

# Notes on 1 Corinthians

2014 Edition

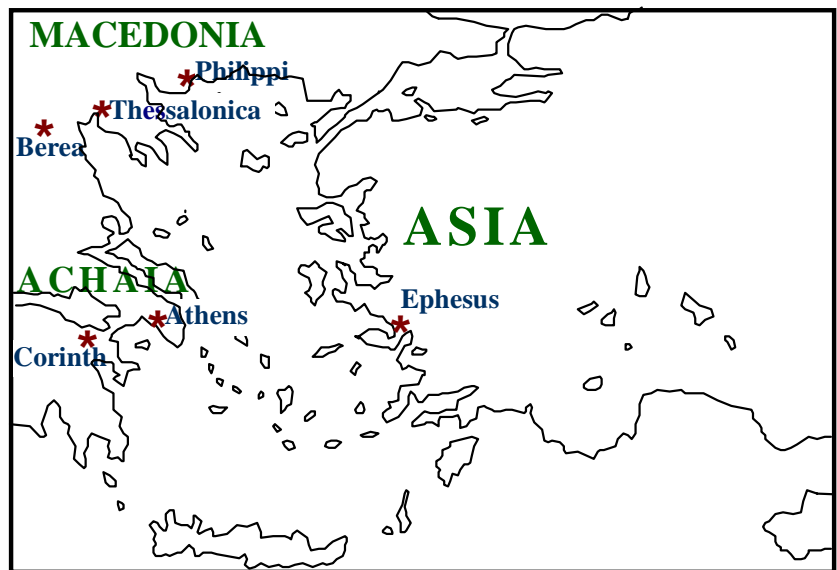
Dr. Thomas L. Constable

## Introduction

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Corinth had a long history stretching back into the Bronze Age (before 1200 B.C.).<sup>1</sup> In Paul's day, it was a Roman colony and the capital of the province of Achaia. The population consisted of: Roman citizens who had migrated from Italy, native Greeks, Jews (Acts 18:4), and other people from various places who chose to settle there.

The ancient city of Corinth enjoyed an ideal situation as a commercial center. It stood just southwest of the Isthmus of Corinth, the land bridge that connected Northern Greece and Southern Greece (the Peloponnesus). This site made Corinth a crossroads for trade by land, north and south, as well as by sea, east and west. In Paul's day, large ships would transfer their cargoes to land vehicles that would cart them from the Corinthian Gulf, west of the isthmus, to the Saronic Gulf,



east of the isthmus, or vice versa. There, stevedores would reload them onto other ships. If a ship was small enough, they would drag the whole vessel across the four-and-a-half-mile isthmus, from one gulf to the other. This did away with the long and dangerous voyage around the Peloponnesus by way of Cape Malea. Later the Greeks cut a canal linking these two gulfs. Nero began this canal, but it was finally completed in 1893.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," in *Romans-Galatians*, vol 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 175-76, for information helpful to most expositors.

<sup>2</sup>C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 1. Cf. Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 3:10:9; J. S. Howson, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 324, n. 7..

"Her [Corinth's] colonies were spread over distant coasts in the East and West; and ships came from every sea to her harbours. Thus she became the common resort and the universal market of the Greeks."<sup>3</sup>

Corinth's strategic location brought commerce, and all that goes with it, to its populace: wealth, a steady stream of travelers and merchants, and vice. In Paul's day, many of the pagan religions included *prostitution* as part of the worship of their god or goddess. Consequently fornication flourished in Corinth.

"Old Corinth had gained such a reputation for sexual vice that Aristophanes (*ca.* 450-385 B.C.) coined the verb *korinthiazō* (= to act like a Corinthian, i.e., to commit fornication)."<sup>4</sup>

"The old city had been the most licentious city in Greece, and perhaps the most licentious city in the Empire."<sup>5</sup>

The most notorious shrine was the Temple of Aphrodite, that stood on top of an approximately 1,900 foot high mountain just south of the city, the Acrocorinthus. Hundreds of female slaves *served* the men who "worshipped" there. The Greek geographer Strabo wrote of 1,000 prostitutes, but this probably referred to the early history of the old city, and it may have been an exaggeration.<sup>6</sup> Other major deities honored in Corinth included Melicertes, the patron of seafarers, and Poseidon, the sea god.

"All of this evidence together suggests that Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world."<sup>7</sup>

There were several other local sites of importance to the student of 1 Corinthians. These included the *bema* ("judgment seat" or "platform"), the place where judges tried important cases, including Paul's (Acts 18:12).<sup>8</sup> Cenchrea, the port of Corinth on the Saronic Gulf of the Aegean Sea, was the town from which Paul set sail for Ephesus during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18). Isthmia was another little town east of Corinth, just north of Cenchrea, that hosted the Isthmian Games every two or three years.<sup>9</sup> These athletic contests were important in the life of the Greeks, and Paul referred to them in this epistle (9:24-27).

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>4</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 2. See also David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 505, for other quotations about Corinth from ancient writers.

<sup>5</sup>Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, p. xii.

<sup>6</sup>See Fee, pp. 2-3.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>See the diagram of central Corinth in Mare, p. 186.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Howson, p. 540.

Paul had first arrived in Corinth from Athens, which lay to the east. In Corinth he preached the gospel and planted a church. There, too, he met Priscilla and Aquila, Jews who had recently left Rome. After local Jewish officials expelled the church from the synagogue, it met in a large house next door that Titius Justus owned. Paul ministered in Corinth for 18 months, probably in A.D. 51 and 52. He left, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him to Ephesus. Paul then proceeded on to Syrian Antioch by way of Caesarea.

Returning to Ephesus on his third journey, Paul made that city his base of operations for almost three years (A.D. 53-56). There he heard disquieting news about immorality in the Corinthian church. Therefore he wrote a letter urging the believers not to tolerate such conduct in their midst. Paul referred to this letter as his "former letter" (1 Cor. 5:9). It is not extant today.

Then he heard from "Chloe's people" that factions had developed in the church (1:11). He also received a letter from the church in Corinth requesting his guidance in certain matters (7:1). These matters were: marriage, divorce, food offered to idols, the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church, and the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Those who carried this letter also reported other disturbing conditions in the church (5:1; 16:17). These conditions were: the *condoning* rather than disciplining of immorality, Christians suing one another in the pagan courts, and disorders in their church meetings. These factors led Paul to compose another letter: "1 Corinthians." In *it* he dealt with the problem of factions, promised to visit them soon, and said he was sending Timothy to Corinth (chs. 1—4). Paul also included his responses to the Corinthians' questions about what he had previously written. He next dealt with the oral reports (chs. 5—6), and then with the questions that the Corinthian believers had written to him (chs. 7—16). Thus 1 Corinthians is an "occasional" epistle, namely, one occasioned by certain real situations. Paul evidently sent this epistle from Ephesus, by trusted messengers, in the late winter or early spring of A.D. 56 (cf. 16:8).<sup>10</sup>

It seems that a conflict had developed between the Corinthian church and its founder, Paul. There was internal strife in the church, as the epistle makes clear. However, the larger problem seems to have been that some in the community were leading the church into a view of things that was contrary to that of Paul. This resulted in a questioning of Paul's authority and his gospel (cf. Gal.). The key issue between Paul and the Corinthians was what it means to be "spiritual."<sup>11</sup>

"It [1 Corinthians] is not the fullest and clearest statement of Paul's Gospel; for this we must turn to Romans. Nor is it the letter that shows Paul's own heart most clearly, for in this respect it is surpassed by 2 Corinthians, and perhaps by other epistles too. But it has the great value of showing theology at work, theology being used as it was intended to be used, in the criticism and establishing of persons, institutions, practices, and ideas."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>On the integrity of 1 Corinthians, see Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 442-44.

<sup>11</sup>See Fee, pp. 4-15.

<sup>12</sup>Barrett, p. 26.

"If in Romans Paul resembles the modern professor of Biblical Theology, in I Corinthians he resembles the pastor-teacher, faced with the care of the church on the firing line of Christian warfare."<sup>13</sup>

"The letter is, in its contents, the most diversified of all St. Paul's Epistles . . ."<sup>14</sup>

"No part of the Pauline corpus more clearly illuminates the character of Paul the man, Paul the Christian, Paul the pastor, and Paul the apostle than do these epistles [1 and 2 Corinthians]."<sup>15</sup>

"These two epistles constitute the most telling condemnation of arrogance, self-promotion, boasting, and self-confidence in the Pauline corpus; conversely, they describe in practical terms the nature of Christian life and witness, emphasizing service, self-denial, purity, and weakness as the matrix in which God displays his strength. Perhaps the high-water mark is the emphasis on love as 'the most excellent way' (1 Cor. 12:31—13:13) all Christians must pursue."<sup>16</sup>

PAUL'S CORINTHIAN CONTACTS							
<i>Paul's founding visit</i>	His "former letter"	The Corinthians' letter to him	<b>First Corinthians</b>	<i>Paul's "painful visit"</i>	His "severe letter"	<b>Second Corinthians</b>	<i>Paul's anticipated visit</i>

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction 1:1-9
  - A. Salutation 1:1-3
  - B. Thanksgiving 1:4-9
- II. Conditions reported to Paul 1:10—6:20
  - A. Divisions in the church 1:10—4:21
    - 1. The manifestation of the problem 1:10-17
    - 2. The gospel as a contradiction to human wisdom 1:18—2:5
    - 3. The Spirit's ministry of revealing God's wisdom 2:6-16
    - 4. The immature and carnal conditions 3:1-4
    - 5. The role of God's servants 3:5-17
    - 6. Human wisdom and limited blessing 3:18-23
    - 7. The Corinthians' relationship with Paul ch. 4

<sup>13</sup>S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1229.

<sup>14</sup>W. J. Conybeare, in *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 380.

<sup>15</sup>Carson and Moo, p. 450.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 451.

- B. Lack of discipline in the church chs. 5—6
  - 1. Incest in the church ch. 5
  - 2. Litigation in the church 6:1-11
  - 3. Prostitution in the church 6:12-20
- III. Questions asked of Paul 7:1—16:12
  - A. Marriage and related matters ch. 7
    - 1. Advice to the married or formerly married 7:1-16
    - 2. Basic principles 7:17-24
    - 3. Advice concerning virgins 7:25-40
  - B. Food offered to idols 8:1—11:1
    - 1. The priority of love over knowledge in Christian conduct ch. 8
    - 2. Paul's apostolic defense ch. 9
    - 3. The sinfulness of idolatry 10:1-22
    - 4. The issue of marketplace food 10:23—11:1
  - C. Propriety in worship 11:2-16
    - 1. The argument from culture 11:2-6
    - 2. The argument from creation 11:7-12
    - 3. The argument from propriety 11:13-16
  - D. The Lord's Supper 11:17-34
    - 1. The abuses 11:17-26
    - 2. The correctives 11:27-34
  - E. Spiritual gifts and spiritual people chs. 12—14
    - 1. The test of Spirit control 12:1-3
    - 2. The need for varieties of spiritual gifts 12:4-31
    - 3. The supremacy of love ch. 13
    - 4. The need for intelligibility 14:1-25
    - 5. The need for order 14:26-40
  - F. The resurrection of believers ch. 15
    - 1. The resurrection of Jesus Christ 15:1-11
    - 2. The certainty of resurrection 15:12-34
    - 3. The resurrection body 15:35-49
    - 4. The assurance of victory over death 15:50-58
  - G. The collection for the Jerusalem believers 16:1-12
    - 1. Arrangements for the collection 16:1-4
    - 2. The travel plans of Paul and his fellow apostles 16:5-12
- IV. Conclusion 16:13-24
  - A. Final exhortations 16:13-18
  - B. Final greetings and benediction 16:19-24

## MESSAGE

A phrase in 1 Corinthians 1:2 suggests the theme of this great epistle. That phrase is "the church of God which is at Corinth." Two entities are in view in this phrase, and these are the two entities with which the whole epistle deals. They are *the church of God* and *the city of Corinth*. The church of God is a community of people who share the life of God, are under the governing will of God, and cooperate in the work of God. The city of Corinth was ignorant of the life of God, governed by self-will, and antagonistic to the purposes of God. These two entities stand in vivid contrast to one another and account for the conflict we find in this epistle. In the order in which Paul probably wrote them, Galatians deals mainly with soteriology, 1 and 2 Thessalonians with eschatology, and 1 and 2 Corinthians with ecclesiology.

The "church of God" in view in this epistle is not the universal church but the local church. These two churches are really not that different from one another. The local church is the *micro* form of the universal church, and the universal church is the *macro* form of the local church. What is true of one is true of the other. Whatever we find in a local church exists on a larger scale in the universal church. Whatever we find in one local church exists in many local churches. The New Testament consistently speaks of the church as people, not buildings. The Apostle Paul addressed these people as "believers" because that is what they were (cf. 1 Thess. 5:5). They shared the life of God because the Holy Spirit indwelt them (12:13). They had submitted to God's rule over them to some extent. They were people whom God had commissioned to carry the gospel to every creature. We need to bear these things in mind as we read about the church of God in Corinth, because we might otherwise conclude that they were unbelievers in view of their conduct.

The city of Corinth is the other entity of primary importance in our grasping the major significance of this epistle. What characterizes the world generally marked Corinth. In the first century, when other people described a person as a Corinthian, they were implying that lust, lasciviousness, and luxury characterized that one. These were the marks of Corinth. Corinth as a city was ignorant of the true God, entirely self-governing as a Roman colony, and self-centered in her world. These traits marked the lives of individual unbelievers in Corinth as well. The city was going in the opposite direction from the direction that God had called the church to go. The local culture always impacts the local church.

My father wrote in a devotional booklet on 1 Corinthians, "It seems very often that those communities which excel in the brightness of their shining are also characterized by the darkness of their shadows."<sup>17</sup>

The atmosphere of this epistle is Paul's concept of the responsibilities of the church in "the city" (its local culture). The apostle articulated this underlying emphasis in 1:9: "You were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Fellowship involves both privilege and responsibility. On the one hand, all of God's resources are at our disposal. On the other hand, all our resources should be at His disposal as well. The church in any place has a debt to the people who live there to proclaim the gospel to them

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<sup>17</sup>Robert L. Constable, *Called Saints*, devotional 3, page 2.

(Rom. 1:14-16). Paul wrote this whole letter out of an underlying sense of the church's responsibility for "the city" where it existed.

The church in Corinth was struggling to discharge its debt. It was failing in some very important areas: in readiness, in courage, and in conviction to declare the gospel. The Corinthian church was a carnal church. However, its carnality, as big a problem as that was, was only part of a larger problem. The bigger problem was its failure to carry out its God-given purpose in "the city," namely: to proclaim a powerful spiritual message to "the city." The Christians could not fulfill their purpose unless they dealt with their carnality. Why is carnality wrong? It is wrong, partially, because it keeps us from fulfilling the purpose for which God has left us on this planet.

In this letter we discover the causes of this church's failure. Another major emphasis is the secrets of the church's success. On the one hand, we find correctives of carnality. On the other, we have construction of spirituality. We will consider the causes of failure first.

The first cause of failure was that the spirit of "the city" had invaded the church like a virus. Every evil thing in the church to which Paul referred was prevalent in Corinth. Three things merit particular mention.

One of the symptoms of Corinthian cultural influence was intellectual freedom. There was much interest in intellectual speculation in Corinth, as there was in its neighbor city of Athens. The phrase "Corinthian words" was a synonym for rhetoric in Paul's day. Corinth glorified human wisdom. The Corinthians discussed and debated all sorts of opinions. Each intellectual leader had his group of disciples. Discussion of every subject under the sun prevailed with great diversity of opinion. Unfortunately, this spirit had invaded the church. There was a veneration of human wisdom among the Christians. They had chosen their own Christian leaders whom they viewed as celebrities (ch. 1). Intellectual restlessness prevailed in the church, as well as in the city. The believers sampled Christian teaching like the general populace dabbled in philosophical argumentation. This extended to such fundamental doctrines as the Resurrection (ch. 15). "Talk shows" would have been very popular in Corinth.

Another evidence that "the city" had invaded the church was the moral laxity that prevailed. Intellectual permissiveness led to the lowering of moral standards. When people view any idea as legitimate, there are few moral absolutes. The worship of "Aphrodite" on the mountain behind the city was extremely immoral, but the unsaved citizens viewed this worship as perfectly acceptable. "Live and let live" could have been their motto. Regrettably some Corinthians in the church were viewing morals the same way (ch. 5). We face a similar spirit in our day.

A third mark of the city's effect on the church was personal selfishness. In the city, every person did what was right in his own eyes. The result was that there was very little concern for other people and their welfare. One of the evidences of this attitude in the church was the Christians' behavior when they assembled for fellowship and worship. They were not sharing their food with one another (ch. 11). They were also interrupting speakers in the meetings, rather than waiting for the speaker to finish what he had to say (ch. 14). Where edification and order should have prevailed, self-glorification and chaos reigned.

These were only symptoms of a deeper problem. The real root issue was that the church had failed to recognize its uniqueness. The Christians had not grasped and retained some central truths, that the apostles had taught them, that identified the essence of their Christianity. Paul reminded them of these things in this epistle.

They had forgotten the central importance of the message of the Cross of Christ. This was a message not subject to debate. It rested on eyewitness testimony and divine revelation, not human speculation. Christians should unite around this message, share a common commitment to it, and make it the subject of our proclamation. We should appreciate the unity of the body of Christ while at the same time glorying in the diversity of its leaders.

The Corinthians had also forgotten the central importance of the power of the resurrection of Christ. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in Christians today, to enable them to live morally pure lives. Immorality is not an option for the believer. One of the most outstanding marks of a Christian should be moral purity. Because Jesus Christ was pure, we should be pure. And because He was pure, we can be pure.

