutiny of others for validation as a part of the responsibility of giving them. We are not to become so arrogant that we are not in this way submissive to each other. It is their ministry to us, and we should receive it and look to it for edification.

#### **14:30—but if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent.**

It seems that it is God's way to progressively build conceptually in our minds so that what is learned in one lesson builds on and provides deeper understanding of those lessons previously taught. It is the way God has brought about the special revelation of Scripture, so that as we move through the Bible, we come to understand more about what will happen in the future but also more about what has happened in the past. It is the way He has revealed Himself so that what is known about Yahweh in Revelation is greater than what is known about him in Genesis and what is revealed in Revelation explains what was happening in Genesis. It is that way with the individual experience of His children. We come to understand more about our past walk with Him as well as our future as time is spent knowing Him.

This principle of the progress of revelation may be what is in mind in laying down this rule for the church. Clearly, priority is given to the most current utterance from God. As one was speaking if a word came to another through some signal unknown to us, the first was to give way. I suspect it was simply communicated by standing up, at which point the first speaker brought his thought to a swift conclusion. Most likely the succeeding speakers thought built in some way on what was previously said so that it was understood in a deeper way. At the same time the foundation was being laid for what would follow, and a certain divinely logical order was found that resulted in the edification of all present.

**14:31—for you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted;**

This statement, "you can all prophesy," is better understood as being limited by two things. First, Paul's earlier statement in verse 29 that two or three prophets were to speak. This shows that not "all" could speak in a single meeting, but that all over time could speak. It is also limited by the phrase "one by one." Not all could speak at once but in turn. But taken together with what will be said in the next verse, I suspect that what Paul is saying is that "you all are able to control yourself so that you speak one at a time." That is, all of you who are used in this way by God are able to cooperate together speaking in order, so that the hearers are better served.

**14:32—and the spirits of the prophets are subject to prophets;**

It is not the nature of the Holy Spirit to so "possess us" that we lose control of our speech or any aspect of ourselves. Paul is laying down rules that involve keeping silent, observing a certain order speaking, the number of speakers allowed and so on. The excuse, "I couldn't stop!" Or "I couldn't remain silent!" was not acceptable because Paul says, "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." There is never loss of control on the part of an authentic prophet. He or she can live by these guidelines that have been set forth. It is not a squelching of the Holy Spirit moreover, to observe these guidelines, and what Paul will say next supports this.

**14:33—for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.**

In observing order and in restraining ourselves to preserve order we are representing God well. We are doing things His way and we are following the tradition of the early church. This is a very important statement for much of what the church does. The church should be considered characterized by order not confusion.

None of this is to say that our goal is order. Nothing can institutionalize and so kill a church quicker or more thoroughly than an obsession with order. There must be a freedom to detect the new and fresh moving's of the Spirit. But it must not be confusion and the absence of any order. That does not reflect God.

The order set forth in this chapter protects against the confusion of counterfeit spiritual activity, like the Corinthians had observed the ritual of the idols' temples. It also protects against the cold, scripted spiritual sounding routine by ordering fresh prophetic thought to be shared in a way in which all could learn and benefit from it.

**14:34—Let the women keep silent in the churches, for they're not permitted to speak but let them subject themselves, just as the law also says.**

There are a couple of issues that make this verse tricky to interpret. Taken alone it prohibits women from speaking at all in the church assembly. However, in 11:7 of this same letter Paul has already spoken of women prophesying. There he has simply given the instruction that when they do so they are to have a head covering on. So what does he mean here when he now says they must remain silent?

There is no latitude in the meaning of the words silent itself, as there is in the case of the word used in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. The only possibility that allows the command in this

verse to stand without contradicting what he has said earlier is to apply it to those situations in the church where judgment was being passed on the speaker or questions were being asked and issues raised. We know that in the Jewish synagogue, which was the source of much church polity, men were permitted to ask questions of the speaker and challenge his views. Women were not permitted to do so. It seems best to understand this as being a restatement of that prohibition, especially when we consider what the next topic in the next verse says.

This is done with the intent of affirming male headship, which in terms of the culture of the day would be violated by such "speaking out" on the part of the women. This is why Paul adds to the prohibition "but let them subject themselves." They were to show their submission to the spiritual headship of man by this act of refraining from public questioning allowing that to be an activity of the men.

When Paul adds, "just as the law also says," it seems he is referring to the phrase "let them subject themselves." He is saying that the submission of women demand is rooted in the law. We take that to mean as he states elsewhere, in the order of creation. The law affirms spiritual headship of the man. It does not affirm that the women should keep silent. There are cultural considerations in how submission is express, but the basic idea of submission is not a cultural issue to Paul but an issue of God's order in creation.

**14:35—if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.**

This verse further supports the idea that Paul is prohibiting women from asking questions or raising issues in the public service with speakers. He is affirming the right to learn, which was foreign to the thoughts of the rabbis, who said, "let the words of the law be burned rather than being delivered into the hands of women!" (From Adam Clarke's commentary). Paul is saying that the interactive portion of learning is to incur at home.

Paul gives us insight into his prohibition, and the cultural nature of it when he says, "it is improper for a woman to speak in church." We must understand that speech is not improper for women in church, or he would not have condoned women prophesying in Chapter 11. It is their speaking in a questioning manner, calling to account statements made publicly, that is improper. The word for improper means "shameful." It says something bad about themselves and the church. And so Paul sets forth this teaching that women should refrain from participation in this portion of the church life, but that they should observe and ask questions at home.

We believe that in Western culture such participation by women does not in and of itself violate or project a perceived violation of the headship of males. We believe women in our culture are free in this matter. We would simply firm that the church leaders, and by that we mean the elders are to be men and that the women involved in the ministry of the church are to be clearly responsive to their authority and to that of their own husbands in their homes.

**14:36—was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Has it come to you only?**

It would seem from the tone of this and the ensuing verses, that the Corinthian church was somewhat arrogant on matters of church polity. They were mavericks and Paul was concerned that they were becoming a law unto themselves. Having spent several chapters on their behavior in public worship and on their management of the various spiritual phenomena that accompany a Spirit indwelt community, Paul here reminds them that they are not the originators or leaders of the church. They are simply one of several places in which God was doing His great work. The implication of these words is, "lineup in these practical matters of church life with the rest of God's people and we as his chosen church authorities, have found to be good and proper." The Corinthians were not in any way to view themselves as exclusive.

**14:37—if anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write are the Lord's commandment.**

As Paul draws to a close is discussion of "spirituals" he sets forth another test for evaluating spiritual activity and so-called "spiritual people." The test is, do they agree with and adhere to what Paul has written, because what he has written is the commandment in these matters from the Head of the church. This is a bold statement and yet not an arrogant one. It reflects confidence in the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul believes he has been led in writing these things and that anyone so led will therefore agree with the words of the Spirit. It is that simple. In the realm of spiritual phenomena, we should always apply this test—does it line up with the apostolic teaching delivered to us.

**14:38—but if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.**

If an individual disputes the fact that Paul's comments are the authoritative words of our Lord, he is not be given any recognition or influence. It is that simple. To reject Paul is to reject the Lord and to demonstrate that one's authority has not been bestowed by the Lord. Whatever it is, it is not of the Lord if it does not conform to the teaching of Paul.

**14:39—therefore my brothers, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.**

There is much about which we might speculate regarding the church at Corinth. Paul's conclusion here to his treatment of the phenomena of tongues and prophetic utterances leads us to believe that they had things flip-flopped to some degree. There was in their gatherings much speaking in tongues and little prophecy. Paul, after building the case for the superiority of prophecy in terms of edification, now clarifies how each should be pursued. Prophecy should be pursued earnestly. It would be hard to use more compelling words. Tongues should be allowed. They should not be forbidden. While that is not a ringing endorsement of them, we must remember that it is an endorsement. It is going beyond what is written to forbid speaking in tongues. Clearly it is for public gatherings an activity of significantly less value than prophecy. But to view it as valueless and prohibited is beyond what Paul has prescribed.

**14:40—But let all things be done properly, and in an orderly manner.**

There is an undeniable need in the pursuit of the things of the Spirit for spontaneity. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit can be structured out of our personal lives and out of our church meetings. However, that is primarily implicit in the truth expressed in the scriptures about spiritual things not explicit. While our lists and schedules and systems can all lead to lifeless activity, it is also true that the Scripture calls for order rather than chaos so that such things are essential in most work that is truly spiritual. And so as Paul leaves his discussion of spiritual phenomenon, he leaves this final thought.

Because the great human danger in the pursuit of things in the spiritual realm is that we abandon order and standards of propriety, Paul lays down this principle. There is nothing that the principle does not apply to. It concerns "all things." As we press for the mind of God we are not looking just for activity, but for an order.

There is a timing to the words and acts the Spirit inspires, and that is often more difficult to comprehend and apprehend than the activity. It is the great challenge of leadership to bring about this order and timing of the Spirit. Without it we do not experience the complete work of God, but His partial will, which is not His will. And so Paul reminds us of this most tricky of tasks as he concludes. It is the greatest of mistakes to approach spiritual phenomena without this important teaching in hand. If it is not followed, what may be genuinely spiritual in terms of its source becomes unspiritual in terms of its result. That is the dilemma and challenge of spiritual leadership.

## 1 Corinthians 15

**15:1—Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand.**

Paul leaves the realm of the activity of churches and the things they do when they meet and turns his attention to what they believe. This defines them. It is the gospel that brings about a local church, and its mandate is that churches mission. Paul wants to "make it known" to them.

In one sense, of course, the Corinthians knew the gospel. It had been preached (announced) to them, it had even been "received" by them, and they "stood" in it. But Paul wanted them to know it in terms of its precise nature. He wanted them to know when it had been added to and when it had been stripped of something. Even though we receive the gospel, we can stray from it. We can slip into old humanistic patterns of thinking regarding salvation. We can stray from the gospel's gracious nature and add to it. Then it becomes at best God's message with human attachments. We begin to think differently about its basic facts, so that we believe something other than what is true about God. So Paul wants to clarify for them the truth of the gospel to provide them with a standard by which they can judge the soundness of words taught to them and their own thoughts that were in them.

The gospel is critical because in this "we stand." Our faith "works" in the practical realm of our struggle against sin and evil only if we understand and trust the gospel. We have "standing" before God only based on the gospel. We "stand" against the schemes of the evil one and quench his flaming missiles (Ephesians 6:13-17), only by our faith in the work of Christ. So knowing the gospel in this sense, being aware of its essential facts and not allowing any latitude in these, is essential to our spiritual health.

**15:2—by which you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.**

Paul is using the term "saved" here in terms of the present work of salvation, that plan of God which saves us from sin's power and conforms us to the image of Christ. God's plan of salvation is not just about forgiving us. It is a plan that extends beyond our justification to our sanctification and eventually our glorification. We are saved in this fuller sense if we hold fast to the broader message of Christianity, the apostolic teaching regarding the Christian life. It is obedience to this teaching that leads to our sanctification, and this is God's design and purpose for us. To not enter the journey to maturity is to believe in vain. This to lay hold of the life without laying hold of and experiencing the outcome and the blessing of it. The belief is not in vain in terms of being forgiven or receiving eternal life. It is in vain in terms of results and victories. It is to miss out on God's plan for our lives on earth and because of that to miss out on some reward we might have received an eternity.

**15:3—for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.**

This is the first element of the gospel message, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture. He was our substitute, he stood in our place. That is why the gospel is

good news. Christ didn't simply die. His death had a very specific purpose—to make atonement for our sins.

Now how do we know that this good news is true? How do we know that Jesus did not simply live and die like any other man? Because of what the Scriptures say. The Scriptures predicted the Messiah's death for our sins (Isaiah 53). His death was not an afterthought, it was the plan. It was what all of the types and symbols of the Old Testament pointed to. It was what the script called for and it happened in a way that perfectly fits all of the Old Testament projections. The gospel is firmly rooted in the teaching of the Old Testament and the statement of its truth can be clearly found in that text written centuries before its events occurred in time.

**15:4—and that He was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**

Christ was buried. That is proof that he died. His body was prepared for burial in a manner appropriate to the customs of the day and the culture in which He lived. People handled His body which had once been alive but was not devoid of life. The body was released for burial by the Roman guards, who had taken steps to ensure that He was dead. His burial was proof that He had indeed died for our sins. Then, He was raised on the third day. On the third day after His death, His body was transformed and made alive as His spirit returned to it. This too was in accord with the Scriptures (Psalm 16:8-10). Such an abnormal thing, one that had never happened to any human before or since, was obviously the work of God. It was a one-of-a-kind sign from Him to prove to us that Jesus work accomplished for us in his death was legitimate and complete, recognized by God.

**15:5—and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.**

From the realm of scriptural proof for the resurrection, Paul moves to the testimony of eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. If it were not for His appearance to eyewitnesses we would have the testimony of Scripture about the Messiah with an empty tomb, but not the unmistakable link the testimony the eyewitnesses provide. We now have the projection of Scripture as to the projected suffering, substitutionary death, and the resurrection of the Messiah, we have an empty tomb and we have written testimony of those who personally saw, conversed with, and ate with the one who had most certainly been dead. His appearance after the resurrection makes our faith credible.

**15:6 after that he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;**

It would be hard to overstate the significance of this post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. "Five hundred at one time" virtually assures the historicity of the event. Any explanation of what so many could have been so wrong about simultaneously, sounding contrived and empty. The fact that most of those were still alive and could be consulted and spoken with about the event at that time in the first century made the claims of Christianity that much more viable. The objective case for Christianity was and is very strong.

**15:7—then to James, then to all the apostles;**

Jesus appeared to James. This is likely a reference to his brother James, since what follows is a reference to "all the apostles." We know that James, who had been a skeptic regarding the claims of his older brother, became a central figure in the early church, and that the post-resurrection appearance of Christ to him was likely the reason behind this (Acts 1:14; 15:13, Galatians 1:19, 2:9).

**15:8—and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.**

It is evident from Paul's testimony of his dialogue with the risen Christ, his open testimony of it, the testimony of what the Lord told him in that conversation, and the acceptance of him and his words by the other apostles, that Paul rightly reckons Christ's appearance to himself with a string of appearances that occurred in the short period of time after the resurrection, even though a significant period of years elapsed between them. His encounter with Christ we must understand therefore is no mere vision or dream, but nothing less than the bodily appearance of our Lord. It is as if, Paul says, he was born too late and so had to be picked up and brought up to speed later. There may have been in the sovereign act of God, time allowed for the progress of revelation, a principle we observe in the unveiling of truth by God on behalf of man that seems to govern the timing of the arrival of more information.

**15:9—For I am the least of all the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.**

Paul's thoughts on the apostles are clear. He regarded them as being unique. He regarded the term as being something not casually bestowed. He regarded it as a very important title only to be assigned to those of certain character. He is reluctant to take it on himself because of his past, specifically his stance against Christ. So here Paul speaks of being in this sense unfit for the title.

Nevertheless Paul accepted the reality of his calling and never wavered in his authority. That is the challenge of those called by God. We must understand very clearly our undeservedness of this spiritual authority. A clear grasp of this reality will quickly quell the arrogance that can so quickly rear its head throughout our years of ministry.

On the other hand there is a mandate in our calling that demands that we not hesitate on those occasions where authority is clearly needed. Scripture shows that the Lord has little pleasure or patience with those you who do not rise to the occasion at moments when it comes time for our part in His sovereign plan to be executed. Paul clearly understood his unworthiness but found his balance so that he did not let his Sovereign down when his time arrived.

**15:10—but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.**

Paul understood grace. Grace, specifically the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ when He gave Himself for our sin and imparted to us righteousness, gave us right standing with God and therefore makes us adequate for practical service to Him. In neither case are we adequate because of our own works and that is true of everyone as fallen humans.



We are what we are by the grace of God both in terms of our standing and our acts of service.

This is how past failures are dealt with and less spoken of but equally important, is to deal with past successes in the same way. We have not walked in the apostolic way until we have learned to see both our successes and failures through the lens of grace.

Paul demonstrates both things in these words. By God's grace he was an apostle. He did not back down from that. At the same time he did not present himself in to prove his own worth by his own works. Having received the grace of God, he now learned to lean on it even more to lay hold the objective that God had called him to.

Paul's was a greater labor in many respects than the other apostles. We do not know in what sense, but since Paul is writing through the Holy Spirit's leading it was correct to put it in writing in this way. It was likely well attested to by the others that his had been the greatest labor. Obviously, credit for his achievement was God's. Paul's ongoing work was a result of God's work of grace in Him. So his salvation, his calling to apostleship, and his extraordinary accomplishment in the cause of Christ were all a result of God's grace. He was what he was by the grace of God, and we are correct when we view our lives in the same way.

#### **15:11—Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believe.**

With this Paul returns to his grand subject of the gospel and the statement of it he gave in verses three and four "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according to the Scripture." This is the apostolic message delivered in different ways and in different places by them all, but always the same in its content. It is the basic Christian message, that which they had been called to believe and in fact had believed.

#### **15:12—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?**

One of the essential facts of Paul's gospel as he had stated it is that Christ has been raised from the dead. This has been preached by him in Corinth and believed in by these Corinthians. Now somewhere apparently denying in some way the resurrection. Whether they were denying the bodily resurrection, claiming only a spiritual resurrection, or whether they were denying the resurrection in any form is unclear. It appears the latter is most likely since Paul says they were saying "there is no resurrection of the dead."

This was a teaching that had "crept in." We see from this verse that the reason for Paul's sudden shift of subjects beginning in chapter 15, and his concise restatement of the gospel in those verses is toward this end—of demonstrating the utter absurdity of this notion that there was no resurrection.