The Corinthians had also forgotten the importance of Christ's command that we love one another. Selfishness had invaded the church. The believers needed to put the welfare of others, their fellow believers and their unsaved neighbors, before their own personal inclinations and preferences.

One of the central revelations of this epistle, then, is that the church fails to fulfill her function in her "city" (i.e., culture) when the spirit of "the city" invades her. The church allows the spirit of "the city" to invade her when she forgets that God wants her to be unique. The church fails when it adopts the ideas and activities of its environment rather than those revealed for it in God's Word. In view of this, Paul constantly appealed to his readers to be what they were in reality. We are not the people that we were. We are saints (1:2). We need to remember that and act accordingly. We do not need to catch the spirit of our age. We need to correct the spirit of our age. When the church catches the spirit of its age, it catches a disease and becomes anemic, weak, and sickly. We avoid catching this spirit by staying spiritually healthy and by constantly imbibing the message of the Cross. We do it by exercising the power of the Resurrection, and by keeping others, rather than self, primary as we walk by the Spirit.

I have already begun to hint at the secrets of the church's success, which is the second major revelation of this epistle.

The church must realize what it is to fulfill its function in its "city." We must appreciate our life in Christ.

The life of the church is the life of an organism (ch. 12). It has "one Lord" whose life we share. It has "one Spirit" who governs it: distributing abilities, assigning positions, and determining results as He sees fit in view of God's overall purpose. The church has "one God"—not many, as in Corinth—whose glory it should determine to promote. To the extent that a church realizes these truths, it will be ready to be successful in the sight of God. If it shares the spiritual life of her Lord, submits to the Spirit's leading, and seeks to



glorify God, it will succeed. By separating from the spirit of "the city," it can help and lift "the city."

The law of the church must be the *law of love*. This is the opposite of the selfish outlook. Paul emphasized the importance of love in chapter 13. It is no accident that Paul wrote his classic chapter on love to this church, because the Corinthian church was sadly lacking in love.

The power of the church is the resurrection life of Christ (ch. 15). We presently live between two resurrections, the resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection. These resurrections are literal realities. One has already taken place, and the other is yet to come. Between these resurrections, the church must fulfill its function in the world. The life that God has given to every believer is life that has power over death. One who overcame death has given it to us. This life is essentially different from what unbelievers possess. It is eternal, divine life. With such life, we can face any enemy as we serve God. Even the final enemy, death, cannot hold us. It could not hold Him who gave us His life.

Not only must we appreciate the uniqueness of our life as a church to fulfill our function, but we must also fulfill our function by invading "the city." Rather than allowing it to invade us, we must "invade" it in order to be successful. We do this by proclaiming that "Jesus is Lord." He is the only Lord. The proof of this is His resurrection. So who do we promote: Christian celebrities, or the Savior?

We also fulfill our function by rebuking the immorality of "the city," not just by decrying it but, what is more important, by overcoming it in our own lives. We do this by demonstrating the power of Christ's life within us by living morally pure lives, by the Spirit's enablement.

Third, we fulfill our function by counteracting the selfishness of our culture by practicing genuine Christian love. This means living for the glory of God and the good of others, rather than putting self first.

The church always fails when it becomes conformed to the maxims, methods, and manners of its "city"—the world in which it lives. It always succeeds when it stands separate from "the city" and touches it with its supernatural healing life. Christians have always tended either to isolate themselves from the world or to compromise with the world. We should live distinctively Christian lives in the world. Jesus, during His earthly ministry, is our great example.

This epistle calls the church in every age to recognize its responsibility to its "city." The church is responsible for the intellectual, moral, and social conditions in its "city." Unfortunately, many churches believe they exist merely to conserve the life of their members. We live in a cultural climate very similar to the one in which the Corinthian Christians lived. It is a culture characterized by intellectual pluralism, situational ethics, and personal selfishness. We face the same challenge the Corinthian believers did. Consequently, what this epistle reveals is extremely relevant for us. We have responsibility for how people in our "city" think, how they behave, and whom they

glorify. What they need is the message of the Cross delivered in the power of the Resurrection.

This letter is also a call to separation.

First, we must separate from absolute intellectual freedom and willingly submit our understanding and thinking to the revelation that God has given us in Scripture (chs. 1—4). There is a growing belief that all religions lead to God. Increasingly we hear that it does not matter too much what someone believes, because we will all supposedly end up in the same place eventually. We need to counter that view with the revelation of the exclusive way of salvation that God has provided for people who are hopelessly lost and dead in their sins. Peter preached, "There is salvation in no other name . . ." (Acts 4:12). Jesus said, "I am the way . . ." (John 14:6). Paul wrote, "There is one mediator . . ." (2 Tim. 2:5).

God has also called us to separation from moral laxity. Our culture is playing down personal morality and marital morality today. We need to proclaim the standards of God in these areas, even though we may face strong opposition for doing so. Paul held these standards up in chapters 5—7.

Likewise we need to separate from selfish living. We need to make a break with goals and plans that are designed to glorify ourselves. Instead, we need to evaluate all of our activities by the standard of chapter 13.

By way of application, we can conclude several things from these observations about the emphases in this epistle.

First, the influence of the church is the influence of its individual members. The sum of its individual members' influence is that church's influence. Everything that is true of the church, therefore, is usually true of the individual believer in it, to some extent.

Second, there should be perpetual conflict between the church and "the city." If there is no conflict, the church is not having its proper influence. It may be that "the city" has invaded the church.

Third, the message of the church must always be the message of the Cross and the Resurrection. This is a message of failure and success, of success out of failure. That is the message of hope "the city" needs to hear. Consequently, we need to "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," because we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (15:58).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:111-28.

## Exposition

### I. INTRODUCTION 1:1-9

To begin his letter, Paul greeted the Christians in Corinth and expressed gratitude to God for them. This positive and complimentary introduction contrasts with the generally critical spirit of the epistle that follows. Paul began with praise and commendation for his readers' good qualities, as was his typical practice. He knew this congregation well, having lived in Corinth for 18 months.

#### A. SALUTATION 1:1-3

The Apostle Paul began this epistle, as he did his others, by identifying himself and a fellow worker known to the readers. Then he identified and described the recipients of the letter and greeted them with a benediction. This is the most extensive elaboration of an address that we have in Paul's letters.

1:1 Paul's description of himself as one whom God had "called" to be "an apostle of Jesus Christ" reminded his original readers of his privilege and authority (cf. Rom. 1:1). The idea of authority received added strength from the reference to "the will of God" (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1).

"Sosthenes" was probably the same Sosthenes who was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17). He was with Paul in Ephesus when Paul penned this epistle. Though Luke did not record his conversion in the Book of Acts, Sosthenes quite clearly became a believer, assuming this was the same man. Probably he was the same man, and Paul referred to him because the Corinthians knew him well.

1:2 Paul frequently referred to all the Christians in a particular locality as "the church of God *in that place*" (cf. 11:16). However, to the Corinthian church, where party spirit was a problem, this reminder focused on the church's true Lord ("their Lord and ours"). This was not the church of Cephas (Peter), or Apollos, or even Paul, each of whom had their admirers in Corinth. There may or may not have been more than one house-church in Corinth at this time.<sup>19</sup>

God had set the Corinthians apart from sin (but not from other sinners) to be His holy people, by uniting them with Him through faith in His Son (cf. John 17:17). "Sanctified" (set apart) may be a metaphor for conversion here (cf. v. 30; 6:11). They were "saints" (Gr. *hagios*, holy) "by" divine "calling" (i.e., positional sanctification; cf. Rom. 1:7; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2). The Corinthians were not saintly in their conduct (i.e., progressive practical sanctification), as this letter makes clear. Perhaps

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<sup>19</sup>Craig S. Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, p. 21, believed there were many.

Paul mentioned their *saintly* "calling" to inspire them to be more saintly in their conduct. They were saints who were sinning.<sup>20</sup>

"Biblical sanctification is fourfold: (1) primary, equivalent to the 'efficacious grace' of systematic theology (cf. II Thess 2:13; I Pet 1:2); (2) positional, a perfect standing in holiness, true of all believers from the moment of conversion (cf. Acts 20:32; 26:18); (3) progressive, equivalent to daily growth in grace (cf. Jn 17:17; Eph 5:26; II Cor 7:1); (4) prospective, or ultimate likeness to Christ positionally and practically (cf. I Thess 5:23). The use of the perfect participle here refers to positional sanctification."<sup>21</sup>

"Paul understands Christian ethics in terms of 'becoming what you are,' a perspective that emerges in 1 Corinthians in a number of ways. . . .

"Perhaps the single greatest theological contribution of our letter to the Christian faith is Paul's understanding of the nature of the church, especially in its local expression. If the gospel itself is at stake in the Corinthians' theology and behavior, so also is its visible expression in the local community of redeemed people. The net result is more teaching on the church here than in any of Paul's letters."<sup>22</sup>

The saints "in every place" are probably those in churches in other places, some of whom had come to the Savior through the witness of Christians other than Paul. This seems more likely than that they were just Paul's converts near Corinth (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 16:1). This seems probable in view of "every place" (NASB) or "everywhere" (NIV), and in view of how this verse ends. Paul evidently wanted his readers to remember that they were part of a large body of believers (cf. 12:12); they were not the only church. They needed to fit into the family of God harmoniously, rather than being a rebel congregation.

Calling "on the name of . . . Christ" means confessing faith in Him, worshipping, and praying to Him (cf. Rom. 10:13-14).

1:3 This greeting is characteristically Christian (cf. Rom. 1:7; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3). It sums up Paul's whole theological outlook.

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<sup>20</sup>See Robert L. Saucy, "'Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):400-12.

<sup>21</sup>Johnson, p. 1230.

<sup>22</sup>Fee, pp. 17-18.

### **B. THANKSGIVING 1:4-9**

Paul followed his salutation with an expression of gratitude for his original readers, as he usually did in his epistles. In this case, the focus of his thanksgiving was on God's grace (help) in giving the Corinthians such great spiritual gifts (cf. Eph. 1:3-14). The Corinthian church was weak in its spirituality, but it was strong in its giftedness. The believers were blessed by the Spirit, but they were not walking by the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16).

"What is remarkable here is the apostle's ability to thank God for the very things in the church that, because of the abuses, are also causing him grief."<sup>23</sup>

- 1:4 Paul was grateful that God had poured out His unmerited favor and divine enablement (i.e., His "grace") on the Corinthian believers through "Christ Jesus." He usually referred to the Lord as "Christ Jesus" rather than as Jesus Christ. This put the emphasis on His divine character as Messiah, rather than on His human nature, and encouraged his readers to submit to Him as their Lord.
- 1:5 By "speech" (NASB) or "speaking" (NIV; Gr. *logos*), the apostle meant eloquence, the ability to express their "knowledge" (Gr. *gnosis*) fluently and effectively. As we shall see, knowledge and eloquence were two things the Corinthians valued very highly. These characteristics appear, by their usage in this letter and in 2 Corinthians, to have been common buzzwords in Corinth. *Logos* occurs 26 times in 1 and 2 Corinthians, compared to 58 times in Paul's other epistles, and *gnosis* appears 16 times in these two epistles, but only seven times in all of Paul's other writings. Paul had to put these gifts in their proper place among the other gifts. Nevertheless they were great gifts, and Paul was thankful that God had given them to the Corinthians.
- 1:6 The Corinthians' reception of these gifts had corroborated the truthfulness of the gospel. Giving these gifts was one of the ways God validated ("confirmed") the gospel message in the early history of the church (cf. Gal. 3:2-5; Heb. 2:3-4).
- 1:7 God had blessed the Corinthians greatly with spiritual gifts. Note that Paul praised his readers for their gifts ("you are not lacking in any gift"), but not their behavior. Ancient orators typically praised their audiences for both.<sup>24</sup> But Paul could not do that. The revealing ("revelation") of "the (our) Lord Jesus Christ" to His saints at the Rapture would be God's greatest gift to them. The early Christians awaited His return eagerly. This reference to the Rapture is one of many indications that the apostles taught the imminent (i.e., any moment) return of the Lord for His own (cf. 4:5;

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>24</sup>Keener, p. 22.

15:51-52; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Thess. 1:10-12; Titus 2:13; James 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20).<sup>25</sup>

"Three words are prominently employed in connection with the return of the Lord: (1) *Parousia*, also used by Paul of the coming of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:17), of Titus (2 Cor. 7:6, 7), and of his own coming to Philippi (Phil. 1:26). The word means *personal presence*, and is used of the return of the Lord as that event relates to the blessing of Christians (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Th. 4:14-17) and to the destruction of the man of sin (2 Th. 2:8). (2) *Apokalupsis*, employed here, and meaning *unveiling, revelation*. This word emphasizes the visibility of the Lord's return. It is used of the Lord (2 Th. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13), of the sons of God in connection with the Lord's return (Rom. 8:19), and of the man of sin (2 Th. 2:3, 6, 8), and always implies perceptibility. And (3) *epiphaneia*, translated 'brightness' (2 Th. 2:8) or 'manifestation' in some other versions. It means *an appearing*, and is used of both advents (first advent, 2 Tim. 1:10; second advent, 2 Th. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Ti. 2:13)."<sup>26</sup>

1:8 By God's sustaining power, Christians will stand free of guilt ("blameless") before Him on that "day." "The day of the (our) Lord Jesus Christ" is the Rapture (cf. Phil. 1:6; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess 3:13; 5:23; et al.). It is not *the day of the Lord*, which is a term both Old and New Testament writers used to refer to the period beginning with the Tribulation and extending through the Millennium.

"The expression 'the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,' identified with 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 7), is the period of blessing for the Church beginning with the rapture. This coming day is referred to as 'the day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14), 'the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil 1:6), and 'the day of Christ' (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). ('The day of Christ' in 2 Th. 2:2 should be rendered 'the day of the Lord.')

"The day of Christ" in all six references in the N.T. is described as relating to the reward and blessing of the Church at the rapture and in contrast with the expression 'the day of the Lord' (cp. Isa. 2:12, marg.; Joel 1:15, *note*; Rev. 19:19, *note*), which is related to judgment upon unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, and blessing on millennial saints (Zeph. 3:8-20)."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>See Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):146-48.

<sup>26</sup>*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1233.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

The Greek word translated "blameless" (*anegkletos*) means not reprobable or without accusation (cf. Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7). It does not imply that at the judgment seat of Christ there will be complete equality among believers (cf. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Moreover, it does not mean that once God regenerates a person, that individual never sins again (cf. 1 John 1:6-10). It means that every Christian will stand before the Lord guiltless, unimpeachable, because God has imputed the guilt of our sins to the Savior, and He has borne them (cf. Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

1:9 Paul's confidence that his readers would one day stand without guilt before the Lord did not rest on the Corinthians' ability to persevere faithfully to the end. It rested on God's ability and promises to preserve them. God had begun the good work of calling them "into fellowship with His Son," and He would be "faithful" to complete that work (cf. Phil. 1:6; 1 John 1:1-4).

"Fellowship" is a matter of degree. We enjoy more or less fellowship with a variety of individuals in our various circles of acquaintances. The Corinthians' fellowship with Christ began when they trusted Him as their Savior. But Paul's major concern, in this epistle, was that they would enjoy deeper, more intimate, and more satisfying fellowship with Christ, as they dealt with things that were limiting that fellowship. Christians have more or less fellowship with Christ to the extent that they trust and obey Him (cf. 1 John 1:3).

". . . God is the subject of all the actions of the thanksgiving. And in every case that work is mediated by or focused on 'his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.' Thus the christological emphasis that began in the salutation is carried through in an even more emphatic way in this introductory thanksgiving. Everything God has done, and will do, for the Corinthians is done expressly in 'Jesus Christ our Lord.'

"His concern here is to redirect their focus—from themselves to God and Christ and from an over-realized eschatology to a healthy awareness of the glory that is still future."<sup>28</sup>

An over-realized eschatology is an understanding of the future that stresses present realities to the exclusion of related future realities. For example, an over-realized view of the resurrection emphasizes the believer's present spiritually resurrected condition to the exclusion of his or her future physical resurrection.

The apostle's confidence in God, as he expressed this in these verses (vv. 4-9), enabled him to deal with the problems in the Corinthian church optimistically and realistically. God was *for* the Corinthians. Now they needed to orient themselves properly toward Him.

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<sup>28</sup>Fee, p. 46.

## **II. CONDITIONS REPORTED TO PAUL 1:10—6:20**

The warm introduction to the epistle (1:1-9) led Paul to give a strong exhortation to unity. In this exhortation, he expressed his reaction to reports of serious problems, in the Corinthian church, that had reached his ears.

"Because Paul primarily, and in seriatim fashion, addresses *behavioral* issues, it is easy to miss the intensely *theological* nature of 1 Corinthians. Here Paul's understanding of the gospel and its ethical demands—his theology, if you will—is getting its full workout.

". . . the central issue in 1 Corinthians is 'salvation in Christ as that manifests itself in the behavior of those "who are being saved.'" This is what the Corinthians' misguided spirituality is effectively destroying.

"Thus three phenomena must be reckoned with in attempting a theology of this Letter: (1) Behavioral issues (= ethical concerns) predominate. . . (2) Even though Paul is clearly after behavioral *change*, his greater concern is with the theological distortions that have allowed, or perhaps even promoted, their behavior. This alone accounts for the unusual nature of so much of the argumentation. . . (3) In every case but two (11:2-16; chaps. 12—14), Paul's basic theological appeal for right behavior is the work of Christ in their behalf."<sup>29</sup>

### **A. DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH 1:10—4:21**

The first major problem that Paul addressed was the divisions that were fragmenting this church.