It is interesting to note Paul's line of reasoning and how it coincides with the insistence in his teaching of the identity of the believer with the experience of Christ. The basis of his argument for our bodily resurrection is that it happened to Christ therefore it must happen to us. So one can almost say that the key and central fact of the gospel is our being united with Christ so that whatever happened to Christ happened or must yet happen to us. Therefore to Paul, to preach Christ as raised from the dead and then speak of us not being raised from the dead is an absurd contradiction.

**15:13—but if there is no resurrection from the dead, not even Christ's been raised;**

Paul states here the more consistent position they would have to adopt to persist in this belief. Again, we see the strength of the linkage in Paul's theology between Christ's experience our own. What happened to Christ must happen it us, that is the good news of the gospel. Christ's identity with humanity was such that to view His experience as unique and separate was to totally let go of one's understanding of God's dealings with man and Christ's role in those dealings. It was nothing short of a wrong doctrine of Christ.

The teaching that the Corinthians were straying into may well have been the beginnings of Gnostic thought, which viewed all matter as evil and destined to be destroyed. Since the body was matter it was evil, therefore destined to be destroyed. The next step in their logic was to say that acts done by the body or for the body were no consequence. Immorality was of no real consequence to God since it was a bodily deed. So it was to be expected and did not need to be resisted. Their teaching of Christ was that He did not in fact have a body, but only appeared to have one. This is the issue being addressed by John in first John.

**15:14—and if Christ is not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.**

So much a part of Paul's teaching was the resurrection that it was impossible to take it away. To do so was to strip his message of its very essence and the faith he taught in its truth. Paul wants the Corinthians to know the implications of their thinking if they persist in this teaching. To persist they are separating themselves from Paul and his message. This is not a slight variation in their beliefs. It is dramatic. It is not a hybrid of the truth; it is a departure from the truth. This retracing by Paul of the logical path they have taken in their thinking is meant to establish the great implications of this departure.

**15:15—Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ from the dead, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.**

The implications of the Corinthian's embracing of this new belief continued to be rehearsed by Paul. He wants no doubt in anyone's mind about what he has said and taught on this subject to them. And so he says that if it is true that there is no resurrection then he is by that indicted as a false witness because that has clearly not been his testimony to them. He has taught that God raised Christ from the dead.

**15:16—for if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.**

Since Christ had a human, physical body, if physical bodies are not raised from the dead because of the inherent evil of matter, as Gnostic thought taught, then Christ has not been raised. If resurrection is absurd, then Christ's resurrection is absurd. Paul reiterates the linkage between the normal human experience and Christ's experience. There was not the slightest room in his teaching for the fact that Jesus' experience of humanity was any different than ours. If we are not raised from the dead neither was Christ and in that case there are implications that go beyond what he has so far spoken of.

**15:17—and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.**

To remove the resurrection from our belief system is to shatter that belief system. The sign Jesus gave that supported His claim to be who he said he was, was that if they destroyed "this Temple" he would raise it up again in three days. By the law's rule of how prophets were to be judged, Jesus' testimony should be discarded if this great sign of His own resurrection was not true (see John 2:18 - 22; Deuteronomy 18:15-22). If Christ was not raised from the dead then Christ's entire teaching, including what He said about being the source of eternal life, should not be believed.

The resurrection was central in the apostle's personal belief system. It was THE proof that Christ was who He claimed to be and that His message was the truth. It was also proof that Christ's sacrifice for our sin was acceptable in God's sight. Without the resurrection there was no basis for belief in the Christian faith. It is, without the resurrection, a worthless faith, which in turn means our sins remain unforgiven and we must figure out a way on our own to be absolved of them.

**15:18—Then those have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.**

If Christ is not raised, then death is simply the end of the road. That's it! There is nothing more. Once physical life is over, we are gone like the beasts. Christ is our hope for eternal life and if it was not given to Him, if He did not enter it, then we simply have no hope. Paul is teaching the Corinthians that there are a few things in their belief system they will have to give up if they let go of this belief in the resurrection of Christ.

**15:19—if we have hope in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.**

If Christ was not raised from the dead, then the only benefit we receive through our belief in Him is how it might contribute to our experience of this life. If our belief in Christ was just something we did for the benefit we receive in this life, then it was an awful choice we made.

The faith is stripped of its worth if it yields nothing beyond the grave. The premise of Jesus' teaching is that the one who seeks to lay hold of this world's good and favor, will do so at the expense of eternity. So if we let go of the things of this life, and there is no

eternity, then we have sacrificed for nothing. It is all a great delusion. We are suckers, and Christianity is the absolute worst of choices to be made in terms of how to shape one's personal life.

**15:20—but now, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.**

The good news of the gospel is that Christ has been raised. Our faith is not in vain. Our present lives are not all there is. All sacrifice will be rewarded. His resurrection is proof that we rightly believe in eternal life and rightfully believe that it is found in and through Him.

As the first fruits of the harvest offer hope of what is to come and were offered to God as a symbol of one's faith in Him for the future, Christ is the first fruit of the mighty work God would do in raising all his children from the dead. Christ is the first. The rest will follow for sure, and we will enter into the abundance of all He has reserved in heaven for us.

**15:21—For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.**

Having spoken of the logical and practical side of the argument for the resurrection Paul will now speak to the theological argument for it. The linkage between Christ's experience and our own resurrection is the same as the linkage between ourselves and Adam in our experience of physical death. What happened to Adam of necessity happens to us. He dictated a portion of the human experience that was entered into by every human being born on the face of the earth except Christ. Adam died and life ceased in terms of his physical body. No human being could have any other experience due to the power of sin. So human beings were up against an unbridgeable divide in terms of their physical bodies.

God became a man to address this dilemma created by sin. He experienced death as we do, but exerted power over it. By His death Christ paid for our sins and Adam's sin so that the power of God might be justly released in our behalf against physical death which came because of sin. So the way is provided for us to be bodily resurrected. Those who believe will be resurrected to a life of fellowship with God. Those who do not believe will be resurrected to an eternity of punishment. Just as the horrible experience of death came through one man to the entire human strain, so the end of that sentence came through one man.

Most understand this as demonstrating that Adam and Christ had by their identity headship in some sense over humanity. Though the views of that headship vary from covenant headship to seminal and federal headship, all agree that in some sense both represented humanity. What is clear from these verses is that both brought about something that impacts all humanity.

**15:22—For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.**

This verse states in a very straight forward way what the previous verse has already made clear. What we see is that physical life and death are what is being spoken of, not spiritual life. For while it is true that all men will be raised from the dead, not all will be made alive spiritually in the way that we have come to understand spiritual life—as being a state of unbroken fellowship with God. Physical death and physical resurrection are what Paul's teaching propounded, not physical death and some sort of spiritual resurrection. Resurrection is to be experienced bodily by all men, even those raised to eternal punishment.

**15:23—But each in his own order; Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,**

Paul teaches the order in which bodily resurrection is bestowed as the universal experience of humanity. But he mentions one group, those who belong to Christ. The resurrection experience was entered into first by Christ and then will be entered into by His children. All those who have believed in Him will be raised from the dead when He comes again. Later in the passage we'll see more intricate detail of this event and see more precisely what is meant by this term "at His coming." So the experience "spreads" according to the order that conforms to God's sovereign plan for humanity in the world.

**15:24—then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He had abolished all rule and all authority and power.**

The end will come and that includes the resurrection of all humanity. Christ will completely subdue all power, rule, and authority that existed in the theater of human history, whether of human or satanic origin. This verse speaks of this great consummation, or "summing up" of all that has been a part of the entire human experience. It involves gathering and separating the whole of humanity from all the institutions and trappings of earthly life, sending them before God to give account and to be subjected to an eternal destiny. It is the end to which all has been orchestrated by His great plan. It involves the physical resurrection of all who have ever lived to stand before their Creator. Pity those who address him there for the first time! This is the end which all people are appointed, and they will be brought to stand as friend or foe before him according to a certain order.

**15:25—For He must reign until He has put all his enemies under His feet.**

Christ will reign over the fallen Earth until a specific objective is accomplished. We know it will be accomplished over a time frame of 1000 years (see Revelation 20). The present world will be subjected to Jesus completely by the end of that period. All its tribes, nations, and rulers, whether human or spiritual, all will be conquered and finally subdued by Him. Earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. Earth's last great battle will pit Satan and the participants of the last rebellion of the earth against the armies of Christ. Fire will fall from heaven and bring an end to all who march against God (Revelation 20:7-10).

**15:26—The last enemy that will be abolished is death.**

After the final defeat of the evil one and of those he is leading in a rebellion on the earth, the very next thing we see is the great resurrection of the wicked dead and their judgment for their deeds done in this life (Revelation 20:11ff). This will be the end of the experience of death for humanity.

For the believer this is a wonderful thought. For the unbeliever it is an awful one, because humanity will be confirmed forever in whatever spiritual condition they are in at that moment. We know that the righteous dead will have already been raised. We will see that their resurrection is a separate event from the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20 later in this chapter of First Corinthians. They will have been already confirmed as God's children when the unbelievers are raised.

There is an "order" (verse 23), to the resurrection of the dead. When the remaining ones, the unbelieving are raised from the dead it will signal the end of death for all of eternity.

**15:27—For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says "all things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.**

Paul wants to clarify the subjection of the Son to the father. In the Christian theology of the Trinity, we believe that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equally God in terms of their essence. They are of the same essence. In terms of function however we see the Holy Spirit and the Son subjugated to the will of the Father.

Paul sees it as important to reiterate that here. And one can only imagine that as the Spirit inspired these words, they were written in anticipation of the formation of that elusive understanding of the concept of the triune God that would develop in the coming centuries—the doctrine of the Trinity.

**15:28—and when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the one who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.**

Creation, once restored by Christ to fellowship with God, will be delivered and presented back to God, redeemed from the curse of evil. God's servant, Christ, the One through whom God brought about the projection and that by His own arm He would bring about salvation, accomplishes the mission, and delivers restored humanity back to God. He to whom authority was given now offers back all that was accomplished through that authority and God's ultimate end is achieved.

This is one of the clear statements in Scripture of the ideological end of God's plan and his ultimate purpose in all things. We fall short of understanding the ultimate purpose of it all when we simply speak of redemption and salvation of man. God's ultimate end is to reveal completely His glory so that we might see Him as He is, "all in all."

Now what does this phrase mean, "all in all"? It means in short, that all things exist by and for Him. It means they are conceived and orchestrated by Him and depend on Him for their existence. In the end they serve Him and therefore ultimately bring about what is good. So God is all in all, powerful enough to make all things, even evil, achieve His purposes. It means that He is significant enough that all things find their highest and most noble use in serving Him.

He will be found to be not simply the ideological all in all, but the practical all in all. That is, we won't just think He is good, we will feel it and have learned it by our experience. We'll know Him thoroughly and perfectly, even "as we have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Numerous other Scriptures conform that this is indeed God's purpose in all things, to bring about true knowledge of his great glory (see Ephesians 3:10, have a look to: 13-14, Psalms 46:10; Isaiah 45:4-6, 20-25).

This great truth, the eternality, the all-encompassing fullness of God, expressed early by His covenant name, Yahweh—"I am," will be the great truth that all of human history will be found to demonstrate. It is this understanding that will produce from every tongue the confession that "He is Lord." That will not be simply a confession of His authority, but of the perfection and goodness of His nature. He will be

acknowledged to by all as the One who IS all, the one in whom all else that exists finds its meaning and purpose.

**15:29—otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raise at all, why are baptized for them?**

From the theological argument for the resurrection of the dead, Paul now moves to a statement of cultural and common-sense type arguments. This is by Biblical standards, a bizarre verse because uncharacteristically there is no other passage in Scripture that sheds light on it. That is rare. Various groups have because of it engaged in baptism by proxy, believing they can through substituting themselves for dead relatives attain salvation for those who died as unbelievers. It has led to the Mormons intense interest in genealogical study.

There is no other Scripture that indicates that there is anything we can do that can so serve as "credit" to another's account. That right requires our own sinlessness and was attained only by Christ who was God's chosen "Lamb." It is best to understand Paul's words here as a sort of logical argument from the culture for the resurrection. It seems that baptism for the dead was a familiar practice in the various cults of Corinth. Paul is saying through citing their practice, "how could you not believe in the resurrection? Even as pagans, before the gospel came to you, you believed in being raised to an afterlife and you worked to get others into it. How could you now separate yourself from such a believe?" This explanation is likely the best that can be offered without doing violence to the whole of Christian theology.

**15:30—why are we also in danger every hour?**

Paul continues his logical appeal to the Corinthians by this statement from the realm of common sense, and from his personal practice. He had endured many dangers in the course of each day since giving himself to the proclamation of the gospel. He is saying, "if there is no after-life for me, why am I doing this? It's not that much fun!"

The term "we" is emphatic, meaning "we ourselves." Paul's total thought, combined with the previous verse is this, "if there is no afterlife, why are pagans baptizing for the dead, and why do we of all people put our lives on the line?" The "we" likely refers to Paul, Sosthenes, and the apostolic company. But it could refer to Paul and all believers as opposed to those being baptized the dead.

**15:31—I protest, brethren and, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.**

The words, "I die daily" begin the verse in the original. Each day Paul died to self a little more for the good of the church and for the great prospect of eternal reward. He felt right and good about that, like there was no other way to live. That joy at the faith of people like the Corinthians, Paul offers as proof of the resurrection. It is subjective evidence. "Would God bestow such a feeling, and would I feel it if it were not true and not real," is Paul's thought here.

**15:32—if from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.**

We do not know for sure if the term "wild beasts" is to be taken in the plain literal sense or in the figurative literal sense. Were they animals, or beastly human beings? We are at a loss to know for sure though arguments can be made either way. Paul's central point is that whatever that "fight" was, he did not wage it after the human manner, meaning, for the glory that might be gained in this life. That is a normal human way of living. We do that which produces a return in this life.

If there is no resurrection, then we should live for no other purpose than what makes our present life more pleasurable. We should eat and drink, and in using that phrase Paul is meaning we should live in excess and cram as much possible pleasure as we can into this life because this is all there is if there is no resurrection of the dead. There is no profit in sacrificing for the sake of the gospel or anything else related to another world or life. This is all we have apart from our resurrection. This is a logical argument in the realm of simple common sense that is true. If there is no resurrection, live it up! Party hard and don't slow down to ponder any deeper meaning in life if there is no resurrection.

**15:33—do not be deceived, "bad company corrupts good morals."**

Bad thinking, like the Corinthians were getting about the resurrection from the dead from some unnamed source, has the moral implications Paul has just mentioned in the previous verse. If one embraces thinking that denies the resurrection, then that will lead them into a low level of morality. For this reason we should avoid being deceived, because where there is wrong thinking there will come to be wrong living, and those who think errantly will eventually lead us there.

It is true of all that is untrue that it will lead to wrong thinking and from there to wrong living. Being holy necessitates the presence of truth. To let go of truth is to let go of light and when we do that the deeds of darkness are inevitable. This degeneration had already started in Corinth and Paul wants it stopped. Through a present imperative he tells them not to go on being deceived. He is prohibiting an action in progress. He tells them to put an end to this deception because it brings with it moral corruption. The next verse will continue to expand this important thought.

**15:34—becomes sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.**

The word rendered "becoming sober minded" is used of those who awake sober after intoxication. We could render this verse in this way. "Having slept off this excessive binge you've been on, refocus on reality!" It is an aorist imperative, which is a command to commence an action that has not been carried out. Paul then tells them to stop sinning, using a present imperative, prohibiting an action in progress.

The Corinthians had been sinning due to wrong thinking about the resurrection. It may be the problem underlying all else that he has had to address in this letter. Paul calls for a shift in their demeanor. They were to shake off this mental bewilderment brought on by their loss of faith in the resurrection, and they were to stop the excessive living that naturally went with it. It was shameful how they're behaving. Their thinking and actions were consistent with those who did not know God. They had embraced the



thoughts of those who had no knowledge, the ignorant. The actions then followed because, as the proverb familiar to them said, "bad company corrupts good morals."

**15:35—but someone will say, "how are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?"**

Paul switches to address a question within the question of the resurrection. He also switches his tone, which is noticeable particularly in the next verse. It seems the question is being asked in an arrogant way, as if there no reasonable answer was possible. It is as if such an event is impossible because we cannot conceive of how it might be done. It lies beyond us therefore it lies beyond the realm of possibility. This is, of course, the mindset that traps the unbeliever and unbelief.

The question given here is twofold. It is a question about how the resurrection happens. During the rest of the chapter Paul will answer a number of the "how" questions that occupy every mind that considers this great subject. First he will answer in a very direct way the other question, which concerns itself with the type of body those raised will have. This was no doubt, the most important question to the Corinthians, since the early forms of Gnosticism and the belief that matter was evil, were beginning to shape thinking. To those influenced by this thinking, the question of the nature of the material body was very significant.

**15:36—you fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies;**

Paul starts his argument by taking the offensive. It is no small thing, as Jesus said, to call someone a fool (Matthew 5:22). Here Paul uses a different term than what Jesus used, not  $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\eta$ , but  $\alpha\phi\omega\nu$ , meaning one who is unthinking or not understanding. It is not calling someone a moron, but it is saying that they are not thinking on this issue.

The simplicity of Paul's reasoning, in which he gives an illustration from agriculture, makes this a simple common-sense reply. It builds on this term's basic meaning. Paul is inferring that the person who stumbles at the idea of the resurrection of the dead because they cannot imagine the process of a change in form of matter, such a person is not really applying what they know to the problem. They are at that point not thinking. Paul is right in his use of this label to describe the situation.