". . . this opening issue is the most crucial in the letter, not because their 'quarrels' were the most significant error in the church, but because the nature of this particular strife had as its root cause their false theology, which had exchanged the theology of the cross for a false triumphalism that went beyond, or excluded, the cross."<sup>30</sup>

"Triumphalism" is the belief that Christians are triumphing now over sin and its consequences—to the exclusion of persecution, suffering, and some human limitations. It is sometimes, and it was in Corinth, an evidence of an over-realized eschatology, which is that we have already entered into certain blessings of salvation that really lie ahead of us in the eschaton (end times). Prosperity theology is one popular form of triumphalism.

#### **1. The manifestation of the problem 1:10-17**

The surface manifestation of this serious problem was the *party spirit* that had developed. Members of the church were appreciating their favorite leaders too much, and not

<sup>29</sup>Idem, "Toward a Theology of 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>30</sup>Idem, *The First . . .*, p. 50.



appreciating the others enough. This was really a manifestation of self-exaltation. They boasted about their teachers of wisdom in order to boast about themselves.

1:10 By exhorting his readers "in the name of their (our) Lord Jesus Christ," Paul was putting what he was about to say on the highest level of authority. This is the tenth reference to Jesus Christ in the first ten verses of the epistle. Clearly Paul was focusing the attention of his audience on Christ, who alone deserves the preeminence. The Corinthians were to regard what he was about to say as coming from the Lord Himself.

"That the true source of the Corinthians' illicit behavior is bad theology—ultimately a misunderstanding of God and his ways—is evident from the beginning, especially with Paul's use of crucifixion language in 1:10—2:16."<sup>31</sup>

Bad theology usually lies behind bad behavior. There was already disagreement among members of the congregation, but there was not yet division in the sense of a church split. Paul urged his original readers to unite in their thinking ("that you all agree . . . in the same mind"). The Greek word *katartizo*, translated "made complete," describes the mending of nets in Mark 1:19. Paul wanted them to take the same view of things, to have "the same mind" (cf. Phil. 2:2), and to experience unanimity in their judgment of what they needed to do ("be made complete . . . in the same judgment").

"The gospel that effects eschatological salvation also brings about a radical change in the way people live. This is the burden of this letter and the theological presupposition behind every imperative. Therefore, although apocalyptic-cosmological language is also found, salvation is expressed primarily in ethical-moral language."<sup>32</sup>

1:11 Today no one knows exactly who "Chloe" was. She evidently had a household or business that included servants, some of whom had traveled to Corinth, and had returned to Ephesus carrying reports of conditions in the Corinthian church. They had eventually shared this news with Paul. Quarrels and dissension should never characterize the church (cf. Gal. 5:20).

1:12 The Corinthians had overdone the natural tendency to appreciate some of God's servants more than others based on their own personal qualities or the blessings they had imparted.

It was normal that some would appreciate "Paul," since he had founded the church, and had ministered in Corinth with God's blessing for 18 months. "Apollos" had followed Paul there, and was especially effective in

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<sup>31</sup>Idem, "Toward a . . .," p. 41.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

refuting Jewish unbelievers, and in showing that Jesus was the Messiah. He was a gifted apologist and orator (Acts 18:24-28).

There is no scriptural record that Peter ever visited Corinth, though he may have. "Cephas" is the Hellenized form of the Aramaic *kepa*, meaning "rock" (cf. John 1:42). Since Peter was the leading apostle to the Jews, it is understandable that many of the early Christians, especially the Jewish believers, would have venerated him. A fourth group apparently professed loyalty to no human leader, but boasted of their allegiance to "Christ" alone. They appear to have regarded themselves as the most spiritual element in the church. They had devised their own brand of spiritual elitism that made them no better than the others.

1:13 This last group was using "Christ" as the name of a party within the church. This, in a sense, "cut" Him "off" from the other members of the church. Such an idea was unthinkable, and by stating it, Paul showed its absurdity.

Next Paul addressed his own supporters. How foolish it was to elevate him over Christ, since Christ did what was most important (was "crucified for" them). Note the central importance of the Cross in Paul's thinking. Paul's followers had not submitted to water baptism in order to identify with Paul, but to identify with the Savior. This reference shows how highly Paul regarded water baptism. It is God's specified way for the believer to identify publicly with his or her Lord (Matt. 28:19; cf. Acts 8:16; 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). It implies turning over allegiance to the One named in the rite.

1:14 "Crispus" was the ruler of the synagogue in which Paul preached when he first came to Corinth (Acts 18:8). "Gaius" may be the same person as Titius Justus. This man was a Gentile convert who lived next door to the synagogue, and who opened his home to the church after the Christians could no longer meet in the synagogue (Acts 18:7; Rom. 16:23).

"Gaius Titius Justus would be a complete Roman name (*praenomen, nomen gentile, cognomen*)."<sup>33</sup>

Some Christians contend that water baptism is essential for salvation. If it is, it would seem natural that Paul would have emphasized its importance by personally baptizing more than just two new believers in Corinth (cf. John 4:2).

1:15 Paul deliberately did not baptize most of his converts, so that there would be no question as to whose disciples they were ("no one would say you were baptized in my name"). This was one way he kept Christ central in his ministry. Paul believed baptism was important, but each baptism was

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<sup>33</sup>F. F. Bruce, ed., *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 34.

just as valid whether he, or any other believer, administered it. He was not superior to other believers in this respect.

1:16 The members of Stephanas' family ("household of") were the first converts in the Roman province of Achaia (16:15). It was unimportant to Paul whom he personally baptized; he was not keeping score. This is clear because he temporarily forgot (cf. v. 14) that he had baptized these people. As he continued to write, the Lord brought them to mind.

"Paul casts no reflection on baptism, for he could not with his conception of it as the picture of the new life in Christ (Rom. 6:2-6), but he clearly denies here that he considers baptism essential to the remission of sin or the means of obtaining forgiveness."<sup>34</sup>

1:17 Baptizing is part of the Great Commission that all Christians are responsible to carry out (Matt. 28:19). Paul's point was that "preach[ing] the gospel" is more important than baptizing. He used a figure of speech, *litotes*, for emphasis. In *litotes*, a writer makes a negative statement to emphasize the positive alternative. For example, "No small storm" (Acts 27:20), means a very large storm. Paul would hardly have said what he did if baptism were necessary for salvation.

"Cleverness of speech" (NASB) and "words of human wisdom" (NIV) greatly impressed the Greeks.

"The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words; and to them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected."<sup>35</sup>

One of the features of "Paul," "Apollos," Peter ("Cephas"), and "Christ," that made them attractive to various segments of the Corinthian church, was evidently their individual oratorical styles. Later, Paul pointed out that the Corinthian Christians were viewing things through *carnal* eyes, namely, seeing things as unsaved people do (3:1-4). Paul did not emphasize or place confidence in the *method* of his preaching, but rather in the *message* of "the Cross." He did not want to draw attention away from the gospel message to his style of delivering that message.

"Paul represents himself as a preacher, not as an orator. Preaching is the proclamation of the cross; it is the cross that is the source of its power."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:76.

<sup>35</sup>William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup>Barrett, p. 49.

"The Gospel's appeal is not to man's intellect, but to his sense of guilt by sin. The cross clothed in wisdom of words vitiates this appeal. The Gospel must never be presented as a human philosophical system; it must be preached as a salvation."<sup>37</sup>

This verse provides a transition into the next section of the epistle, in which Paul contrasted God's wisdom and human wisdom.

"With this observation Paul is fully launched on his epistle. As in Romans (cf. i. 16 ff.), mention of the Gospel sets his thought and language in motion."<sup>38</sup>

The crux of the Corinthians' *party spirit* lay in their viewing things as unbelievers did, specifically Christian preachers and teachers. They failed to see the important issues at stake in ministry, and instead paid too much attention to external, superficial matters. This was a serious condition, so Paul invested many words in the following section to deal with it (1:18—4:21). This is still a major problem for many Christians worldwide, who have been too influenced by the attention given to celebrities in their respective cultures.

## **2. The gospel as a contradiction to human wisdom 1:18—2:5**

Paul set up a contrast between cleverness of speech (impressive oratory) and the Cross in verse 17. Next he developed this contrast with a series of arguments. Boasting in men impacts the nature of the gospel. He pointed out that the gospel is not a form of *sophia* (human wisdom). Its message of a crucified Messiah does not appeal to human wisdom (1:18-25). Second, its recipients are not especially wise in the eyes of humanity (1:26-31). Third, Paul's preaching was not impressive in its human wisdom, but it bore powerful results (2:1-5).

"There are . . . three particularly important expository passages in 1 Corinthians. They may be regarded as the letter's principal theological discourses and as such deserve special attention.

"These three key discourses deal, respectively, with the wisdom of the cross (1:18—2:16), the nature of Christian community (12:4—13:13), and the resurrection of the dead (chap. 15). In each instance Paul's reflections on the topic are deliberate and focused, and lead him to develop a more or less extended and coherent argument. Moreover, each of these passages occurs at an important point within the overall structure of the letter. The discourse on wisdom, situated prominently at the beginning of the letter, supports the apostle's urgent appeals for unity (1:10—4:21). It can be argued that the discourse on Christian community undergirds, directly or indirectly, all of the counsels and instructions in chaps. 8 through 14. And

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<sup>37</sup>Johnson, p. 1231.

<sup>38</sup>Barrett, p. 49.

the discourse on resurrection, a response to those who claim that 'there is no resurrection of the dead' (15:12), is located prominently at the end of the letter."<sup>39</sup>

"In this part of the [first] discourse [i.e., 1:18—2:5] the argument proceeds in three steps: Paul makes his main point in 1:18-25, confirms it in 1:26-31 with an appeal to the Corinthians' own situation, and then further confirms it in 2:1-5 with reference to what and how he had preached in Corinth.

"The apostle's thesis is registered first in 1:18 and then twice restated (in 1:21 and 1:23-24)."<sup>40</sup>

Superficial displays of erudite oratory, which to the Corinthians appeared to be demonstrations of wisdom, impressed them too greatly. Paul pointed out that the wisdom of God, the gospel of Christ, had power that mere worldly wisdom lacked.

### **The folly of a crucified Messiah 1:18-25**

"This paragraph is crucial not only to the present argument (1:10—4:21) but to the entire letter as well. Indeed, it is one of the truly great moments in the apostle Paul. Here he argues, with OT support, that what God had always intended and had foretold in the prophets, he has now accomplished through the crucifixion: He has brought an end to human self-sufficiency as it is evidenced through human wisdom and devices."<sup>41</sup>

1:18        The "message ("word"; *logos*) of the Cross," in contrast to the speech (*logos*) of human wisdom (v. 17), has the Cross as its central theme. When people hear it, it produces opposite effects, in those "who are" on the way to perdition ("perishing"), from those on the way to glory ("who are being saved"). Paul contrasted "foolishness" and weakness with wisdom and "power" (cf. Rom. 1:16).

"What would you think if a woman came to work wearing earrings stamped with an image of the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb dropped over Hiroshima?

"What would you think of a church building adorned with a fresco of the massed graves at Auschwitz? . . .

"The same sort of shocking horror was associated with *cross* and *crucifixion* in the first century."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Victor Paul Furnish, "Theology in 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>41</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, p. 12.

- 1:19 Paul's quotation of Isaiah 29:14 ("I will destroy the wisdom of the wise . . .") shows that it has always been God's method to expose the folly of merely human wisdom.
- 1:20 The first three questions in this verse ("Where is the wise man" . . . the scribe? . . . the debater of this age?") recall similar questions that Isaiah voiced when the Assyrians' plans to destroy Jerusalem fell through (Isa. 33:18; cf. Job 12:17; Isa. 19:12). Paul's references to "this age" (Gr. *aión*) and "the world" (*kosmos*) clarify that here he was speaking of purely natural "wisdom," in contrast to the wisdom that God has revealed. God's wisdom centers on the Cross.

"In first-century Corinth, 'wisdom' was not understood to be practical skill in living under the fear of the Lord (as it frequently is in Proverbs), nor was it perceived to be some combination of intuition, insight, and people smarts (as it frequently is today in the West). Rather, wisdom was a public philosophy, a well-articulated world-view that made sense of life and ordered the choices, values, and priorities of those who adopted it. The 'wise man,' then, was someone who adopted and defended one of the many competing public world-views. Those who were 'wise' in this sense might have been Epicureans or Stoics or Sophists or Platonists, but they had this in common: they claimed to be able to 'make sense' out of life and death and the universe."<sup>43</sup>

- 1:21 Human reasoning ("wisdom") does not enable people to get "to know God," nor does it deliver ("save") them from their sins. These benefits come only through the "foolishness" (in the eyes of the natural man) of "the message preached" (Gr. *kerygma*), namely, the gospel.<sup>44</sup> The true estimation of things, therefore, is that human reasoning is folly.

Paul was not saying that all the "wisdom" that unbelievers have produced is worthless. However, in comparison with what the wisdom that God has revealed about Himself can accomplish, human wisdom is of little value.

"Not every human knowledge about any given topic—physics or medicine, for instance—is under debate in our text (at least not primarily). Paul has something more specific in mind . . . Paul aims specifically at the human wisdom *about God* as 'wisdom of the world,' at 'theo-logy' as 'wisdom of the world.'"<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>44</sup>See Larry J. Waters, "Paradoxes in the Pauline Epistles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:668 (October-December 2010):430-35.

<sup>45</sup>Peter Lampe, "Theological Wisdom and the 'Word About the Cross' The Rhetorical Scheme in I Corinthians 1—4," *Interpretation* 44:2 (April 1990):120.

1:22 The "Jews" characteristically asked "for signs" as demonstrations of God's power (cf. Matt. 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12; John 2:18). In contrast, the message of the Cross, "Christ crucified" (v. 23), seemed to be a demonstration of weakness, specifically: Jesus' apparent inability to save Himself from death.

Likewise, the Greeks typically respected "wisdom"—an explanation of things that was reasonable and made sense to them. However, the message of the Cross did not appear to make sense. How could anyone believe in, and submit to, One who was apparently not smart enough to save Himself from suffering execution as a criminal—when He was not one? Furthermore, how could anyone look to such a One as a Teacher of "wisdom"?

". . . the 'Jews' and 'Greeks' here illustrate the basic idolatries of humanity. God must function as the all-powerful or the all-wise, but always in terms of our best interests—power in our behalf, wisdom like ours! For both the ultimate idolatry is that of insisting that God conform to our own prior views as to how 'the God who makes sense' ought to do things."<sup>46</sup>

1:23 A crucified Messiah was "a stumbling block" to the Jews, because they regarded Messiah as the Person on whom God's blessing rested to the greatest degree (Isa. 11:2). After all, Jesus' executioners hung Him on a tree, the sure proof that God had cursed Him (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

Paul used the terms "Greeks" (v. 22) and "Gentiles" (v. 23) interchangeably.

"It is hard for those in the christianized West, where the cross for almost nineteen centuries has been the primary symbol of the faith, to appreciate how utterly mad the message of a God who got himself crucified by his enemies must have seemed to the first-century Greek or Roman. But it is precisely the depth of this scandal and folly that we *must* appreciate if we are to understand both why the Corinthians were moving away from it toward wisdom and why it was well over a century before the cross appears among Christians as a symbol of their faith."<sup>47</sup>

1:24 The "called" contrast with the unsaved, among "both Jews and Gentiles [Greeks]" (1:2; Rom. 8:28, 30). "Christ" is the instrument of God's "power" in conquering the forces of evil and delivering people from their control. He is also the instrument of God's "wisdom" in solving the problem that human reasoning could not unravel, namely: how people can

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<sup>46</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 74.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

know God and come to God. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament personified wisdom as God's agent in revelation, creation, and redemption. Jesus Christ personally is *that wisdom*, because He is "the power of God" for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16; cf. v. 30).

"This is Paul's most brilliant epigrammatic description of the world in which the Gospel is preached, and of the Gospel itself."<sup>48</sup>

1:25 The "foolishness" of God, the gospel of the Cross, is "wiser" than human wisdom, and the "weakness" of God, in the eyes of unbelievers, is "stronger" than human strength.

"At the moment, books are pouring off the presses telling us how to plan for success, how 'vision' consists in clearly articulated 'ministry goals,' how the knowledge of detailed profiles of our communities constitutes the key to successful outreach. I am not for a moment suggesting that there is nothing to be learned from such studies. But after a while one may perhaps be excused for marveling how many churches were planted by Paul and Whitefield and Wesley and Stanway and Judson without enjoying these advantages. Of course all of us need to understand the people to whom we minister, and all of us can benefit from small doses of such literature. But massive doses sooner or later dilute the gospel. Ever so subtly, we start to think that success more critically depends on thoughtful sociological analysis than on the gospel; Barna becomes more important than the Bible. We depend on plans, programs, vision statements—but somewhere along the way we have succumbed to the temptation to displace the foolishness of the cross with the wisdom of strategic planning. Again, I insist, my position is not a thinly veiled plea for obscurantism, for seat-of-the-pants ministry that plans nothing. Rather, I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy, by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight. Whenever the periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry."<sup>49</sup>

In these verses (18-25), Paul sought to raise the Corinthians' regard for the gospel message, by showing its superiority over anything humans can devise through reasoning and philosophizing. His purpose in doing so was to encourage them to value the content

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<sup>48</sup>Barrett, p. 54.

<sup>49</sup>Carson, p. 26.



of the message more highly than the "wisdom" evident in the presentations of those who delivered it.