Paul then immediately takes them into the realm of what they already know by observation. It is the same illustration Jesus used of his own death and the life that would result from it. When a seed is planted in the ground it ceases in time to exist as a seed. It changes form and emerges as a plant. It dies a seed. The human body can be compared to this in death. That is the direction Paul is taking the thinking of the readers in order that they might understand that there is a linkage between the present and future body that allows for very distinctive changes. There is a vast realm of possibility regarding our future bodies if we apply the death and burial of the body to what we observe in the planting of seeds. There is a great metamorphosis that occurs between what is sown as a seed and what emerges as a plant.

**15:37—and that which you sow you do not sow like the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or something else.**

Paul states the change that occurs in form between what is sown and what emerges. A seed is sown which we know has all the genetic material of the plant that will

emerge. So there is linkage, but a completely different form emerges from the ground. Neither Paul nor Paul's readers understood genetics. They just understood that you sowed a certain kind of seed and it ceased to exist as a seed, but a plant emerged. It was a miracle, and so is the resurrection. Through science we can understand the metamorphosis of the seed well. The resurrection miracle will be similarly understood once it is observed.

**15:38—but God gives the body just as He wishes, and to each of the seeds a body of its own.**

By the design of God seed germinates and is slowly transformed into a plant. The plant that we recognized by sight bears no resemblance in terms of appearance to the seed from which it came. One is a kernel, the other plant. They are related, yet very different. And each species of seed becomes its own unique plant, distinctive in appearance. Paul is illustrating further the miracle of the resurrection and showing the reader that the resurrection body, though related to the present body, will be vastly different in terms of appearance, particularly with respect to the decayed, broken-down matter from which it comes. The fact that the earthly body completely loses its form through death should not hinder us from believing in a resurrection. We witness the miracle of plants emerging from the ground all the time, in completely different form than what we placed in the ground as a seed.

**15:39—all flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, and another of flesh of birds, and another of fish.**

Turning from plant life to animal life Paul points out that "skin" changes from animal to animal. He cites four examples each of which is vastly different. He is continuing to argue the case for a material resurrection. His present point is that to believe in a resurrection is not to believe that we will have a body that appears exactly like our present one. Flesh changes from species to species, but it is still material and a part of a material body. In thinking about a resurrected body, don't think that its flesh has to be the same as the flesh of our present body. That is the thrust of Paul's argument.

**15:40—there are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly another.**

There is for each believer two bodies. One is the heavenly body we will one day be clothed with. The other is the earthly body. Both are in their own way a wonder, glorious. That is important. There was not defamation on the part of Paul of our earthly bodies. They are a wonder, though of a different sort than our heavenly bodies will be. Just as plants have a different appearance from the seeds they come from, and just as the flesh of different animals is distinct, so there is a distinction between one's earthly and one's heavenly body. But both have a glory. That was an important point to make in Greek thought in the first century.

**15:41—there is one glory of the sun, and another of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.**

Paul builds further on the idea of glory, which he has said both one's earthly and one's heavenly body have. This too is common in terms of the creation of the material realm. You can have matter, and yet have a large degree of difference in "glory," as

illustrated in the sun, moon, and stars, and even from star to star. The fact that the new creation will be perfect and glorious does not in itself disallow a bodily or material resurrection. God is abundantly able, as He has clearly illustrated in the present creation, to fashion bodies of greater glory than what we have known in our present bodies. The verses that follow will outline specific ways in which our heavenly bodies will have greater glory.

**15:42—so also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;**

Having illustrated truth by speaking of the sowing of seeds, of differences in flesh among animals, of the differences in glory between the sun, moon, and stars, Paul now applies all of this to the fact of the resurrection. He cites a series of contrasts between our present body and the body that it will become. The first contrast is our present body is perishable. It is subject to deterioration and ultimately to decay. It wears out and then once dead, it breaks down. Our new body will be imperishable. It will not deteriorate with the passage of time and with use. It will not have to be subjected to the special care our present bodies require. Our present bodies die. They are placed in the ground where they deteriorate further. But when they emerge it will not be for another cycle of death, as with plants. What will emerge is that which is eternal.

**15:43—It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.**

The third contrast is that the present body is buried in dishonor. By this Paul is referring to the fact that death is the common experience of all humans, no matter what their achievements or their social status to which they rise, or their power and fame. They all die. No matter their lofty status when alive, they are in the end indistinguishable from the common thief. In death they are exposed as mere mortal man.

But in death, if they are believers, the transformation will begin. What will emerge is a body with glory. By glory, weightiness or significance is meant. There is that about the new body that will distinguish us, whereas there was that about our earthly bodies that, in a sense negated all that may have been honorable in us. The earthly body was such that the strong became weak, the wise became babbling fools, the disciplined lost control. The resurrection body will not perish and so will accentuate rather than negate what is good in us. It is raised in glory.

The third contrast builds further on this idea. Our present bodies are placed in the ground in weakness. Death is the ultimate experience of weakness. All humans are powerless against death, save one. In our burial, stark and profound testimony is given to this no matter what good might be said on our achievements. We are dead, and that is testimony that our weakness caught up to us and triumphed over us. But power characterizes the resurrection. The power of our faith, because of the person who is its object, will be dramatically displayed. Rather than our powerlessness being displayed as in the day of our burial, the wisdom of our faith and God's power in producing it in us and rewarding it will be clearly known on the day of our resurrection. It will be a day of power, first God's, then that which we have been granted by Him in our new bodies.

**15:44—it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.**

The fourth contrast is characterized by Paul as natural versus spiritual. The contrast is not material versus spiritual. Paul has used the terms natural and spiritual earlier in the letter. The "natural man" referred to the man who was godless, devoid of the Holy Spirit (2:14 FF). When sin entered humanity something of God was lost in our bodies. Adam and Eve knew they were naked. It was probably a physical loss, specifically, the light of the glory of God likely made the bodies glow with bright light, which concealed the details of their form. Through sin the human body lost its glory and its immortality because something of its link to God was lost. In this sense it is natural, what Paul will describe later as of the earth and relating to the year.

The body is raised spiritual. This does not mean immaterial, but as in chapter 2, where "spiritual" described the man rightly related to God, the spiritual body will once again reflect the glory of God as Adam did before the fall. That Paul is using the terms "natural" and "spiritual" in this way is obvious from his transition and thought in the very next verse to Adam. Adam's body started out "spiritual" but became "natural". In the sense outlined above there is not only a "natural" and "spiritual" man, as Paul spoke of in chapter 2, there is a "natural" and "spiritual" body as well. The following verses develop this important thought.

**15:45—So also it is written, "the first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit."**

This idea, that there is a natural body which has lost its glory because of sin, and a spiritual body in which that glory will be restored through the work of Christ in our behalf, agrees with the Scripture's testimony that in Adam we were given physical life. The actual quote from the Scripture is simply "man became a living soul." Man as a being was given physical life through Adam. It was life in a natural body, that is, a body that reflected man's broken relationship with God. It is imperfect in that it is missing its original glory. It is weak, and it is perishable. Man receives spiritual life in Christ, and those who do will receive a spiritual body. That will be a body that reflects man's transformed relationship with God. That body will be perfect, and it will have its original glory. It will be powerful and imperishable.

**15:46—however the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.**

Before we can enjoy our spiritual bodies, we must pass through this life in our natural body. We do not get to skip it. There is a divine order of events that requires our present lives.

Now why does Paul make this statement? We cannot be sure what specific issue in the thinking of the readers or in the cultural context of the Corinthians he was trying to address with the detail of his comments. Again, we know that the system of thought which would come to be known as Gnosticism was developing. It would tend to minimize the significance of this present life in this body, and of the body itself. There would arise the idea we already mentioned that what we do with or because of our bodies is meaningless, because they are just bodies composed of evil matter. And so there was a demeaning of the present life and the body so much so that even in death the body would often be cruelly or at least casually treated.

It was the Christian community that insisted on giving dignity to the body and death. So here Paul wants to remind us that there is a time for the "spiritual" body. But that does not mean we should skip over the present "natural" life flippantly. It is our present call and should receive our best effort. This is our station and calling for the present. Paul's teaching reflects a hope in the future glory, but his zeal and purpose, and even passion for the present. The future is better, but the present is critically significant.

**15:47 —The first man is from earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.**

Our first body come from earthly matter. It is for the earth, reflects the earth, and relates to life on the earth. Literally, "his source is the earth, made of dust." It fits where we live. Our new body will be made for where we live. Material? Yes! The same matter as our present bodies are? Likely not. Our new body will be profoundly different in several ways, even as Christ resurrection body was different. It will be equipped for body experiences beyond what we know in this life. It is for life in a different realm, and it reflects a relationship to God unlike anything we have known.

**15:48—as is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.**

As the creation is made from dust, so are those who are part of that creation. There was the creative act of God that brought about the existence of the heavenly beings. But the "Earth critters" are related to earth. Their bodies are composed of matter that is of the same sort of that found on earth. Their bodies are made up of the elements of the earth.