"One can scarcely conceive a more important—and more difficult—passage for the church today than this one. It is difficult, for the very reason it was in Corinth. We simply cannot abide the scandal of God's doing things his way, without our help. And to do it by means of such weakness and folly! But we have often succeeded in blunting the scandal by symbol, or creed, or propositions. God will not be so easily tamed, and, freed from its shackles, the preaching of the cross alone has the power to set people free."<sup>50</sup>

### **The folly of the Corinthian believers 1:26-31**

Paul turned from the content of the gospel to the Corinthian believers, to strengthen his argument that the gospel he preached contradicted human expectations. God had chosen "nobodies" rather than the "beautiful people" of Corinth. They themselves were evidence that God's "foolishness" confounds the "wise." Jeremiah 9:23-24, with its emphasis on boasting in one proper thing (knowing the Lord) rather than an improper thing (human wisdom, power, or riches), lies behind this pericope.

- 1:26 This verse reflects that there were few in the Corinthian assembly who came from the higher intellectual and influential levels of their society ("not many wise" or "mighty" or "noble"). This characteristic has marked most local churches throughout history.
- 1:27-28 The Old Testament is full of illustrations of God choosing less than promising material as His instruments. In the Book of Judges, for example, we see Him using an ox goad (Judg. 3:31), a nail (4:21), trumpets, pitchers, and lamps (Judg. 7:20), a millstone (Judg. 9:53), and the jawbone of a donkey (Judg. 15:15). His method did not change with the coming of Christ, nor has it changed since then.
- "Things that are not" are things that are "nothing." They are non-entities in the eyes of the world. The "things that are" are those things and individuals that the world values highly. Paul did not mean that God cannot or will not save the affluent, but the glory of the gospel is that God's mercy extends to those whom the affluent tend to write off.
- 1:29 God has chosen this method so the glory might be His and His alone. How wrong then to glorify His messengers! Glorifying ("boast before God") here has the idea of putting one's full confidence in some inappropriate object in order to secure oneself.
- 1:30 God is the source ("by His doing") of the believer's life "in Christ" (cf. v. 2). "Righteousness," "sanctification," and "redemption" are metaphors of salvation, the result of the "wisdom" we find in Christ (cf. 6:11).

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<sup>50</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 77-78.

"Righteousness" focuses on our right standing in the sight of God (justification), "sanctification" on His making us more holy (sanctification), and "redemption" on our liberation from sin (glorification).

- 1:31 This loose quotation from Jeremiah 9:24 ("Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord") summarizes Paul's point. Instead of emphasizing the Lord's servants and what they have done, we should focus on what the Lord Himself has done in providing wisdom and power in Christ.

God's purpose was not to make a superficial splash but to transform lives, something the Corinthians could see in their own experience.

"The issue of election is particularly strong in 1 Corinthians. Paul opens the letter by affirming not only his call ('called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God') but also that of the Corinthians ('called to be saints,' 1:2). This conviction reappears in the final verse of the thanksgiving, functioning there as part of the ultimate ground for Paul's confidence (1:9): 'God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.' When the issue surfaces again a few verses later with renewed rhetorical emphasis (1:24, 26-30), it becomes clear that the concept of election or call no longer merely undergirds Paul's argument; it has instead become the focus of this argument. The Corinthians, it seems, have not grasped what election means."<sup>51</sup>

### **The folly of Paul's preaching 2:1-5**

Paul offered the example of his preaching among the Corinthians as a further illustration of what the wisdom of God can do, in contrast to what the words that humans regard as wisdom can do.

"The matters of *literary context* and *the continuity of the argument* are all important in understanding I Corinthians 2. Otherwise, much of the chapter reads like pure gnosticism, and Paul is made the advocate of a private religion reserved for the spiritual elite (2:6-16)."<sup>52</sup>

- 2:1 Some early texts have "mystery" (Gr. *mysterion*) instead of "testimony" (*martyrion*). The difference is not very significant. The gospel was both the message that God had previously not revealed, which the apostles made known, and the message to which they bore witness. The apostle's preaching in Corinth was "not in excellence of rhetorical display or of philosophical subtlety."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Jouette M. Bassler, "Paul's Theology: Whence and Whither?" in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup>Charles B. Cousar, "Expository Articles: I Corinthians 2:1-13," *Interpretation* 44:2 (April 1990):169.

<sup>53</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, p. 170.

"When a speaker would first come to a city (2:1), he would advertise a meeting where he would declaim (normally praising the city); if he proved successful and attracted enough students, he would stay on in the city. Paul points out that he did not come to them like such sophists, pandering to popularity (see further 2 Cor 2:17)."<sup>54</sup>

2:2 As far as his preaching went, Paul only spoke about "Christ, and Him crucified." This was his regular practice (Gal. 3:1). He left all other knowledge aside ("determined to know nothing among you except . . .").

"According to Acts xviii. 1 Paul moved on to Corinth from Athens, and it is often supposed that after an attempt to marry the Gospel to Greek philosophy in his Areopagus speech (Acts xvii. 22-31), which was attended with indifferent success (Acts xvii. 32 ff.), he determined to change his tactics and preach nothing but the cross.<sup>55</sup> For this imaginative picture there is no evidence whatever."<sup>56</sup>

". . . 1 Corinthians is more than a practical letter aimed at telling the readers what to do and what not to do. The letter in fact primarily seeks to influence the minds, dispositions, intuitions of the audience in line with the message Paul had initially preached in the community (2:2), to confront readers with the critical nature of God's saving action in the crucified Christ in such a fashion that it becomes the glasses to refocus their vision of God, their own community, and the future. The advancing of such an epistemology gives the letter a theological purpose that unifies its otherwise unconnected structure."<sup>57</sup>

Centering his preaching on "Christ crucified" was not a new tack that Paul took in Corinth—because of previous lack of response (cf. Acts 17:22-31).

"What Paul avoided was artificial communication that won plaudits for the speaker but distracted from the message. Lazy preachers have no right to appeal to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 to justify indolence in the study and careless delivery in the pulpit. These verses do not prohibit diligent preparation, passion, clear articulation, and persuasive presentation. Rather, they warn against any method that leads people to say, 'What a marvelous preacher!' rather than, 'What a marvelous Savior!'"<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Keener, p. 34.

<sup>55</sup>E.g., Barclay, p. 26.

<sup>56</sup>Barrett, p. 63.

<sup>57</sup>Charles B. Cousar, "The Theological Task of 1 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 102.

<sup>58</sup>Carson, p. 35.

2:3 The reason Paul felt ("was with you in") weak ("weakness"), fearful ("fear"), and "much trembling," was probably his sense of personal inadequacy, in the face of the spiritual needs he faced when he entered Corinth (cf. Acts 18:9-10).

"If this was epilepsy, or malarial fever (Ramsay), it might well be the recurrent trouble which he calls a 'thorn for the flesh' (2 Cor. xii. 7)."<sup>59</sup>

2:4 Paul did not design his content ("message," *logos*), and or his delivery ("preaching," *kerygma*), to impress his hearers with his eloquence or wisdom. Rather, he emphasized the simple message he announced. His preaching was a "demonstration," not a performance. Conviction came as a result of the Holy Spirit's "power," not the "wisdom" of the preacher. We should not interpret this verse as deprecating persuasion (cf. 2 Cor. 5:11), but as an instruction that conviction does not come as a result of persuasive arguments. It comes as the Holy Spirit opens blind eyes when Christians herald the gospel. The warning is against self-reliance in the preacher.

"Those who minister the Word must prepare and use every gift God has given them—but they must not put their confidence in themselves."<sup>60</sup>

"Mere human *sophia* may dazzle and overwhelm and seem to be unanswerable, but . . . it does not penetrate to those depths of the soul which are the seat of the decisions of a lifetime."<sup>61</sup>

"It is possible for arguments to be logically irrefutable, yet totally unconvincing."<sup>62</sup>

2:5 Paul's reason for this approach was so his converts would recognize that their "faith" rested on a *supernatural* rather than a natural foundation, namely, the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit by "the power of God" (cf. Matt. 16:15-17).

The apostle's conviction concerning the importance of the superior power of the gospel message was clear in his own preaching.

### **3. The Spirit's ministry of revealing God's wisdom 2:6-16**

Paul's reference to the Holy Spirit's "power" (vv. 4-5) led him to elaborate on the Spirit's ministry in enlightening the minds of believers and unbelievers alike. The Corinthians needed to view ministry differently. The key to this change would be the Holy Spirit's

<sup>59</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 31.

<sup>60</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:573.

<sup>61</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 33.

<sup>62</sup>Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 52.

illumination of their thinking. People who are pursuing true wisdom (*sophia*) cannot perceive it except as the Holy Spirit enlightens them.

Paul constructed his argument in this section with three contrasts that overlap slightly: The first contrast is between those who receive God's wisdom and those who do not (vv. 6-10a), and the second one contrasts the Spirit of God with the spirit of the world (vv. 10b-13). The third contrast is between the "natural" person and the "spiritual" person (vv. 14-16).<sup>63</sup>

"Paul is not here rebuilding what he has just torn down. He is retooling their understanding of the Spirit and spirituality, in order that they might perceive the truth of what he has been arguing to this point.

"While it is true that much of the *language* of this paragraph is not common to Paul, the explanation of this phenomenon is, as before, to be found in his using *their* language but filling it with his own content and thus refuting them. The theology, however, is his own, and it differs radically from theirs. . . . Paul's concern throughout is to get the Corinthians to understand who they are—in terms of the cross—and to stop acting as non-Spirit people."<sup>64</sup>

2:6 Even though Paul's preaching of the gospel was simple and clear, there was a depth to his message that he did not want the Corinthians to overlook. Immature Christians cannot understand the real depths of the gospel fully ("we do speak wisdom among those who are mature"). Later, in chapter 3, Paul would say the Corinthians were *not mature* (3:1-3).

Paul could have been using the word "mature" as synonymous with "Christian." Or he may have selected the word "mature" because the Corinthians loved to apply it to themselves.

"All Christians are 'mature' in the sense that they have come to terms with the message of the cross, while all others, by definition, have not."<sup>65</sup>

However, Paul later distinguished between the natural person, the spiritual person, and the carnal person (2:14—3:4). Consequently by "spiritual" he probably meant one who has followed God's Spirit for some time, not just one who has His Spirit (cf. Heb. 6:1).

The deep things of God require a type of "wisdom" that is different from secular wisdom ("not of this age"). In "this" present "age" between the two advents, those who control the climate of public opinion dominate secular wisdom. These "rulers" are those individuals who set the standard for what unbelieving people, who disregard God's revelation, consider as true (cf.

<sup>63</sup>Carson, pp. 46, 52, 56.

<sup>64</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 100.

<sup>65</sup>Carson, p. 47.

1:20, 26), particularly those who were responsible for Jesus' crucifixion (v. 8). However, these people are on the way out ("passing away"), because the popular perception of what is true changes, and because Christ will end their rule eventually (15:24-25; Col. 2:15).

2:7 The "wisdom" that Paul proclaimed was a "hidden" wisdom that God had not previously revealed. It was not a revelation in addition to the gospel. The message about "Christ crucified" embodies *the* wisdom of God. This message was unknown ("a mystery") before Christ came. The message of the Cross is a further unfolding of God's plan and purpose—beyond what He had revealed and what people had known previously.

Paul expounded on the fact that God had decreed ("predestined") this mystery from before creation ("before the ages") in Ephesians 3:2-12. The Ephesian church was more mature and better able to understand this revelation than was the Corinthian congregation.

The end purpose of this new revelation was the saints' ultimate glorification ("to our glory") by conformity to the image of God's Son.

2:8 The "rulers of this age" are probably the same intellectual trend-setters Paul mentioned above (v. 6). Those responsible for the death of Christ were members of this group (cf. Acts 3:17-18; 4:25-28). "If they had understood" the central place that Jesus Christ occupied in God's plan, "they would not have crucified" Him, thus assuring their own doom (cf. Luke 23:34).

"The key [to this section of Paul's argument] is verse 8. The rulers of this age (whether understood as political and religious figures or as apocalyptic powers) demonstrated their ignorance of divine wisdom when they crucified the Lord of glory. The very mention of the crucifixion shows the argument very much in continuity with the preceding section and reminds us that the wisdom of God, which is incomprehensible to the world, is nothing other than the word of the cross (1:23-24)."<sup>66</sup>

The phrase "Lord of glory" implies the divine fullness. It also ties in with the saints' glory (v. 7). It is through union with Him that we will experience glory.

2:9 The source of this quotation is evidently Isaiah 64:4 and 65:17. It summarizes Paul's point well. There are many things we can know only by revelation. The more God reveals, the more clearly we see that He has designed His plans for humanity *for our blessing*.

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<sup>66</sup>Cousar, "Expository Articles . . .", p. 171.

"Paul's thought is that there is no method of apprehension open to man (eyes, ears, or understanding) which can give him any idea of the wonderful things that God has made ready for *them that love him* (cf. Rom. viii. 28)."<sup>67</sup>

2:10 The wonderful mysteries that God has prepared for those who love Him are not knowable only by a select group of Christians. Any and every believer can understand and appreciate ("to us God revealed") them, because the indwelling Holy "Spirit" can enlighten him or her.

"The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded."<sup>68</sup>

The mystery religions of Greece promised deeper insights and new knowledge to their devotees. However, any Christian can apprehend the very best that God has revealed, because every believer possesses the spiritual organ of perception, namely: the Holy Spirit. "Searches" (Gr. *ereuna*) means continually examines.

"Apparently they have thought of spirituality mostly in terms of ecstasy and experience, which has led some of them to deny the physical body, on the one hand, and to a sense of 'having arrived' (cf. 4:8), on the other. . . .

"They considered Paul's preaching to be 'milk'; on the contrary, he implies, redemption through the cross comes from the profound depths of God's own wisdom, which his Spirit, given to those who love him, has searched out and revealed to us."<sup>69</sup>

2:11 It is necessary for someone to be a human being to understand things having to do with human life. Animals cannot do it. Likewise it is necessary for someone to have the indwelling "Spirit of God" to understand (know) "the things (*thoughts*) of God." Unbelievers cannot do it.

2:12 "We" is emphatic in the Greek text. All believers have received "the Spirit who is from God," i.e., the Holy Spirit (12:13; Rom. 8:9). He helps us understand ("know") the "mind (*thoughts*," v. 11) of God" and "the things" God has "freely given to us." This Spirit is vastly different from "the spirit (viewpoint or mindset) of the world." Unbelievers cannot understand (know) the things of God (as believers can), because they have no one who can help them perceive these supernatural things.

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<sup>67</sup>Morris, p. 57.

<sup>68</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:7:4.

<sup>69</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 110, 111.

". . . as a man's own spirit best understands his inner thoughts, so the Spirit of God alone can grasp divine truths (verse 11), and alone can interpret to those within whom he dwells 'the things that are freely given to us by God' (RV)."<sup>70</sup>

"The tragic failures of men to understand clearly God's revealed will is but a commentary on the weakness and limitation of the human intellect even when enlightened by the Holy Spirit."<sup>71</sup>

2:13 Paul and the other apostles spoke the truths ("things") that the Holy Spirit had helped them understand (cf. vv. 6-7). They did not choose their "words" based on what *people* generally regarded as the best ones with which to persuade ("words taught by human wisdom"). They did not rely on the rhetorical forms that the orators used, either. The Holy Spirit guided them not only in their communication of divine truth, but in their perception of it. "Spiritual *thoughts*" or truths are concepts the Holy Spirit enables us to understand. "Spiritual *words*" are those He guides us to use in expressing these thoughts. The Spirit enables us to speak in language appropriate to the message instead of "words taught by (according to) human wisdom." In short, the Holy Spirit plays an indispensable role both in understanding and in communicating God's revelation.

2:14 The "natural man" is any person who does not possess the Holy Spirit, namely: unbelievers.<sup>72</sup> Every human being is a natural man until he or she trusts in Christ and receives the Spirit. Paul called type of person a "natural (Gr. *psychikos*) man" because he or she is *only* "natural" and is spiritually dead, without God He has no supernatural Person indwelling him, and his viewpoints and ideas are exclusively the natural, human kind. He "cannot" accept ("understand") all that God has revealed, because he does not possess the indwelling Spirit of God, who enables believers to understand spiritual matters, "that are spiritually appraised (evaluated, discerned)."

The natural person can, of course, understand the gospel and experience salvation but only when the Holy Spirit illuminates his or her understanding. Paul did not mean that an unbeliever is *mentally* or *intellectually* incapable of understanding the words of Scripture. However, an unbeliever rejects, and does not *accept*, everything that God wants him or her to have. One of these things is eternal life through faith in His Son. It is as though God is speaking in a language that the unbeliever does not understand ("it is foolishness to him"); he or she fails to respond properly.

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<sup>70</sup>Bruce, p. 40.

<sup>71</sup>Robertson, 4:87.

<sup>72</sup>See Barrett, p. 77.