That is perhaps what God was expressing to a non—scientific world. He gave the very simple explanation that he formed man from the dust of the ground, and that we are formed of dust and to dust we will return. But we are already beginning to understand that elements exist in the universe that are not found on earth. Therefore the bodies that are made for living in realms unlike the present earth might be very different. So Paul says here that those who are of the heavenly creation reflect the fact that they are of a different realm. He is, we must remember, responding to a question some Corinthians had, as recorded in verse 35, "with what kind of body do they come?"

**15:49—and just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall bear the image of the heavenly.**

Man was created in the image of God. He, like God, has rational, emotional, creative, intellectual, and relational abilities, beyond the other life forms created by God. He also was to bear God's image in the functional sense, doing the work of God on earth. This was God's design in creation, and though marred by the fall, man's likeness to his Creator can still be clearly seen.

But man also bears the image of the world he lives in. His body is composed of various earthly elements, and his body even reflects Earth's fallenness. We do not escape either of these things through the experience of the new birth. We escape them only through death and the resurrection. Our new bodies reflect the new material realm we will live in as well as its perfect and unfallen moral state.

**15:50—now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.**

With this Paul begins to address the question posed in verse 35, “How are the dead raised.” He has addressed the other question in that verse, “with what sort of bodies do they come?” Now he will disclose some things about “how” the event occurs and comes about.

First, Paul speaks to the necessity of bodily change. Our present bodies cannot experience the kingdom of God in its glorious state. Flesh and blood, our bodies as we presently know them, simply are not able to inherit the kingdom of God, nor are they able to inherit and take advantage of the state of incorruptibility that is part of God’s kingdom in its glory. They must be in some sense made over.

Paul does not say why this is true. We can only speculate. The reasons could be spiritual. There is ample evidence, even in the typology of the Old Testament that the blemishes of our present bodies brought about by sin, could not be acceptable to God. There is also the thought that when sin entered humanity it became inherent in human genetics. Therefore our bodies are unredeemable in the complete sense of what that term means to God. The reason may be physical, that given the environment of heaven our bodies are not suitable for it. We do not know why the statements of this verse are true, but Paul states the case very definitively.

We must remember that Paul had seen the abode of God (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). From that experience he knew things that could not be fully explained, and he heard things he was not permitted to pass on. The words “this I say,” have the authority of this experience and of other revelation that his statements here are based on. As complete a statement as we have on how this transformation of our bodies happens is in the verses that follow.

**15:51—Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.**

Paul reveals something that lies beyond our ability to fully explain. A mystery involves something which we know has come to be true, but the detail of how it came to be is not completely known to us. The mystery Paul wants us to know is that not all Christians will die, but all will receive a new body.

Now if our new body comes through the death of our present one, how can anyone receive a new body without dying? That is the mystery. It is true, but how it can be lies beyond us. But it is a fact. Not all Christians will die, but all receive a new body. The verses that follow describe an event, the event which will bring about our new bodies whether we are alive or dead at the time it occurs.

**15:52—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trouble will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.**

This verse describes the change that will occur in millions of bodies both alive and dead. It will be instantaneous not a slow process. It will be completed in a fraction of a second. After giving the elapsed time of the event, Paul gives information to identify to some degree the timing of the event, to place it on a timeline of sorts. He says it will occur “at the last trumpet.”

Know what is this trumpet? Is it the last of the seven-trumpet spoken of in Revelation? While this is possible it doesn't seem likely in that the book of Revelation had not yet been written. While it is not unusual for the writers of Scripture to give their readers material that would only later be understood, such a thing is more characteristic of apocalyptic writings. This is an epistle in which the purpose seems to be to answer questions, not raise them. Paul's tone in chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians seems to be one of clearing up distorted thinking not contributing to the vagueness of their understanding.

On the other hand, Paul does refer to the event as a mystery, and so its nature is not such that our understanding of it will be crystal clear. If "the last trumpet" is not the seventh trumpet of Revelation, what is it?

There is a trumpet mentioned in Isaiah 27:13 that is to sound in the last days. It will be a trumpet that summons Israel from the nations into which they have been scattered, to bring them to Jerusalem to worship God "in the holy Mountain of Jerusalem." Several other references to a trumpet blast in the last days may be referring to this same event. If so then this trumpet triggers several great events that begin simultaneously. One of these simultaneous events will be the resurrection of the righteous dead. Their transformation into imperishable bodies, along with the transformation of those in Christ that are still alive at that moment, will be instantaneous.

This is the event we have come to call "the rapture," the removal from the earth of all believers. That such an event is in Paul's mind here and that he is not just thinking of the resurrection of the dead is plain from the fact that he has already stated that we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed (verse 51). In this verse he alludes to the order of the events that occur in this moment. The order he gives here agrees with what he will expound on later in 1Thessalonians 4:13-18.

It is also interesting that Paul seems to use the word "we" as if he expected to be alive for this great event. This means he expected either that no further "signs" would be given at the approach of the rapture, that it was imminent, or that he believed world events could move very quickly at any moment, and this great event could occur in the wake of these fast-moving events. Either scenario is possible, and it is best not to see a hard-core case for the immanency of the rapture from this passage. How and when it occurs is a mystery. But the event is a certainty.

**15:53—For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.**

These two things must happen. The first begins with "δεῖ," meaning "it is necessary." It is necessary because of what verse 50 has taught—that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." It is necessary because God has so ordered things that this must occur.

Through these statements Paul is reminding the readers of the absolute certainty of the event and the absolute necessity of it. The resurrection is not just a wonderful hope but an essential occurrence that must come about if we are to lay hold of that for which we were laid hold. It is the death of much of Christian and Jewish theology to let go of belief in the resurrection.

We must remember that Paul was no stranger to the errant thought that there was no resurrection. Having been a Pharisee he had been well-schooled against the Sadducees position that denied the resurrection (Acts 23:6). Here he states the necessity of the great event.

In stating this we see that in all of Paul's teaching about new bodies there remains the distinct possibility of linkage to the old. Our present body is in some sense transformed. It is not discarded and replaced by another. This was an important contrast to the rising gnostic thought that viewed the body as unredeemable.

**15:54—but when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying "death is swallowed up in victory."**

The result of this transformation of the body will be that death is stripped of its power. Paul refers to Old Testament sayings (Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14) which spoke of God's intent to bring about the immortality of the redeemed of Israel. It is interesting imagery that shows that death simply goes away because of something of greater power.

**15:55—O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?**

The resurrection is not a new-fangled idea. It is rooted in Old Testament prophecy. Paul is not simply celebrating our hope with these verses. He is continuing to build his case for the resurrection. Old Testament Scriptures assume the idea of a resurrection. One does not find in them text that specifically defends such a belief. It is held by the writers as "self-evident," the hope of mankind since the fall of Eden and presumably given to humanity by none other than God himself.

**15:56—the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.**

This verse is written in conjunction with the statement just made, "O death, where is your sting?" That is a prophetic word from Hosea 13:14 that Paul uses to indicate that our new bodies will bring about a state where death has been overcome. It will be rendered powerless. Its stinger has been removed. This verse reveals why death has such power over us in the present life. The problem is sin.

We know that sin is ultimately the cause of physical death, and this verse speaks to that sin as the sting that results in death. We die specifically due to Adam's sin. When he sinned, the effect of the sting came over the entire human stream that was to follow. So all experience physical death. Paul says that the reason death has such a sting is not death itself. Death is merely an event. It is brought about by sin. The verse goes on to say that sin has power due to the law. Physical death is an automatic consequence of sin, built right into the universe now God's moral law was violated. Logically then, the law is the thing that metes out the sentence against sin, and specifically the sentence of physical death.

Ultimately then, the power of death and sin is derived. They do not have innate power. It is derived from the character of God, specifically His holiness and justice. So death has power over every man, which power comes because of sin's power. However sin's power comes from the authority of God's moral law, which is rooted in the character of God Himself.



**15:57—but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The law is God's holy standard. It is unattainable to us due to the sin that resides in our being. God's law then, that could have been a source of blessing to us has instead become an instrument of death to us due to our sin. Our dilemma is unsolvable in terms of our own resources. Victory is not a remote possibility.

But God himself gives us the victory. He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. He became a man, met the requirements of the law perfectly to become our lawful substitute. The result is that we are justly cleared by the standard of the same law, declared to be righteous. We have victory through Lord Jesus Christ.

**15:58—therefore, my beloved brother, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.**

Our lives should reflect a certain stability and firm direction because of all this, the victory over death that we have been given by God, the great hope of life in an imperishable body as ones deeply loved and cared for by God. There should be a resoluteness in our mindset and a purpose in our step.