He or she needs an interpreter. That is a ministry that only the Holy Spirit can perform.<sup>73</sup>

"It will help us to think clearly about this issue if we recognize that 1 Corinthians 2 is not concerned with the mechanics of how people understand their Bibles generally, or with the quality of a particular scholar's exegesis of some specific Hebrew text. . . . His focus is the fundamental message of the crucified Messiah. And this, he insists, is fundamentally incomprehensible to the mind without the Spirit."<sup>74</sup>

"Human ears cannot hear high-frequency radio waves; deaf men are unable to judge music contests; blind men cannot enjoy beautiful scenery, and the unsaved are incompetent to judge spiritual things, a most important practical truth."<sup>75</sup>

2:15

In contrast to the natural man stands the "spiritual" (Gr. *pneumatikos*) man. He or she is a Christian, a person who possesses the Holy Spirit (cf. 3:1). One of the things the spiritual person is able to do is "appraise" or make judgments (Gr. *anakrino*) regarding "all (spiritual) things." In other words, the spiritual person has a discernment of spiritual truth that a "natural" person lacks. This affects his values and decisions. For this very reason he is a puzzle to the natural man. The unsaved person cannot understand holiness, but the holy person can understand the depths of evil. Even carnal fellow believers cannot fully understand the spiritually mature person ("he himself is appraised by no man"). That is all right, in one sense, because the spiritual person's judge is ultimately God, not other people.<sup>76</sup>

When I was in Edinburgh, Scotland, I visited the tomb of John Knox, the great Protestant reformer who made Scotland "Presbyterian." His burial place is marked by a small plaque that is now on the pavement of the parking lot behind his church, St. Giles Cathedral. A car was parked over it, and I had difficulty finding it. It is ironic that Knox's grave is in a parking lot covered by automobiles that occasionally drip oil on it, whereas John Lennon's grave is beautifully preserved in Westminster Cathedral. This reflects the world's distorted values.

This verse is not saying that believers are responsible only to God, but that the Christian is ultimately *answerable* to God alone (cf. 4:3-4). Paul

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<sup>73</sup>See Robert A. Pyne, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April-June 1993):204-5.

<sup>74</sup>Carson, p. 64.

<sup>75</sup>Johnson, p. 1233.

<sup>76</sup>See Charles C. Ryrie, "What Is Spirituality?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:503 (July-September 1969):204-13, or *idem*, *Balancing the Christian Life*, pp. 12-23.

recognized the value of church discipline (5:3-8), constructive criticism (11:17-18), and self-judgment (11:31) as having immediate value.

2:16 To summarize his thought, Paul again cited Isaiah (Isa. 40:13; cf. Rom. 11:34). That prophet marveled at the mind of God. Who can fully understand what God understands ("Who has known the mind of the Lord")? Certainly no one can. On the other hand, mature believers can understand—to a much greater degree than unbelievers—because they have the Spirit of God in them, and He controls them. Consequently, the mature Christian has "the mind of Christ." That is, he or she views life to some extent as Jesus did, because that person understands things from God's perspective, at least partially.

In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul urged his readers to adopt "the mind (attitude) of Christ" (Phil. 2:5). Even though we "have" (possess) "the mind of Christ," we need to *adopt* it, that is, to use it to view life as He did. One mark of Christian maturity is the believer's consistent employment of Christ's attitude and viewpoint in all of life.

In this section (vv. 6-16), Paul elaborated on the subject of the Holy Spirit's ministry of illuminating the believer about what God has revealed. He had previously reminded his readers that he had conducted himself in their midst with this supernatural viewpoint (vv. 1-5).

The basic theological point of tension, between Paul and the Corinthians in this epistle, was over what it means to be a *pneumatikos*, a "Spirit-person." Because of their experience of *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), they considered themselves to be "as the angels," and in need only of shedding their bodies. The sources of this distorted view were popular philosophy tainted with Hellenistic dualism. "Hellenistic dualism" viewed anything material as evil, and anything non-material, or "spiritual," as good. The result was a "spirituality" and "higher wisdom" that had little connection with ethical behavior.<sup>77</sup>

"The concern from here on will be to force them to acknowledge the folly of their 'wisdom,' which is expressing itself in quarrels and thereby destroying the very church for which Christ died.

"Paul's concern needs to be resurrected throughout the church. The gift of the Spirit does not lead to special status among believers; rather, it leads to special status vis-à-vis the world. But it should do so always in terms of the centrality of the message of our crucified/risen Savior. The Spirit should identify God's people in such a way that their values and worldview are radically different from the wisdom of this age."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Fee, "Toward a . . .," pp. 37-38.

<sup>78</sup>Idem, *The First . . .*, p. 120.

#### **4. The immature and carnal conditions 3:1-4**

The apostle proceeded to tell the Corinthians that they had not been viewing things from the spiritual point of view. He was referring specifically to their exaltation of one or another of God's servants above the others (1:10-17). Paul urgently appealed to them to change.

3:1 Here Paul introduced a third category of humanity, namely, the "fleshen" (Gr. *sarkinos*) or immature Christian. The Corinthians were not spiritually mature even though they possessed the Holy Spirit. Paul said he could "not speak to" them "as to spiritual men." They were not demonstrating the discernment that typically marks believers. He explained the reason in verse 3. Instead he had to address them as "fleshen" people, even as "babes (infants) in Christ." Immaturity is not blameworthy if one is very young. However, if a person has been a Christian for some time, and is still immature, his or her condition is blameworthy (cf. 2:6). Such was the condition of the Corinthians.

3:2 When Paul had been with them they were new converts, so he gave them the "milk" of the Word, the ABCs of the faith (cf. 1 Pet. 2:2). Now, when they should have been able to take in more advanced teaching ("solid food"), they were not able to do so (cf. Heb. 5:11-14). Their *party spirit* was an evidence of spiritual immaturity, lack of growth. Their fundamental need was not a change of diet but a change of perspective.

Paul's use of the vocative ("brothers [and sisters]") and second person plural pronouns in verses 1 and 2 indicates that he was addressing the whole church, not just a faction within it (cf. 1:10). The actions of many in the congregation had defiled the whole body.<sup>79</sup>

3:3 The reason Paul did not feel he should give them more advanced instruction was that their flesh (Gr. *sarkikos*) still dominated them. As believers, they were making provision for the flesh to fulfill its desires (cf. Rom. 13:14), rather than following the leading of the Holy Spirit. They were not only immature believers but also carnal ("fleshly") believers. The carnal, "fleshly" believer is the fourth type of person Paul mentioned in 2:14—3:4.

Students of this section of the epistle have understood Paul as describing several different kinds of people. Some believe he saw only a difference between unbelievers (natural) and believers (spiritual).<sup>80</sup> Others have seen three kinds of people in view: unbelievers, spiritual believers, and carnal believers.<sup>81</sup> Still others have seen four: unbelievers (*psychikos*), believers

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>80</sup>E.g., John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works*, p. 126.

<sup>81</sup>E.g., Lewis S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 3-14.

(*pneumatikos*), immature believers (*sarkinos*), and carnal believers (*sarkikos*).<sup>82</sup> I believe the last view is the best.

A saved person can behave like a Christian or like a non-Christian. Paul called the Christian who behaves like a non-Christian "carnal." Galatians 5:16 proves that there is such a thing as the carnal Christian: "Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh." To turn this verse around, it is possible for a Christian not to walk by the Spirit and so to carry out the desires of the flesh: to be a carnal believer.

Paul let the Corinthians diagnose themselves: Are not "jealousy and strife" the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20)? Did these qualities not indicate that they were conducting themselves as unbelievers ("walking like mere men"), as people who do not even possess the Holy Spirit?<sup>83</sup> Their inability to get along with other Christians showed that their flesh (sinful human nature) controlled them. So they were not only immature but carnal.

"Being human is not a bad thing in itself, any more than being *sarkinoi* ["fleshen"] is (v. 1). What is intolerable is to have received the Spirit, which makes one more than merely human, and to continue to live as though one were nothing more."<sup>84</sup>

3:4 Partisanship is a manifestation of human wisdom. All the philosophical schools in Greece had their chief teachers. There was keen competition among these teachers, and there were strong preferences among the students as to who was the best. However, this attitude is totally inappropriate when it comes to evaluating the servants of Christ. It is completely contrary to the mind of Christ, who Himself stooped to raise others.

"It is sinful for church members to compare pastors, or for believers to follow human leaders as disciples of men and not disciples of Jesus Christ. The 'personality cults' in the church today are in direct disobedience to the Word of God. Only Jesus Christ should have the place of preeminence (Col. 1:18)."<sup>85</sup>

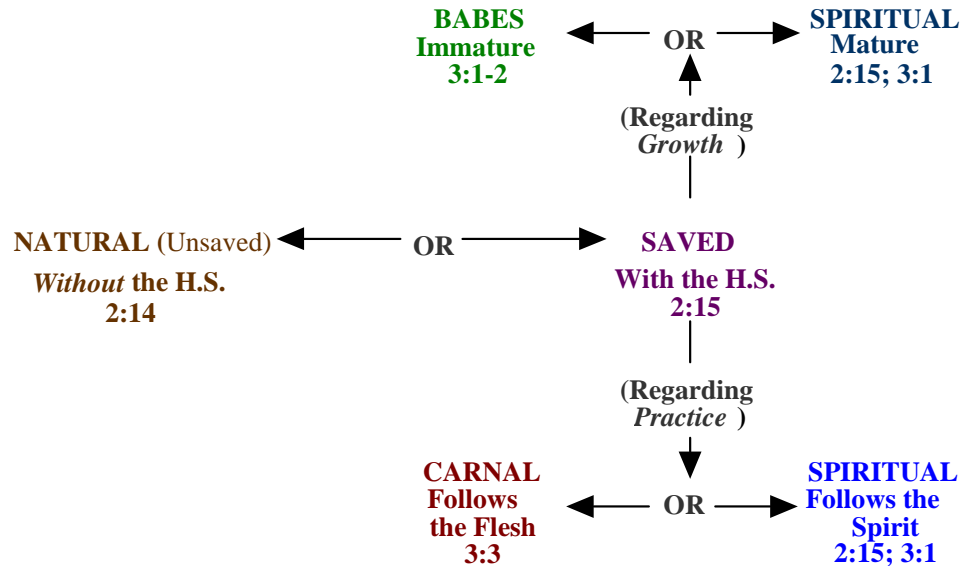
This section of verses makes it very clear that it is possible for genuine Christians to behave as, and to appear to be, unbelievers (cf. Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). The Corinthians' conduct indicated carnality, not lack of eternal life. Prolonged immaturity as a result of carnality is a condition all too prevalent in modern Christianity. Often we mistake carnal Christians for natural men, unbelievers.

<sup>82</sup>E.g., Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Spiritual Man," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:498 (April-June 1968):139-46.

<sup>83</sup>For an excellent discussion of carnal believers, see Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 311-31.

<sup>84</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 127.

<sup>85</sup>Wiersbe, 1:569.



### **5. The role of God's servants 3:5-17**

Paul turned next to a positive explanation of how his readers should view him and his fellow workers.

"At issue is their radically misguided perception of the nature of the church and its leadership, in this case especially the role of the teachers."<sup>86</sup>

"In the first place, they have not understood the nature and character of the Christian message, the true wisdom (1:18—3:4). In the second place, their sectarian spirit indicates that they have no real understanding of the Christian ministry, its partnership under God in the propagation of the truth (3:5—4:5)."<sup>87</sup>

#### **Fellow workers under God 3:5-9**

"Besides evidencing a misapprehension of the gospel itself, the Corinthians' slogans bespeak a totally inadequate perception of the church and its ministry."<sup>88</sup>

- 3:5 "Paul," "Apollos," and, of course, Cephas (mentioned previously), were only "servants" of Christ, each serving in his own way and sphere of opportunity under the Master's direction.
- 3:6-8 Obviously, "God" deserved more credit for the church in Corinth than either its planter or its nurturer. Next to Him, the others were "nothing." Human laborers are all equal, in the sense that they are human laborers

<sup>86</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 128.

<sup>87</sup>Johnson, p. 1231.

<sup>88</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 129. See Jay E. Smith, "Slogans in 1 Corinthians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:655 (January-March 2010):68-88.

with human limitations. Nevertheless the Lord will reward each one at the judgment seat of Christ because of his or her work. Note that it is our "labor" that will be the basis of our "reward," not the fruit of our labor.

3:9 Paul and Apollos were "fellow workers" *for* God. Elsewhere Paul spoke of believers as fellow workers *with* God (2 Cor. 6:1), but that was not his point here.

". . . they were called co-workers not because they bring anything of themselves, but because God uses their work after he has rendered them capable of it and has furnished them with the necessary gifts."<sup>89</sup>

The Corinthians were "the (God's) field" in view in the preceding illustration (vv. 6-8). Paul now compared them to "a (God's) building." He proceeded to develop this illustration in the following verses (vv. 10-17). This verse is transitional.

To help the Corinthians abandon the party spirit that marked their church, Paul stressed the equality of their teachers as fellow workers *under* God's sovereign authority (vv. 5-9).

"Everything is God's—the church, its ministry, Paul, Apollos—everything. Therefore, it is absolutely not permissible to say 'I belong to Paul,' since the only legitimate 'slogan' is 'we all belong to God.'"<sup>90</sup>

"A sermon on our text [3:1-9] would focus on the attitudes of preachers and congregations about one another as they relate to the gospel of the cross. Peruse this brief sermon sketch:

"'I belong to Paul.' 'I belong to Apollos.' Familiar cries in a world of hi-tech religion. See huge Sunday crowds squint under the glare of spotlights as 'their' preachers dazzle millions of electronic viewers with wisdom and rhetorical charm. Overhear the Christian public admire TV evangelists and big-time clergy: 'Oh, I like to listen to \_\_\_\_.' 'Well, he's O.K. but I like \_\_\_\_ better.' You fill in the blanks. Yes, everyone has their favorite preacher nowadays. In spite of all the notorious hucksters, 'preacher religion' is in. The result? An increasingly fragmented church. 'I belong to Paul and you don't.' It is enough to make Corinth look tame by comparison."<sup>91</sup>

### **Builders of God's temple 3:10-15**

"The usual explanation of this passage is that it describes the building of the Christian life. We all build on Christ, but some people use good materials while others use poor materials. The kind of material you use determines the kind of reward you will get.

<sup>89</sup>Calvin, 2:5:17.

<sup>90</sup>Smith, p. 134.

<sup>91</sup>C. Thomas Rhyne, "Expository Articles: I Corinthians 3:1-9," *Interpretation* 44:2 (April 1990):177.

"While this may be a valid *application* of this passage, it is not the basic *interpretation*. Paul is discussing the building of the local church, the temple of God."<sup>92</sup>

3:10 In the new illustration, Paul "laid the (a) foundation" of the church in Corinth by founding the church, and others added the walls and continued "building" on that foundation. Paul's special mission from God was to "found" (plant) churches (Rom. 15:20). He readily acknowledged that it was only by God's grace that he could do so as a skillful ("wise") "master builder." He added a word of warning, that the quality of the materials and workmanship that went into building the church are very important ("how he builds").

"By laying the foundation he did—Jesus Christ and him crucified—he was the truly 'wise' master-builder in contrast to the 'wise' in Corinth, who are building the church of totally incongenial materials and are therefore in danger of attempting to lay another foundation as well."<sup>93</sup>

3:11 Christ Himself is the "foundation" of the church (Matt. 16:18; cf. Isa. 28:16; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6). Basing a church on the work of any other person, even Peter, is improper. Paul laid the foundation for the church in Corinth when he preached Christ and Him crucified there. The apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church in a secondary sense only (Eph. 2:20).<sup>94</sup>

3:12-13 Even though the quality of the foundation was the best, the condition of the building also depended on what others built "on" top of "the foundation." In Paul's day, contractors built buildings of durable and or combustible materials, as they do today. In the building of the Corinthian church, durable materials ("gold, silver, precious stones") were those activities that sprang from reliance on Christ and Him crucified: the Foundation. These works contributed to the permanent spiritual strengthening of the believers. The combustible materials ("wood, hay, straw") were activities that arose out of human "wisdom" in all its forms. These made no lasting contribution, although they may have served some temporary need. Examples of the former include instruction in the Word of God, training in evangelism, and the refutation of error. Illustrations of the latter would be the teaching of popular ideas not rooted in Scripture, social work that excluded the gospel message, and the use of time and money for simply temporal purposes. However, Paul's main concern in this metaphor was the people doing the building rather than the building itself.

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<sup>92</sup>Wiersbe, 1: 579.

<sup>93</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 138.

<sup>94</sup>See Barrett, pp. 87-88.

"The six materials in 1 Cor 3:12 are arranged to denote a descending scale by moving from a unit of three good qualities to a unit of three bad ones. The verse uses pictures to represent what Paul calls 'work' in vv 13 and 14. Paul's main point is to encourage building with quality materials that will meet with God's approval and receive eternal reward. Interpreters sometimes restrict the meaning of the symbols either to doctrine, to people, to activity, or to character. The [proper] conclusion is that Paul in the symbols combines several things that lead to Christ's good pleasure and a believer's reward. These are sound doctrine, activity, motives and character in Christian service."<sup>95</sup>

God will expose the work ("show it") of each of God's servants on "the day." This is a reference to the day when the believer will stand before God, and give an account of the stewardship of his or her life—at Christ's judgment seat (cf. Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; Rev. 22:12; et al.).<sup>96</sup> Then "the fire" of God's judgment "will test the quality of each person's (man's) work" and his workmanship, but not his person. The durability or transience of those works will then become apparent ("evident").

3:14-15 If the servant of the Lord has made a *lasting* contribution to the building of the church, by emphasizing some aspect of the gospel, "he (or she) will receive a reward." If someone has not done so, because he or she has pursued human "wisdom," that person will not be rewarded, although he or she will retain his or her salvation ("be saved"). Paul likened the unfaithful servant to a man pulled to safety "through the" flames ("fire") of his burning house (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). The context identifies those who "suffer loss" as being *Christians* who seek to build the church with materials that fail to withstand God's assessment. They do not refer to all carnal Christians (vv. 1-4), though carnal Christians may fail to make lasting contributions to the church.<sup>97</sup> Malachi 3:2-3 may have been in Paul's mind when he wrote verse 15.<sup>98</sup> However, Malachi predicted a future cleansing of Israel, whereas Paul spoke of a future testing of Christians.