Paul uses two words to describe our resolve, steadfast and immovable. The word rendered "steadfast" is εδραίοι. In another form it is the word for foundation or support. We are to be grounded, not to be drifting about in life unstable in our character and shaky in our commitment. The word rendered "immovable" as αἰετακίνητοι. It comes from two Greek words plus the alpha privative. One of those words is κίνησις, meaning movement or motion. The other is meta, the preposition meaning with. The two words combined would convey "with motion." The privative reverses that meaning so that we have the idea of "without motion." In terms of what we have our sights set on we are to be motionless. Like an archer who has his sights set on target, we are to remain motionless until the arrow is released.

We are to be always abounding in the work of the mission entrusted to us. There is not to be a lull in our effort to reflect Christ and stimulate the faith of others. There is to be no letup due to discouragement because we can be confident that our labor has a purpose. It is accomplishing objectives that are of eternal significance and we are gaining ground of eternal importance as we are obedient moment by moment to Him.

## 1 Corinthians 16

**16:1—Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.**

With this verse Paul leaves the subject of the resurrection and turns to the pragmatic matter of "the collection for the saints." This was a special fund that was being built up for the needs of Christians in Jerusalem.

This was not what we recall that regular offerings, though some principles can be applied. This was a special offering. It appears that it was being gathered in several churches since Paul says he wants the Corinthians to follow the same instructions he has set forth in the churches of Galatia, a northern province of Asia minor, the area we know as northern Turkey.

The fact that this collection is being taken is instructive. We are to be concerned about and take responsibility for a larger family than our own local church. As in the local assembly where we share the burdens of others, so churches are to behave toward each other. This cooperation was not simply politically motivated as many have suggested, as a means for Paul to wed Jew and Gentile more closely and so legitimize Christianity in that way. This was undoubtedly one of the effects, but it was orchestrated simply because it was the right thing to do. Paul gave such direction because he received it from the Holy Spirit. And so there is a value in this we are to embrace. The value is that it is important what is happening in the larger context of other local churches beyond our own and we have a responsibility in it. The Corinthians were to follow through in this matter as Paul directed.

**16:2—on the first day of the week let each one of you put aside and save, as you prosper, that no collections be made when I come.**

There are several questions that this verse raises. Was Paul meaning by "each one of you," everyone in the Corinthian church? Was he advocating that each person set aside "in a sock" an amount commensurate with their own level of prosperity, which at some point each person would then contribute to the whole? Or does that "each one" refer to "each church?"

This appears to be a precise statement by Paul addressed to individuals but with an ongoing collection in mind. So the command is directed at "each one" and the action commanded, "to put" is a singular imperative referring to everyone. The term for saving is a participle, and so means simply "storing up." The terms rendered by the NASB "as you might prosper" is a third person plural, "as they might prosper." So individuals set aside such an amount and that probably meant they gave it to the local assembly, and the result was a collective storing up that was proportionate to their collective prosperity. So a collection was to happen each Sunday in the church. A contribution was to be made by everyone to a savings account. It would be safeguarded until Paul came. His concern was that giving should always reflect one's prosperity, and it should be ongoing and persistent, not a last-minute scramble.

**16:3—and when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem.**

Here is where the purpose of the “collection” Paul is addressing in these verses becomes clear. It was destined for Jerusalem, and likely was to relieve their need in time of famine (Acts 11:28-30). The Corinthians would appoint carriers of the gift. They would have individuals of character so that no portion of the gift was lost.

They would have letters from Paul. We don't know why such letters would have been necessary. Perhaps because the gift was coming from Gentiles and going to Jews. Perhaps the amount would be recorded to make sure it agreed with the amount that arrived on location. It would have been a sizable gift it would seem, and so certain precautions would seem wise and necessary in days before insurance, armored cars and bonded carriers.

**16:4—and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.**

Paul was still in the process of formulating plans, as will be seen in the verses that follow. We know that in his travels he moved about in step with the dictates of the Holy Spirit, which made for a certain degree of uncertainty. At this point Paul is uncertain of the divine plan and so keeps his options open. “Fitting” is *οἰστος*, often understood as “worthy,” action that is fitting in terms of a certain calling or standard. Paul's going to Jerusalem would be fitting if the Lord desired it.

**16:5—but I shall come to you after I go to Macedonia, for I'm going through Macedonia;**

Paul begins to lay out his plans, such as they are, marked by a high degree of uncertainty. This characteristic of Paul, his openness to formulate plans “on-the-fly” (see Acts 16:6 FF), had been the chief reason the gospel came to Macedonia and then on to Corinth. But this uncertainty seemed to bother the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 1:15 FF). Writing this, most likely from Ephesus, Paul begins to speculate on how he might come to visit Corinth again. One can imagine him traveling from Ephesus up to Asia minor, across to Macedonia, down through Philippi, Thessalonica, and Beroea, into Achaia and on to Corinth.

**16:6—and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me on my way wherever I go.**

Again, Paul's travels are marked by uncertainty. It seems that there are months when he tried to avoid travel, the winter months, and this provided him opportunity to spend extra time in a place. To be “send on one's way” included more than a formal “goodbye.” It included providing for their needs in some way, either with money of provisions or both. Paul was not bashful nor was he apologetic about this. He always approached this type of thing as an opportunity that he was allowing someone or some group to participate in. That is instructive.

**16:7—or I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you some time, if the Lord permits.**

Here we see Paul clearly state the reason for the lack of definition of his plans. He wanted to be where the Lord wanted him at the right time. We also see Paul's own feelings in the matter expressed here.

Determining the Lord's leading is always a delicate task. It involves considering one's own feelings, and assuming that they are a means used by the Holy Spirit to prompt us, while also allowing that they are not the exclusive means used by Him to direct us. So Paul has a desire that he is generally following, while allowing the Lord to tweak the plan as it unfolds. His desire is not just to pass through, but to spend some time with the Corinthians, and so he is shaping a plan based on that desire.

**16:8—but I shall remained in Ephesus until Pentecost;**

We can gain insight into the general time frame of Paul's plan. Pentecost would come 50 days after the Passover. By then it would be late spring. He would travel up to Asia minor and down through Macedonia during the summer and fall months, then spend winter in Corinth. The next statement will reveal why he was delaying his departure from Ephesus.

**16:9—for a wide door for effective service has been open to me, and there are many adversaries.**

We must learn to recognize opportunity by criteria other than lack of opposition. Too often we limit our use of the words "opportunity" and "open door" to those situations where there is no opposition. We need to realize that opposition does not mean that there is not an "open door." Paul had opportunity for effective service. That defined opportunity. The fact that there were many adversaries was irrelevant. The opportunity to him was the work the Holy Spirit was propelling forward. Wherever this forward push is felt there is opportunity that should be persistently seized until the sense of momentum is gone and the push is sensed in a different direction. So Paul's plan was to remain in Ephesus for a period so that the present stage of the work God had moved him into could be completed.

**16:10—Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid; for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am.**

Timothy appears to have had some sort of predisposition to being timid. In both epistles addressed to him, the tone of Paul is that of a commander or coach speaking in a way that would stir Timothy up and instill in him boldness and courage. Here Paul asked the Corinthians to be gentle with Timothy.

Paul commends him to them as one who is a legitimate servant doing the Lord's work in the same sense as Paul is. The Corinthians had a role in his effectiveness. Good leaders understand that and seek to build the right things into followers so that those who come on the scene to lead after them will have a situation where leadership is a joy rather than a trial. Good leaders trained followers to follow legitimate leaders well. They do not press for "exclusive leadership rights." They understand that the followers have a major role in bringing about good leadership.

**16:11—let no one therefore despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.**

Because Timothy did the same work as Paul, he was to be treated with respect. This was an important piece of etiquette that Paul fostered in the early church. Arrogance against leaders, the despising of leaders, and rebellion against leaders all were by Paul's count major sins. He will reiterate this idea in the case of their resident local church leaders as well. The congregation was to respect such leaders make their stay pleasant so that in Timothy's case he would continue his journey in peace, having been refreshed and appreciated. Paul was expecting Timothy in Ephesus with a company of others. They were not to look down on him as an underling but look up to him as a leader.

**16:12—but concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brother; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.**

This verse gives insight into the lines of authority in the early church. Though Paul saw himself as one whose counsel and direction was to be obeyed, he was not overbearing and heavy-handed in how things were done in nonessential matters, even when he had strong feelings. He "encourage greatly" Apollos to visit Corinth. What would it have been like to feel the pressure of being "greatly encouraged" by Paul to go to a certain place and yet believe in your heart that this is not what God want you to do! But Paul apparently respected that and allowed that Apollos' visit should be delayed for later opportunity. The Lord was clearly left to be the head of the church, and Paul did not exercise his authority independent of the Lord or the thought and judgment of others in each matter.