The *rewards* in view seem to refer to opportunities to glorify God by serving Him (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). The Christian will have greater or lesser opportunities to serve God—during the Millennium and forever after—in proportion to his or her faithfulness on earth now.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup>James E. Rosscup, "A New Look at 1 Corinthians 3:12—'Gold, Silver, Precious Stones,'" *Master's Seminary Journal* 1:1 (Spring 1990):33.

<sup>96</sup>See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, pp. 31-37; and Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, p. 10.

<sup>97</sup>Cf. Carson, pp. 79-80.

<sup>98</sup>John Proctor, "Fire in God's House: Influence of Malachi 3 in the NT," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:1 (March 1993):9-14.

<sup>99</sup>See Wall, pp. 112-21, for an explanation of the negative judgment at the *bema*.



The New Testament writers spoke of these rewards, symbolically, as "crowns" elsewhere (cf. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). It is perfectly proper to serve Christ in order to gain a crown to one day lay at the feet of our Savior (cf. Matt. 6:20). The "crown" is a symbol of a life of faithful service that we performed out of gratitude for His grace to us (cf. Rev. 4:4, 10). If the idea of serving God for a reward makes you uncomfortable, may I suggest that you read again the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7)? There Jesus repeatedly appealed to His hearers to follow His teaching with the prospect of receiving an eternal reward for doing so. Scripture appeals to us on many levels to serve the Lord. Certainly love for Him should be our primary motivation. However, the biblical writers also urged believers to serve the Lord out of: love for other people, the fear of the Lord, the prospect of having to give an account of our lives to Him at the judgment seat, and for other reasons.<sup>100</sup>

The testing in view here provides no support for the unbiblical doctrine of purgatory. It is the believer's *works* that God subjects to the fires of testing, not the believer personally. God applies the fire *to determine the quality of the works*, not to purify the believer.<sup>101</sup>

"[The] whole subject of rewards for the believer is one, I am afraid, rarely thought of by the ordinary Christian, or even the average student of the Scriptures. But it is both a joyous and solemn theme and should serve as a potent incentive for holiness of life."<sup>102</sup>

"The Bible describes the judgment seat of Christ for one main purpose: to affect the way we think and live—to motivate us to anticipate with joy His return and to live our lives to please Him, not worrying about the way others treat us or what they may think about us. . . .

"Though not the only motivating factor, I am convinced that the doctrine of the judgment seat (*bema*) is meant to be one of the major scriptural motivations for godly living."<sup>103</sup>

"It is unfortunately possible for people to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated on merely worldly wisdom, be it philosophy, 'pop' psychology, managerial techniques, relational 'good feelings,' or what have you. But at the final judgment, all such building (and perhaps countless other forms, where systems have become more

<sup>100</sup>For a helpful introduction to the study of the Christian's rewards, see Wall, or Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*.

<sup>101</sup>For further refutation of the doctrine of purgatory, see Calvin, 3:5:6-9.

<sup>102</sup>Wilbur Smith, "Inheritance and Reward in Heaven," *Eternity*, March 1977, p. 79.

<sup>103</sup>Wall, pp. 19, 21.

important than the gospel itself) will be shown for what it is: something merely human, with no character of Christ or his gospel in it."<sup>104</sup>

### A warning against destroying the church 3:16-17

This is perhaps the strongest warning in the New Testament against taking the church lightly, and destroying it with the world's wisdom and division.

3:16 The Corinthian church was a "temple" that God's Spirit indwelt. Paul was not speaking here of individual believers being temples of God, though we are (6:19), or of the church universal as the temple of God, though it is (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). He meant the collective body of believers that made up the local church, as is clear from his use of the plural "you" in the Greek text and the singular "temple." The local congregation was not just any building (v. 9), but a sanctuary (Gr. *naos*) that God inhabited. The presence of the "Spirit" alone marked them off as God's sanctuary in Corinth ("the Spirit of God dwells in you"). Ten times in this epistle Paul asked, "Do you not know?" (cf. 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24), and each time the question introduces an indisputable statement.

The New Testament writers spoke often of the church (a group of believers) as God's temple. They did not usually make the distinction between the holy place and the holy of holies that existed in the Israelites' physical temples. They viewed the temple complex as a whole. However, here, Paul did distinguish the place of God's dwelling, the temple building itself (*naos*), from the temple precincts that surrounded and included the sanctuary (Gr. *hieron*).

3:17 If "any (man)" servant of the Lord tears down ("destroys") the church ("temple"), instead of building it up, God will tear down ("destroy") him or her (Acts 9:1-4). He usually does this by sending temporal discipline in one form or another (cf. 5:5). The Greek word translated "destroys" (*phtheiro*) also means "defiles." It is a very serious thing to destroy or defile a holy temple, and that is what the local church is (cf. Matt. 16:18).<sup>105</sup> In the ancient world, destroying a temple was a capital offense. The church is "holy," in that God has set it aside to glorify Himself—even though it is not always as holy in its *conduct* as it is in its calling. Verses 16 and 17 anticipate the discussion of church discipline in 5:1-13.<sup>106</sup>

"There are three types of builders—the wise man (vv. 12, 14), the unwise (v. 15), and the foolish, who injures the building (v. 17)."<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 145.

<sup>105</sup>See James Sweeney, "Jesus, Paul, and the Temple: An Exploration of Some Patterns of Continuity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46:4 (December 2003):605-31.

<sup>106</sup>Brian S. Rosner, "Temple and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 5," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991):137-45.

<sup>107</sup>Johnson, pp. 1234-35. Cf. Lowery, p. 511.

Paul ended his discussion of the local church (vv. 5-17), as he did, to stress the importance of the work that God's servants were doing at Corinth. He also did so to stress the need for unity of viewpoint in the congregation.

". . . this is one of the few texts in the NT where we are exposed both to an understanding of the nature of the local church (God's temple indwelt by his Spirit) and where the warning of v. 17 makes it clear how important the local church is to God himself."<sup>108</sup>

### **6. Human wisdom and limited blessing 3:18-23**

The apostle now combined the threads of his argument, which began at 1:18, and drew a preliminary conclusion. If his readers insisted on taking the natural view of their teachers and continued to form coterie of followers, they would limit God's blessing on themselves needlessly. Rather than their belonging to Paul or Apollos, both Paul and Apollos, and much more, belonged to them because they were Christ's and Christ is God's.

3:18 Paul continued the subject of spiritual rather than natural wisdom. He urged his readers to turn away from attitudes the world regards as "wise," and to adopt God's viewpoint ("become foolish") so they would be truly wise.

3:19-20 Again Paul used Old Testament quotations to give added authority to his statements (cf. 1:19, 31; 2:9, 16). Here he referred to Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. The best wisdom the natural man can produce ("the wisdom of this world") "is foolishness," compared with the wisdom God has revealed in His Word. Unbelieving humanity cannot avoid God's judgment through its own rationalizing. The "reasoning(s) of the wise" of this world are "useless" regarding the most important issues of life. In 1:18-25, Paul had said that the wisdom of God, namely, "Christ crucified," is foolishness to the world. Here he made the same point in reverse: the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God's sight. Thus these statements form bookends for this section of text (an *inclusio*).

3:21 "So then" marks the apostle's conclusion. It is wrong to line up in cliques behind one or another of God's servants ("let no one boast in men"). In doing so, the Corinthians were only limiting God's blessing on them. They were rejecting God's good gifts by not appreciating all the people God had sent to help them.

"Perhaps we cannot help but have our personal preferences when it comes to the way different men minister the Word. But we must not permit our personal preferences to become divisive prejudices. In fact, the preacher I may enjoy the least may be the one I need the most!"<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 149.

<sup>109</sup>Wiersbe, 1:581.

3:22 All of God's servants ("Paul or Apollos or Cephas") were His gifts to the Corinthians. The "world" (Gr. *kosmos*, universe) belongs to the Christian, in the sense that he or she will inherit it and reign over it with Christ one day. "Life" and all it holds ("things present or things to come") contains much blessing for us ("all things belong to you"). Even "death" is a good gift for believers, because it will usher them into the presence of our Savior. This list is similar to the one in Romans 8:38-39 and, as there, is a way of saying "everything." The figure of speech here is a merism. In a merism, objects that are poles apart are intended to encompass everything between them.

"The five things . . . represent the fundamental tyrannies of human life, the things that enslave us, the things that hold us in bondage."<sup>110</sup>

3:23 All the Corinthians ("you") belonged "to Christ," not just those of the "Christ party" (1:12). They belonged to *Him*, not to one of His servants. Even "Christ belongs to God," in the sense of being under the authority and protection of the Father (cf. 8:6; 11:3; 15:28). This is functional rather than ontological subordination. "All things" belong to the Christian because the Christian belongs to Christ, and all things are His (given over to Him; cf. 15:27; Col. 1:16). Thus in Him we possess all things, but it is *only in Him* that we do.

Paul made several references to the administrative order of God when correcting disorders of various kinds in the Corinthian church. This order is: the Father over the Son, the Son over the man, and the man over the woman (e.g., 8:6; 11:3; 15:24-28; et al.). The apostle stressed divine order because the Corinthians were disorderly, having failed to submit to the Holy Spirit's control.

"On this high note Paul's response to the Corinthian pride in man and wisdom has come to a fitting conclusion. But the problem is larger still; so he turns next to deal with their attitudes toward him in particular."<sup>111</sup>

### **7. The Corinthians' relationship with Paul ch. 4**

The apostle now returned to the subject of himself and the other teachers of the Corinthians as "servants of God (Christ)." He did so to say more about what it means to be a servant of God. In this section he clarified the essential features of an acceptable servant of God. He did this so his readers would appreciate their leaders more, and so that they themselves would follow Paul's example as a servant. However, Paul stressed his authority, too, since the factions in the church that favored Apollos, Peter, or Christ—actually were opposing Paul.

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<sup>110</sup>Carson, p. 86.

<sup>111</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 155.

"Throughout 1 Corinthians 1—4 Paul is primarily concerned to address the factionalism that was tearing the church apart with squabbles, jealousy, and one-upmanship. But because not a little of this quarreling arose from the habit of different groups in the church associating themselves with various well-known Christian leaders ('I follow Paul,' . . .), Paul found it necessary to address several Corinthian misconceptions regarding the nature of genuine Christian leadership. These believers were adopting too many models from their surrounding world."<sup>112</sup>

"What Paul is trying to do above all else is to get the Corinthians to enter his orbit, to see things from his eschatological perspective. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of his being right and their being wrong on certain specific issues. It has to do with one's whole existence, one's whole way of looking at life, since 'you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'"<sup>113</sup>

### Judging God's servants 4:1-5

"The first paragraph (vv. 1-5) leads the way by making an application of the servant model and showing how that relates to their treatment of him [Paul]. He changes images from farm to household and insists that he is *God's* servant, not theirs; and they are not allowed to judge another's servant. While on the theme of judgment, he gently broadens the perspective to remind them again of the future judgment that all must experience."<sup>114</sup>

4:1           Learners should view teachers as "servants of God (Christ)" and "stewards of God's mysteries," rather than as party leaders. Paul used a different word for servants here (*hyperetai*) than he did in 3:5 (*diakonoi*). This word means an under-rower, a figure taken from the galley ships of the time. Slaves who rowed, under the authority of the man who coordinated their individual efforts, propelled the ship. The ship sailed straight ahead, rather than in circles, as the slaves followed the instructions of their leader. The other word (*diakonoi*) is the normal word for a servant.

A "steward" ("those entrusted with," NIV) was a servant whom his master entrusted with the administration of his business or property. His job was to devote his time, talents, and energy to executing his master's interests, not his own. The figure stresses both the apostles' humble position as belonging to Christ, and their trusted yet accountable position under God. The "mysteries of God" refer to the truths of the Christian faith.

"('Mysteries' appear often in this letter, 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; and perhaps 2:1; this is consistent with their interest in

<sup>112</sup>Carson, p. 93.

<sup>113</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 157.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 156.

Hellenistic wisdom [cf. Wis 2:22; 6:22; as opposed to pagan mysteries in Wis 14:15, 23]."<sup>115</sup>

- 4:2 The most important quality in a steward is that he manage his master's affairs so the desires of his lord materialize (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 16:1-13; 19:11-27; 1 Pet. 4:10). He must be faithful to his master's trust ("be found trustworthy"). For Paul, this meant remaining faithful to the gospel as he had received it and preached it (cf. 15:1-11).
- 4:3 It mattered little to Paul ("is a very small things") how well the Corinthians or anyone else thought he was carrying out his stewardship, or how popular or unpopular he was. His personal evaluations of his own performance were irrelevant too. What did matter to him was God's estimation of his service. Paul did not give much time and attention to introspection ("I do not even examine myself"), though he sought to live with a good conscience before God. Rather, he concentrated on doing the job God had put before him, to the best of his ability, since he was accountable (cf. 3:13).
- 4:4 As far as Paul knew, he was serving God faithfully ("I am conscious of nothing against myself"). However, he realized that his conscience might not be as sensitive as it should be ("yet I am not by this acquitted"; he was not totally in the clear).<sup>116</sup> Only his Master ("the Lord") had the insight, as well as the authority, to judge ("examine") him.
- 4:5 Since only one Person has enough insight, and is authoritative enough, to pass final judgment, it is unwise for us to try to do so ("do not go on passing judgment"). Let there be no "pre-judgment seat judgment!"<sup>117</sup> Of course, we must make judgments from time to time, but we should always do so with the knowledge that our understanding is imperfect. The place God will judge our lives is the judgment seat of Christ. If Paul's references to his judgment by God in his epistles are any measure of how he regarded that event, he took it very seriously and thought about it often (cf. 2 Cor. 1:14; 5:10; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; et al.).

"Paul lives in expectation of the imminent coming again of Christ."<sup>118</sup>

The "things hidden in the darkness" probably include the unconscious "motives" of God's servants. Evidently God will find something in every faithful Christian's life for which to praise him or her on that day. Paul did not just say each servant would receive what he or she deserves, but that each would receive some "praise." Of course, the more faithful among us will receive more praise than the less faithful.

<sup>115</sup>Keener, p. 43.

<sup>116</sup>See Roy B. Zuck, "The Doctrine of Conscience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126:504 (October-December 1969):329-40.

<sup>117</sup>Johnson, p. 1235.

<sup>118</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "erchomai," by Johannes Schneider, 2:674.

"He [Paul] says nothing here about those who will receive not praise but blame [cf. 1 John 2:28]; he is still thinking in terms of the Corinthian situation, in which some have praise for Paul, some for Apollos, some for Cephas."<sup>119</sup>

Verses 1-5 help us view those who minister to us as *God's* servants, not our servants. They also help us to remember, as "servants of God," to serve for the future approval of our Lord, rather than for the present praise of people. The Corinthian church was not the only congregation that ever became disillusioned with its minister because he lacked "charismatic" qualities.

### **Taking pride in the wrong things 4:6-13**

"With rhetoric full of sarcasm and irony he [Paul] goes for the jugular. His own apostleship, which he portrays in bold relief, contrasting his own 'shame' with their perceived 'high station,' is alone consonant with a theology of the cross."<sup>120</sup>

4:6 Paul had used various illustrations to describe himself ("these things . . . I have figuratively applied to myself") "and Apollos": farmers, builders, servants, and stewards. To "exceed what is [God has] written" would be to go beyond the teaching of the Scriptures (cf. 15:3-4). If his readers avoided this pitfall, they would not take pride in one of their teachers over another.

In this letter, Paul often used the verb translated "become arrogant" or "puffed up" (Gr. *physioomai*) to describe attitudes and activities that smacked of human pride rather than godly wisdom and love (cf. vv. 18-19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4). The frequent use of this word identifies one of the Corinthians' main problems. Their attitude was wrong because their outlook was wrong. Paul proceeded to deal with it, and the rejection of him that it produced, in the remainder of this pericope.

4:7 The apostle reminded the Corinthians that they were not intrinsically "superior" to anyone else, an attitude that judging others presupposes. God had given them *everything* they had. Consequently they should be grateful, not boastful.

4:8 His readers were behaving as though they had already received their commendation (rulership; kingship) at the judgment seat of Christ. This is an indication of their over-realized eschatology. They should have been conducting themselves as under-rowing servants, and paying attention to managing God's work faithfully (v. 1). Sarcastically, Paul said he wished the time for rewards had already arrived, so he could enjoy reigning with his readers. Unfortunately, suffering must precede glory.

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<sup>119</sup>Barrett, p. 104.

<sup>120</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 156.

"The theory that Christ and the saints are now reigning in a present kingdom of God on earth, is specifically refuted by the Apostle Paul [cf. vv. 5, 9-13; 2 Tim. 2:12]."<sup>121</sup>

"The irony is devastating: How they perceive themselves, masterfully overstated in vv. 8 and 10, is undoubtedly the way they think *he* ought to be. But the way he actually is, set forth in the rhetoric of vv. 11-13, is the way *they* all ought to be."<sup>122</sup>

Irony and sarcasm were popular modes of discourse in Greco-Roman antiquity (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7).<sup>123</sup>

4:9 Paul may have had the Roman arena "games" (contests) in mind here, specifically the battles between condemned criminals and wild beasts in the coliseums, which were no small "spectacle."<sup>124</sup> Another view is that Paul was thinking of the Roman "triumph" (victory procession), an illustration that he developed more fully elsewhere (2 Cor. 2:14). At the end of that procession came the captives of war who would die in the arena.<sup>125</sup> In either case, Paul seems to have been thinking of the apostles as the ultimately humiliated group. They were the leaders, and their sufferings for the cause of Christ were common knowledge. How inappropriate it was, then, for the Corinthians to be living as "kings," rather than sharing in suffering with their teachers.