Acts 18:24 and following records the visit of Apollo's to Ephesus where Pricilla and Aquilla, themselves from Corinth, instructed him more accurately in the Scriptures. It also records his desire to travel across the Aegean Sea to the province of Achaia where he "helped greatly those who believed" Acts 19:1 place Apollos in Corinth, the major city of Achaia. Though some might suggest that Acts 18 is a record of Apollos eventual visit to Corinth that Paul anticipates here it seems much more likely that Acts 18 is a record of an earlier visit by which Apollo's became known to the Corinthians. This seems more likely for two reasons. Apollos is known to them and Acts 19 seems to be a record of Paul's two-year stay in Ephesus, during which time this letter was likely written.

**16:13—Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.**

In verses 13 and 14 Paul gives five commands. Each of them is profound. Each of them has been dealt with already in his letter. If these commands are obeyed virtually none of the problems he has addressed would exist in Corinth.

The first command is to be alert. We must be alerted to live this life well. We must be alert to our own spiritual condition, to know when we have slipped or are vulnerable. We must be alert to wrong thinking and false doctrine. We must be alerted to identify compromise. We must be alerted to needs around us. We must be alert to opportunities to seize the moment for the gospel. We must be alert to our times and their special dangers. Most problems in our own walk with our Lord as well as most

problems in the church start slowly and subtly. If we stay alert, we will catch them early.

The second command is to stand firm in the faith. It can be done when we are alert. We are not to give up ground in any sense, in terms of doctrine and in terms of holiness. We are to withstand the attacks of our own lethargy, the compromises of others, and the out and out attacks of the evil one. We must do so personally and corporately.

Third, we are to act like men. Here Paul is using the term "man" to represent the strength, courage, and persistence men must demonstrate in battle. We must be men as opposed to boys. We must stand firm as opposed to being intimidated and backing down. We must be alert as opposed to distracted and playful. We are to act seasoned and mature, not easily dissuaded, distracted, or deceived.

Fourth we are to be strong. Don't be an easy mark. Be able to summon what it takes to rise to the moment. Don't melt away at the first sign of difficulty, and don't let the desire for comfort and ease keep you from the noble and good.

**16:14—let all that you do be done in love.**

This is a fifth command. Paul is not speaking of a fleshly strength that provides impetus in difficulty by stealing oneself to human emotion. We are to be alert, stand firm, act like men and be strong, and do so by the power of love, even as Christ did. Lack of feeling is not to mark us in our strength. We are to do all things in the way that is dictated by love. If we surrender this, we have surrendered our mark of authenticity. Apart from love persistence can simply be stubbornness, alertness can be vindictiveness, maturity can be aloofness, and strength can be cold-heartedness. Love must be evident for Christ to be glorified.

**16:15—now I urge you, brethren (you know the household Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints),**

Paul has something to say about one family. It is an exhortation. Before he gives that he reminds the Corinthians of the facts that are the basis for his exhortation. The facts are that Stephanas and his family were among the first to come to faith in the province of Greece that Corinth is located in. It is not that this bestows a right on them in and of itself, but it does say that they are to be considered "veterans." More importantly, they've made the ministry their full-time occupation. And so there was this phenomenon of people being called to the work of the church as their occupation from the beginning. Everywhere in Scripture this is enthusiastically endorsed as it is here.

**16:16—that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.**

The exhortation regarding Stephanus is that they currently in subject themselves 10, not only to him but to "such ones" and to all who give themselves to the work and labor. There is to be a respectful submission on the part of the church people not only to leaders but to each other. They are to make the work and labor a delight by being

subject as opposed to self – willed and uncooperative. They used to be this spirit that prevails among the rank-and-file of the church.

**16:17—and I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas in Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part.**

Three men would come to visit Paul from the Corinthian church while he was in Ephesus Paul rejoiced over their visit. He was strengthened and ministered to by them. They supplied "the thing lacking yours." We're not sure what that was. It could have been something very tangible, like financial support. It could have been something like emotional support, which was lacking from the Corinthians because of the distance. It could have been both.

It seems likely that it was support at the emotional level due to what follows in verse 18 and the fact that it is connected to this thought by the conjunction γὰρ. I understand verse 18 to be giving a further explanation to what has been stated in verse 17. It is likely that Paul had "an empty spot in his heart" having not heard from the Corinthians. We know he seemed to love them in a special way. What was lacking was not due to neglect on the part of the Corinthians. It was simply a consequence of the distance and the difficulty of travel and communication. The personal visit of these Corinthian men ministered to Paul's inner longing for the relationship.

**16:18—For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.**

This is the work and labor Stephanas and his friends were given to. By their visit they had refreshed Paul, and through the letter they would carry back with them from Paul, they would refresh the spirit of the Corinthians. Men who did such things were to be "acknowledged," or recognized in a special way for their contribution. They are not to be taken for granted. Paul then, has completed the special exhortation he felt the need to give regarding Stephanas. Such men were to be valued.

**16:19—The churches of Asia greet you. Aquilla and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.**

Aquilla and Priscilla were former residents of Corinth (Acts 18:2). They too were tentmakers. They left Corinth when Paul did and took up residence in Ephesus (Acts 18:18 – 19). They would have been personally known by many in Corinth, and thus the "heartly" greeting that comes from them and their church. Aquilla and Priscilla were faithful workers and so it hardly seems a surprise that a church met in their home. Such "house-churches" were the most natural means of providing a meeting place to the church in the early stages of its development. Such churches were proof positive that buildings are not essential to the function of the local church should persecution, economics, or other factors dictate against building such places. The church gained legitimacy without buildings. This is not to suggest that buildings are bad. They do offer opportunity for much by way of community presence in ministry, particularly in a free society within modern Western culture. But there is something to be said for getting church ministry and activity in the homes, where the intimacy afforded by a smaller group provides great opportunity for discipleship and personal care.

**16:20—all the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.**

There is community among believers everywhere and so Paul conveys that to the Corinthian church. He urges that the normal greeting of the day, the kiss on the cheek, be especially given to fellow believers. Done in sincerity and in view of common faith and our common Lord, it says much more than the verbal greeting "hello." It is holy and signifies a union that is holy among all who are part of the body of Christ. To an acquaintance such a greeting is polite, to a family member it conveys a special affection, to a fellow believer it is the mark of a holy union.

**16:21—This greeting is in my own hand—Paul.**

The letter was dictated by Paul to someone else, likely Sosthenes (1:1), who recorded the words. This was usually the case with Paul, perhaps due to his eyesight. Here in this letter he provides his personal greeting. It likely, as he would mention elsewhere, served to ensure authenticity as well as the obvious personal touch (2 Thessalonians 3:17).

**16:22—if anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha.**

How could anyone not love the Lord? Yet we all falter at times and those given moments. If we are honest, we must question the depth of our love for Him. We must remember that the biblical concept of love is rooted in the idea of choice. Those loved are in some way chosen or singled out. Love is not primarily a matter of feeling in Scripture. When Paul speaks of individuals not loving the Lord, he is not speaking of regenerate people who in moments of weakness are disobedient. He's speaking of those who steadfastly refused to choose the Lord. These are those who hear the gospel message and will not repent. These will be accursed.

This way of understanding love can be illustrated by God's statement, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." He is referring to his choice of Jacob rather than Esau. The words love and hate speak to that choice not to the issue of his daily feeling about their moral performance. Neither one was very lovable in that sense. Those who love the Lord choose Him.

The word "Maranatha" means "our Lord come." It is one word prayer, a Greek transliteration of a two-word Aramaic expression "Mirana tha." It expresses Paul's deepest desire and his expectation that it could happen in his lifetime. In Paul's mind events could unfold very quickly to bring about all the signs associated with the consummation of the age. Christ's coming would be swift when the time was right.

**16:23—the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.**

Paul began his letter by saying, "Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1:3). He did so knowing he had some tough things to say to the Corinthians. As he draws the letter to a close, he expresses his desire for them that they experience God's grace. That is what they will need to deal with the normal ebb and flow of life. That is what they will need to raise their conduct to the level Paul has demanded of them.



The grace of God, His power freely flowing our direction because of Christ, provides all that we need to endure trial, to ward off the enemy, and to accomplish ministry objectives. We can fall short of appropriating that grace, but the grace is always with us. The Christian life is entered into by grace, reaching out and grasping what Christ has freely offered. The Christian life is lived through a moment by moment grasping of what the Holy Spirit freely provides, whether it be comfort, courage, physical strength, wisdom, clarity of mind, or power in prayer. It is this grace that pulls us along.

**16:24—My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

He ends with a personal expression of love to the Corinthians. Spiritual leaders convey not only God's love for others, but their own love for them. They love who God loves and do so because God loves them. The challenge for every Christian worker is to see people's "warts," as Paul had these Corinthians, to address them and then be able to feel love for them. Paul could and did, and therein lies his greatness.

Leaders are needed because people cannot live the life of Christ on their own. They must be led. Yet leaders often fall into the trap of resenting the inability of those whom they are called to lead. It is a curious error in logic that we must avoid by keeping our love fervent, our perspective clear and focused, and our expectations realistic and in check.

Amen—meaning So be it. May it be as I have stated, that was Paul's desire.