"The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general displaying the trophies of his prowess; the apostles were like the little group of captives, men doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their pride and their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant a humble service, ready to die for Christ."<sup>126</sup>

Paul evidently meant *good* "angels" here, since elsewhere he sometimes used "principalities and powers" to refer to what we call bad angels (cf. Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15).

4:10 The contrasts in this verse, between the apostles and the Corinthians, clarify the differences in their conditions. Natural men thought the apostles were "fools," but they were willing to suffer this ridicule for Christ's sake. The Corinthians and others, on the other hand, regarded

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<sup>121</sup>Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 433.

<sup>122</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 165.

<sup>123</sup>Keener, p. 45.

<sup>124</sup>Bruce, p. 50.

<sup>125</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 174-75.

<sup>126</sup>Barclay, p. 45.



themselves as "prudent" in their behavior as Christians. To the naturally "wise" person, the apostles looked "weak," but the Corinthians appeared "strong." The Corinthians looked "distinguished," while the apostles seemed to be dishonorable ("without honor").

- 4:11-13 Paul proceeded to detail the *dishonor* that befalls those who bear the message of the cross. The Greeks despised people who did manual labor ("toil, working with our own hands"), as Paul had done in Corinth (cf. 9:4-18; Acts 18:3, 5; 2 Cor. 11:9; 12:13-17); they regarded it as the work of slaves.<sup>127</sup> To the world, it is foolish for anyone to "bless" those who curse ("revile") him or her, but that is exactly what Paul did, following the teaching and example of Jesus (cf. Luke 6:28; 23:34). All of these descriptions of the apostles emphasize the depths to which they were willing to stoop to proclaim the gospel (cf. Phil. 2). They went to these extremes despite the fact that unbelievers, as well as believers who viewed things naturally, called them "fools."

In this section (vv. 6-13), Paul contrasted the viewpoint of the Corinthians with that of the apostles. The viewpoint of the Corinthians was virtually identical to that of natural, unsaved people. The viewpoint of the apostles, whom his readers professed to venerate and follow, was quite different. Not only were the Corinthians unwise (foolish), but they were also proud.

#### **A final appeal and exhortation 4:14-21**

Paul concluded this first major section of the epistle (1:10—4:21) by reasserting his apostolic authority, which had led to his correcting the Corinthians' shameful conduct and carnal philosophy. He changed the metaphor again, and now appealed to them as a father to his children. He ended by warning them that if they did not respond to his gentle approach, he would have to be more severe.

- 4:14-15 It was not Paul's purpose in writing the immediately preceding verses to humiliate ("shame") the Corinthians. Other congregations would read this epistle, too. Instead, he wanted to "admonish" them strongly as their "father" in the faith. They had many "tutors" or "guardians" (Gr. *paidagogoi*) who sought to bring them along in their growth in grace, but he was their only spiritual father.

"The *paidagogos* was the personal attendant who accompanied the boy, took him to school and home again, heard him recite his 'lines', taught him good manners and generally looked after him; he was entitled to respect and normally received it, but there was no comparison between his relation to the boy and that of the boy's father."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>Morris, p. 81.

<sup>128</sup>Bruce, p. 51.

4:16 The Corinthians were to learn from Paul, as a son learns by observing the example of his father. Contemporary Greek philosophers of Paul's day also provided moral examples for their followers to imitate, sometimes using themselves as the model.<sup>129</sup> Paul was doing that here (cf. 11:1).

". . . Paul's actual ethical instruction as it appears in his Epistles rarely uses the language of Jesus as it is recorded in the Gospels; but on every page it reflects his example and his teaching . . ." <sup>130</sup>

For example, Paul never used the word "disciple" in his epistles. Instead he appealed to his readers as his children or his brethren. The metaphor of "father and children," as used to refer to a teacher and his disciples, was also common in Judaism.

4:17 "Timothy" would soon serve as Paul's personal representative in Corinth (along with Erastus; Acts 19:22). Several factors point to the probability that Timothy had already departed from Ephesus, but had not yet arrived in Corinth, when Paul wrote this epistle (cf. Acts 19:22). One of these factors is Paul's lack of reference to Timothy in this epistle's salutation. A second is the tense of the verb translated "have sent" (NASB) or "am sending" (NIV; *epempsa*, aorist tense). A third is Paul's later reference to Timothy (16:10-11). Timothy was not only Paul's "beloved and faithful child in the Lord," of course, but was also one of his closest and most trusted fellow workers.

Paul's way of life ("my ways") here refers to the ethical principles that he taught and practiced ("as I teach everywhere in every church").

". . . the Christian leader today not only must teach the gospel, but also must teach how the gospel works out in daily life and conduct. And that union must be modeled as well as explained.

"The need is evident even at a confessional seminary like the one at which I teach. Increasingly, we have students who come from thoroughly pagan or secular backgrounds, who have been converted in their late teens or twenties, and who come to us in their thirties. Not uncommonly, they spring from dysfunctional families, and they carry a fair bit of baggage. More dramatically yet, a surprising number of them cannot easily make connections between the truths of the gospel and how to live.

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<sup>129</sup>Keener, p. 45.

<sup>130</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 187.

"A couple of years ago a student who was about to graduate was called in by one of our faculty members who had learned the student was planning to return to computer science and abandon plans to enter vocational ministry. The student was pleasant, with a solid B+ to his credit. But as the faculty member probed, it became obvious that this student had not put it all together. He could define propitiation but did not know what it was like to feel forgiven. He could defend the priority of grace in salvation but still felt as if he could never be good enough to be a minister. He could define holiness but found himself practicing firm self-discipline rather than pursuing holiness. His life and his theological grasp had not come together.

"Mercifully, this particular faculty member was spiritually insightful. He took the student back to the cross and worked outward from that point. The student began to weep and weep as he glimpsed the love of God for him. Today he is in the ministry."<sup>131</sup>

Paul gave another gentle reminder that it was the Corinthians, and not he, who had departed from the Christian way. What he reminded them of here was standard teaching in all the churches (cf. 1:2; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33, 36).

4:18 "Some" of the Corinthians, who did not value Paul as highly as they should have, had "become puffed up (arrogant)" in their own estimation of themselves and their ideas (cf. v. 6). They had done so as if they would not face him again ("as though I were not coming to you"). Evidently they felt he would not return to Corinth, and even if he did, they could overcome his influence.

4:19 However, Paul *did* plan to return if God allowed him to do so ("if the Lord wills"). Evidently he was not able to return for some time. In 2 Corinthians, he responded to criticism from within the church, to the effect that he had promised to come but did not (2 Cor. 1:15-18).

Paul knew that all the pretension to superior wisdom in the church was a result of viewing things from a worldly perspective; there was no reality behind it.

4:20 The apostle returned to his earlier contrast between "words" and true "power" (2:1-5). Real, effective "power" that brings about change is the power of the Holy Spirit working through humble messengers. The "kingdom of God" here probably refers to the future millennial kingdom.

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<sup>131</sup>Carson, p. 111.

"Here we have . . . an assertion of the *causal basis* of the future Messianic Kingdom for which the early Christians were looking. It is characterized by 'power' (*dunamis*) rather than boastful talk. The same Greek term is used to describe the great public miracles which, according to Hebrews 6:5, belong to 'the age to come,' i.e., the Kingdom age. To interpret I Corinthians 4:20 as a present kingdom of the saints would make Paul contradict what he had already written in verses five and eight."<sup>132</sup>

4:21 The Corinthians' response to this epistle would determine whether the apostle would return to them as a disciplining ("with a rod") or as a delighted father ("with love"). A "spirit of gentleness" also marked the Lord Jesus (Matt. 11:29), though it stood in stark contrast to the spirit of arrogance in Corinth.

Paul concluded this part of 1 Corinthians with a strong and confronting challenge.

"Christian leadership means being entrusted with the 'mysteries' of God (4:1-7).

"Christian leadership means living life in the light of the cross (4:8-13).

"Christian leadership means encouraging—and if necessary, enforcing—the way of the cross among the people of God (4:14-21)."<sup>133</sup>

The depreciation of some of their teachers resulted in the Corinthians not deriving maximum benefit from them. It also manifested a serious error in the Corinthians' outlook. They were evaluating God's servants the same way that natural, unbelieving people do. This carnal perspective is the main subject of chapters 1—4. The Corinthians had not allowed the Holy Spirit to transform their attitudes.

"Paul's view of the Christian ministry as revealed in this section (1 Cor. 3—4) may now be summed up. The ministry is a divine provision which is responsible to Christ. It is a part of the Church given to the rest of the Church to be employed in its service. It comprises a multiplicity of gifts and functions, but is united by the unity of God and the unity of the Church. It serves the Church by itself first living out the life of suffering and sacrifice exhibited by the Lord on earth, thereby setting an example for the Church as a whole to follow."<sup>134</sup>

"Even though at times Paul seems to be weaving in and out of several topics, the concern throughout is singular: to stop a current fascination with 'wisdom' on the part of the Corinthians that has allowed them not

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<sup>132</sup>McClain, p. 435.

<sup>133</sup>Carson, pp. 94, 103, 108.

<sup>134</sup>Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Nature of the Ministry according to Paul," *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):132.

only to 'boast,' but to stand over against Paul and his gospel. With a variety of turns to the argument he sets forth his gospel over against their 'wisdom' and tries to reshape their understanding of ministry and church. . . .

"The changes of tone in this passage reveal some of the real tensions that continue to exist in Christian ministry. How to be prophetic without being harsh or implying that one is above the sins of others. How to get people to change their behavior to conform to the gospel when they think too highly of themselves. There is no easy answer, as this passage reveals. But one called to minister in the church must ever strive to do it; calling people to repentance is part of the task."<sup>135</sup>

Some scholars think Paul originally intended to end this epistle here.<sup>136</sup> This opinion rests on the fact that the first four chapters could stand alone. This view points out the unity of this section of the letter. However, it is impossible to prove or to disprove this hypothesis.

"It becomes evident in chaps. 5 through 14 as specific problems in the Corinthian community are considered and as pastoral directions are given that at the same time something else is going on. With statements here and there, the epistemology presented in 1:18—2:16 is kept before the readers. They are nudged into viewing themselves and their congregational life in new and different ways, consistent with the message of the crucified Messiah."<sup>137</sup>

## **B. LACK OF DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH CHS. 5—6**

The second characteristic in the Corinthian church reported to Paul that he addressed concerned a lack of discipline (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). This section of the epistle has strong connections with the first major section. The lack of discipline in the church (chs. 5—6) reflected a crisis of authority in the church (1:10—4:21). The Corinthians were arrogant and valued a worldly concept of power. This carnal attitude had produced the three problems in the church that Paul proceeded to deal with next: incest, litigation, and prostitution.

"It is frequently said that the only Bible the world will read is the daily life of the Christian, and that what the world needs is a revised version! The next two chapters are designed by Paul to produce a Corinthian revised version, so that orthodoxy might be followed by orthopraxy . . ."<sup>138</sup>

### **1. Incest in the church ch. 5**

First, the church had manifested a very permissive attitude toward a man in the congregation who was committing incest. Paul explained his own reaction to this

<sup>135</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 193-94.

<sup>136</sup>Bruce, pp. 52-53.

<sup>137</sup>Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 101.

<sup>138</sup>Johnson, p. 1236.

situation, and demanded that his readers take a different view of immorality than the one they held (vv. 1-8). Then he spoke to the larger issue of the Christian's relationship to the immoral, both within and outside the church (vv. 9-13).

"What is at stake is not simply a low view of sin; rather, it is the church itself: Will it follow Paul's gospel with its ethical implications? or will it continue in its present 'spirituality,' one that tolerates such sin and thereby destroys God's temple in Corinth (3:16-17)? Thus Paul uses this concrete example both to assert his authority and to speak to the larger issue of sexual immorality."<sup>139</sup>

"The unusual feature of 5:1-13 is the manner in which the community is addressed first and more extensively than the man involved in an incestuous relationship. The congregation is distinguished by its arrogance and boasting and its failure to mourn. At the heart of Paul's rebuke is an urgent plea for a new, communal self-understanding (5:6-8). Mixing the cultic images of unleavened bread and the Passover lamb, the text pushes the Corinthians to think of themselves differently—as an unleavened community that demonstrates honesty and dependability, as a community for whom the paschal lamb has been sacrificed. The crucified Messiah lies at the heart of the new perspective, critically needed by the readers."<sup>140</sup>

### Paul's judgment of this case 5:1-5

5:1 "Immorality" is a general translation of the Greek word *porneia*, which means fornication, specifically sexual relations with a forbidden mate. The precise offense in this case was sexual union with the woman who had married the man's father (cf. Matt. 5:27-28, 32; 15:19; 19:9; Mark 7:21). Had she been his actual physical mother, other terms would have been more appropriate to use. Evidently the woman was his step-mother (i.e., "his father's wife"), and she may have been close to his own age.

"The woman was clearly not the mother of the offender, and probably (although the use of *porneia* rather than *moicheia* [adultery] does not prove this) she was not, at the time, the wife of the offender's father. She may have been divorced, for divorce was very common, or her husband may have been dead."<sup>141</sup>

The verb translated "to have" (present tense in Gr.), when used in sexual or marital contexts, is a euphemism for a continuing relationship, in contrast to a "one night stand" (cf. 7:2). This man and this woman were "living together." Since the man is the sole object of Paul's censure, it seems that the woman was not in the church.

<sup>139</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 197.

<sup>140</sup>Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 98.

<sup>141</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 96. Cf. Barclay, p. 49.

"The word *porneia* ('sexual immorality') in the Greek world simply meant 'prostitution,' in the sense of going to the prostitutes and paying for sexual pleasure. The Greeks were ambivalent on that matter, depending on whether one went openly to the brothels or was more discreet and went with a paramour [lover]. But the word had been picked up in Hellenistic Judaism, always pejoratively, to cover all extramarital sexual sins and aberrations, including homosexuality. It could also refer to any of these sins specifically, as it does here. In the NT the word is thus used to refer to that particular blight on Greco-Roman culture, which was almost universally countenanced, except among the Stoics. That is why *porneia* appears so often as the first item in the NT vice lists, not because Christians were sexually 'hung up,' nor because they considered this the primary sin, the 'scarlet letter,' as it were. It is the result of its prevalence in the culture, and the difficulty the early church experienced with its Gentile converts breaking with their former ways, which they did not consider immoral."<sup>142</sup>

The leaders of Israel and the early churches regarded fornication—of *all* kinds—as sin to avoid (Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:30; 27:20; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). If the guilty man's father was still alive and married to the woman, adultery would also have been involved. Most interpreters have concluded that this was a case of incest rather than incest plus adultery. If Paul had been living under the Mosaic Law, he should have prescribed the death penalty for both the guilty man and the woman (Lev. 18:8, 29), but he lived under the New Covenant and advocated a different penalty (v. 5). As depraved as Greek culture was, even the pagans looked down on incest, and Roman law prohibited it.<sup>143</sup>

5:2 The Corinthians' attitude about this situation was even worse than the sin itself. Rather than mourning over it, and disciplining the offender, they took pride in it (became "arrogant"). They may have viewed it as within the bounds of Christian liberty, thinking that their position in Christ made sexual morality unimportant. Another possibility is that their worldly "wisdom" encouraged them to cast off sexual restraints.

". . . Paul is not here dealing with 'church discipline' as such; rather, out of his Jewish heritage he is expressing what should be the *normal* consequences of being the people of God, who are called to be his holy people (1:2). It is this lack of a sense of sin, and therefore of any ethical consequences to their life in the Spirit, that marks the Corinthian brand of spirituality as radically different from

<sup>142</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 199-200.

<sup>143</sup>Johnson, p. 1236.

that which flows out of the gospel of Christ crucified. And it is precisely this failure to recognize the depth of their corporate sinfulness due to their arrogance that causes Paul to take such strong action as is described in the next sentence (vv. 3-5)."<sup>144</sup>

5:3 Paul had spoken earlier about not judging others (4:5). That kind of judging had to do with one's degree of faithfulness to the Lord. Here the issue was blatant immorality. This needed dealing with, and Paul had already determined ("judged") what the Corinthian Christians should do, in this case, even though he was not present ("in body") with them. The case was so clear that he did not need to be "present" to know the man was guilty of a serious offense that required strong treatment.

5:4 The apostle wanted the believers to view his ruling as the will of the Lord. He assured them that God would back it up with His "power" as they enforced the discipline. The phrase "in the name of the Lord Jesus" probably modifies "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (v. 5).<sup>145</sup> In passing the following judgment, Paul was acting in Jesus' "name," or with His authority.

"The church's refusal to act against the offender in 5:2 provides the most striking *example* of their arrogance and doubt that Paul would execute discipline (4:18). Here, therefore, he does execute discipline (5:5). They may doubt his 'power' (4:19-21), but he acts by Jesus' power (5:4)."<sup>146</sup>

5:5 Paul had determined to "deliver" the man "to Satan for the destruction of his flesh." Probably Paul meant that he had delivered the man over to the world, which Satan controls, with God's permission of course, for bodily chastisement that might even result in his premature death.<sup>147</sup> This was the result of Peter's dealings with Ananias and Sapphira, though the text does not specifically say that he delivered them to Satan for the destruction of their flesh. God was bringing premature death on other Corinthians for their improper conduct during the Lord's Supper (11:30; cf. 1 John 5:16). We have no record that this man died prematurely, though he may have. Premature death might be his judgment (the "worst case scenario") if he did not repent.

<sup>144</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 203. See also Barrett, p. 122.

<sup>145</sup>See Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 206-8, for supporting arguments.

<sup>146</sup>Keener, p. 48.

<sup>147</sup>Calvin, 4:12:5-6; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 97; S. M. Gilmour, "Pastoral Care in the New Testament Church," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):395; J. C. Hurd Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p.137, p. 286, n. 5; G. W. H. Lampe, "Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, pp. 349, 353; Morris, pp. 88-89; Johnson, p. 1237; and Bruce, pp. 54-55.



Paul passed similar judgment on Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20). In that case, he simply said he "delivered them to Satan." There he wrote nothing about the "destruction of the flesh." Deliverance to Satan must mean deliverance to the *authority and control* of Satan, in a way that is different from the way all believers are under Satan's influence. Everyone is subject to temptation and demonic influence under the sovereign authority of God (cf. Job 1—2).<sup>148</sup>

A variation of this view is that the delivery to Satan would eventuate in a wasting physical illness but not death.<sup>149</sup> However, the term "the destruction of the flesh" seems to imply death rather than simply disease.

A third interpretation understands the term "flesh" metaphorically, as referring to the destruction of the man's sinful nature.<sup>150</sup> The "destruction of the flesh," in this case, refers to the mortification of the lusts of the flesh. However, it seems unusual that Paul would deliver the man to Satan for this purpose. *Satan* would not normally put the lusts of the flesh to death, but would instead stir them up in the man. It is hard to see how handing a person over to Satan would purify him.

Still another view takes the flesh and spirit as referring to the sinful and godly character of the church rather than the individual.<sup>151</sup> Paul may have been identifying the sinful element within the Corinthian church that needed destroying. This would result in the preservation of the "spirit" of the church. The main problem with this view is that Paul seems to be referring to an individual rather than to the church as a whole. Certainly the man's actions would affect the church, so it is probably proper to see some involvement of the church here, even though the judgment itself seems to be primarily against the man.

Another interpretation is that Paul was speaking of the man's excommunication from the church.<sup>152</sup> In this view, Paul meant that he was turning the man over to live in the sphere of Satan's authority, the world— isolated and cut off from the sphere of the Spirit's authority, the church.

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<sup>148</sup>See Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

<sup>149</sup>William Barclay, *By What Authority?* p. 118; M. Dods, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 118; H. Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 90; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, p. 471; W. G. H. Simon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Introduction and Commentary*, p. 78; and M. E. Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 40.

<sup>150</sup>F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 123; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 217; J. J. Lias, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 67; and G. Campbell Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*, p. 83.

<sup>151</sup>B. Campbell, "Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor 5:5: An Exercise in Rhetorical Criticism of the NT," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:3 (September 1993):341; K. P. Donfried, "Justification and Last Judgment in Paul," *Interpretation* 30 (April 1976):150-51; H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, pp. 134-135, n. 50; and the early church father Tertullian.

<sup>152</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 208-15; Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 50; Robertson, 4:113.

"What the grammar suggests . . . is that the 'destruction of his flesh' is the anticipated result [Gr. *eis*] of the man's being being [*sic*] put back out into Satan's domain, while the express purpose [Gr. *hina*] of the action is his redemption."<sup>153</sup>

I think Paul meant excommunication with the possibility of premature death.<sup>154</sup> His analogy concerning the Passover (vv. 6-8) stresses separating what is sinful from what it pollutes. Paul meant that the Lamb was already slain on Calvary, but the Corinthians had not yet gotten rid of the leaven.

Is this a form of church discipline that we can and should practice today? There are no other Scripture passages in which the Lord instructed church leaders to turn sinners over to Satan. Consequently some interpreters believe this was one way in which the apostles, in particular, exercised their authority in the early church for the establishment of the church (cf. Acts 5). I think modern church leaders can turn people over to Satan by removing them from the fellowship of other Christians and the church. People may commit sins that may ultimately lead to their premature deaths today, and there are, of course, other biblical examples of excommunication as church discipline (cf. v. 13; Matt. 18:17; 2 Cor. 2:6; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15).

The last part of the verse gives the purpose of Paul's discipline. "Spirit" contrasts with "flesh." "Flesh" evidently refers to the body, so "spirit" probably refers to the immaterial part of the man. The "day of the Lord Jesus" refers to the return of Christ at the Rapture and the judgment of believers connected with it (cf. 1:8).

From what would his punishment "save" the incestuous man's spirit? It would not save him eternally, since faith in Christ does that. It might save him from physical death if he repented, but the reference to "his spirit" makes this interpretation unlikely. Probably it would guard him from a worse verdict, when the Lord will evaluate the stewardship of his life at the judgment seat of Christ. Evidently Paul regarded it better for this sinning Christian, as well as best for the church, that he die prematurely, assuming that he would not repent, than that he go on living. Perhaps Paul had reason to believe that he would not turn from his sin but only worsen.

Some have interpreted Paul's allusion to "such a one" in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 as referring to this incestuous man. The text does not warrant so definite a connection. "Such a one" is simply a way of referring to someone, anyone, without using his or her name.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 209. See also Craig L. Blomberg's discussion of this verse in William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar: Second Edition*, p. 54.

<sup>154</sup>Cf. Lowery, p. 514.

<sup>155</sup>Bruce, p. 54.

### The analogy of the Passover 5:6-8

Paul argued for the man's removal from the church with this analogy. It was primarily for the sake of the church that they should remove him, not for the man's sake.

5:6 It was not good for the Corinthians to feel proud of their permissiveness (cf. v. 2). Sin spreads in the church as yeast ("leaven") does in dough (cf. Gal. 5:9; Mark 8:15). Eventually the whole moral fabric of the congregation would suffer if the believers did not expunge this sin from its midst.

5:7 In Jewish life, it was customary to throw away ("clean out") *all* the "old leaven" (yeast) in the house, when the family prepared for the Passover celebration (Exod. 12:15; 13:6-7).<sup>156</sup> They did this so that the bread they made for Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed, would be completely free of leaven. This may have been for hygienic reasons as well as because of the symbolism of the act. This is what the Corinthians needed to do, *as a church*, so they could worship God acceptably. In one sense, they were already free of leaven; their trust in Christ had removed their sins. However, in another sense they possessed leaven, since they had tolerated, and were still tolerating, sin in their midst. Paul had described the same situation earlier, in this epistle, when he said the Corinthians were saints (1:2) even though they were not behaving as saints. God had sanctified them in their position, but they were in need of progressive sanctification. They needed to become what they were. This was Paul's basic exhortation.

"1 Corinthians emphasizes that the gospel issues in transformed lives, that salvation in Christ is not complete without God/Christlike attitudes and behavior.

"The classic expression of Paul's understanding of the relationship between gospel and ethics (indicative and imperative) is to be found in 5:7.

"Ethics for Paul is ultimately a *theological* issue pure and simple. Everything has to do with God and with what God is about in Christ and the Spirit. Thus (1) the *purpose* (or basis) of Christian ethics is the glory of God (10:31); (2) the *pattern* for such ethics is Christ (11:1); (3) the *principle* is love, precisely because it alone reflects God's character (8:2-3; 13:1-8); and (4) the *power* is the Spirit (6:11, 19)."<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 220.

<sup>157</sup>Fee, "Toward a . . .," pp. 51, 53.

The mention of the removal of leaven before the Passover led Paul to develop his analogy further. Christ, the final Passover Lamb, had already died. A type is a divinely intended illustration of something else, the antitype. A type may be a person (cf. Rom. 5:14), a thing (cf. Heb. 10:19-20), an event (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11), a ceremony, as here, or an institution (cf. Heb 9:11-12). Therefore it was all the more important that the believers "clean out" the remaining leaven immediately.

- 5:8 The Feast of Unleavened Bread began the day after Passover. The Jews regarded the Passover, combined with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as one festival (cf. Exod. 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:6). As believers whose Pascal Lamb had died, it was necessary that the Corinthians keep celebrating the feast and worshipping God, free from "leaven" which symbolically represented sin. The "old leaven" probably refers to the sins that marked the Corinthians before their conversion. "Malice and wickedness" probably stand for all sins of motive and action. "Sincerity and truth" are the proper motive and action with which we should worship God. This verse constitutes a summary exhortation.

### **The Christian's relationship to fornicators 5:9-13**

Paul proceeded to deal with the larger issue of the believer's relationship to fornicators, inside and outside the church. He did this so his readers would understand their responsibility in this area of their lives, in their immoral city, and abandon their arrogant self-righteousness.

- 5:9 Paul had written this congregation a ("wrote you in my") previous "letter" that is no longer in existence.<sup>158</sup> In it, he had urged the Corinthians to avoid associating with fornicators ("immoral people"). The same Greek word, *pornois*, occurs here as in verse 1. In view of this instruction, the Corinthians' toleration of the incestuous brother in the church was especially serious.
- 5:10 However, Paul hastened to clarify that in writing what he had, he did not mean a believer should never associate with fornicators outside the church ("immoral people of this world"). He did not mean, either, that they should avoid contact with unbelievers who were sinful in their attitudes and actions ("covetous . . . swindlers . . . idolaters") toward people and God. Even our holy Lord Jesus Christ ate with publicans and sinners. Such isolationism would require that they stop living in the real world ("would have to go out of the world"), and exist in a Christian ghetto, insulated from all contact with unbelievers. This approach to life is both unrealistic and unfaithful to God, who has called us to be salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-16; 28:19-20). Many Christians today struggle with an unbiblical view of separation that tends more toward isolationism than sanctification.

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<sup>158</sup>See my comments on this letter in the Introduction section of these notes.

Some interpreters view this discipline as excluding the offender from the community of believers gathered for worship: excommunication.<sup>159</sup> Others view it as social ostracism.

"The Apostle is not thinking of Holy Communion, in which case the *mede* ["not even"] would be quite out of place: he is thinking of social meals; 'Do not invite him to your house or accept his invitations.'"<sup>160</sup>

In 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Paul used the same phrase (Gr. *sunanamignusthai*, lit. mix up together), translated "to associate with" (v. 9), with regard to busybodies in the church. There, "not associating" was to be the last resort of faithful believers in their social dealings with their disobedient brethren (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14). They were not to treat them as enemies, however, but as brothers. Probably Paul had the same type of disciplinary behavior in view here. I tend to think it means excommunication combined with social ostracism in view of the next verse.

5:11 Paul now clarified that he had meant that the Corinthian Christians should not associate with such a person if he or she professed to be a believer ("brother"). The Greek phrase *tis adelphos onomazomenos* literally means "one who bears the name brother." The translation "so-called brother" (NASB) implies that the sinner was only a professing Christian.<sup>161</sup> However, he could have been a genuine Christian.<sup>162</sup> Only God and that person knew for sure whether he or she was a genuine Christian. The important point is that this person's behavior threw into question whether he was a genuine Christian. The Corinthian Christians were to exclude such a person from table fellowship with the other Christians in the church.

In the early history of the church, eating together was a large part of the fellowship that the Christians enjoyed with one another (cf. Acts 2:46-47; 6:1; et al.). To exclude a Christian from this circle of fellowship would have made a much stronger statement to him, at that time, than it normally does in many parts of the world today.

This exclusion was a strong form of discipline that Paul designed to confront the offender with his or her behavior and encourage him or her to repent. Some modern congregations have adopted the policy of excluding such offenders from participation in the Lord's Supper. However, this form of discipline does not carry much impact when a congregation

<sup>159</sup>E.g., Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 226.

<sup>160</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 107.

<sup>161</sup>F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p. 210.

<sup>162</sup>Robert N. Wilkin, "The So-Called So-Called Brother," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:10 (October 1991):2-3.

observes the Lord's Supper only monthly or quarterly. Modern church leaders need to give careful thought to what form of discipline would have the same impact and effect on such a person in their particular society.

"Church discipline is not a group of 'pious policemen' out to catch a criminal. Rather, it is a group of brokenhearted brothers and sisters seeking to restore an erring member of the family."<sup>163</sup>

Paul's list of sins here seems to be suggestive rather than comprehensive (cf. 6:9-10). It includes fornicators ("immoral" people), the greedy ("covetous"), idolaters, people who abuse others verbally ("revilers"), drunkards and perhaps others addicted to enslaving substances, and swindlers.<sup>164</sup> The failure of many church leaders to discipline professing Christians who practice these things today is a sad commentary on the carnality of the modern church. In some cases, it is evidence of unwillingness or inability to exercise "tough love."

5:12 Paul's authority as an apostle did not extend to "judging" and prescribing discipline on unbelievers ("outsiders") for their sins. He did, of course, assess the condition of unbelievers (e.g., Rom. 1; et al.), but that is not what is in view here. His disciplining ministry, and the ministry of other Christians in judging and disciplining sin, took place only within church life. "Judging" here means more than criticizing. It involves disciplining, too, as the context shows.

5:13 Judging and disciplining unbelievers ("those who are outside") is the Lord's work ("God judges"). Obviously this does not mean that Christians should remain aloof when justice needs maintaining in the world. God has delegated human government to people as His vice-regents (e.g., Gen. 9:5-6). As human beings, Christians should bear their fair share of the weight of responsibility in these matters. The point here is that the Corinthians—and all Christians—should exercise discipline in church life to an extent beyond what is their responsibility in civil life.

Paul did not explain, in this passage, the objective in view in church discipline. Elsewhere we learn that it is always for the restoration of the offender to fellowship with God and His people (2 Cor. 2:5-11). It is also for the purity of the church.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup>Wiersbe, 1:586.

<sup>164</sup>See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages with Vice Lists," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):301-16.

<sup>165</sup>For general studies of church discipline, see J. Carl Laney, "The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):353-64; and Ted G. Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):201-13. On the subject of lawsuits against local churches and church leaders who practice church discipline, see Jay A. Quine, "Court Involvement in Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):60-73, and 594 (April-June 1992):223-36.

Chapter 5 deals with the subject of immoral conduct by professing Christians.<sup>166</sup> The first part (vv. 1-8) contains directions for dealing with a particular case of fornication that existed in the church. The Corinthian Christians were taking a much too permissive attitude toward sin, which reflects the impact of their culture on their church. The second part (vv. 9-13) clarifies our duty in all instances of immoral conduct inside and outside of the church.

## **2. Litigation in the church 6:1-11**

The apostle continued to deal with the general subject of discipline in the church that he began in 5:1. He proceeded to point out some other glaring instances of inconsistency that had their roots in the Corinthians' lax view of sin. Rather than looking to unsaved judges to solve their internal conflicts, they should have exercised discipline among themselves in these cases. Gallio had refused to get involved in Jewish controversies in Corinth, and had told the Jews to deal with these matters themselves (Acts 18:14-16). Paul now counseled a similar approach for the Christians.

"In this section Paul is dealing with a problem which specially affected the Greeks. The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public law-courts at all; they settled things before the elders of the village or the elders of the Synagogue; to them justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. . . . The Greeks were in fact famous, or notorious, for their love of going to law."<sup>167</sup>

"Roman society was notoriously litigious, and Corinth, with its rising class of *nouveau riche*, was even more so."<sup>168</sup>

". . . the congregation's root problem lies in its lack of theological depth. It shames itself by not understanding itself as an eschatological community ('Do you not know that we are to judge angels?') and as a community redeemed by Christ."<sup>169</sup>

"Paul has not finished with the theme of church discipline in regard to sexual life; see vi. 12 and chapter vii; but in v. 12 f. he had spoken of judgement [*sic*], and this brings to his mind another feature of Corinthian life of which he had heard . . ."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>See also Timothy D. Howell, "The Church and the AIDS Crisis," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):74-82.

<sup>167</sup>Barclay, *The Letters* . . . , pp. 55, 56.

<sup>168</sup>Keener, p. 52.

<sup>169</sup>Cousar, "The Theological . . .," pp. 98-99.

<sup>170</sup>Barrett, p. 134.

### The shame on the church 6:1-6

The failure of the two men who were suing each other was another evidence that the Corinthian church was not functioning properly. It indicated how lacking in true wisdom these Christians were. Paul argued with a series of rhetorical questions in this pericope.

6:1            Again Paul used a rhetorical question to make a point (cf. 3:16; 4:21). The answer was self-evident to him.

In view of the context, the "neighbor" (NASB) must be a fellow Christian. The "unrighteous" or "ungodly" (NIV) contrasts with the "saints," and refers to an unbeliever (v. 6). When people had disputes with each other in Corinth, and wanted official arbitration, they went to the *bema* (judgment seat) in the center of town.

"The phrase translated 'has a dispute' is a technical term for a lawsuit, or legal action; and the verb *krino* ('judge') in the middle voice can carry the sense of 'going to law,' or 'bringing something for judgment,' as it does here."<sup>171</sup>

"He does not mean that Christian courts ought to be instituted, but that Christian disputants should submit to Christian arbitration."<sup>172</sup>

6:2            "Do you not know?" appears six times in this chapter (vv. 2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19). In each case, this question introduces a subject that the Corinthian Christians should have known, probably because Paul or others had previously instructed them.

The earlier revelation alluded to, that the saints will have a part in judging unbelievers in the future, may be Daniel 7:18, 22, and 27. This judgment will evidently take place just after the Lord returns to earth at His Second Coming to set up His millennial kingdom. We will be with Him then (1 Thess. 4:17).

Since the Lord will delegate the authority to judge unbelievers to Christians in the future, Paul concluded that we are competent to settle disputes among ourselves now. In the light of future eschatological judgment, any decisions that believers must make in church courts now are relatively trifling. The marginal reading in the NASB "try the trivial cases" probably gives the better sense than "constitute the smallest courts."<sup>173</sup> Obviously, some cases involving Christians, arguing with one another, are more difficult to sort out, than some of those involving unbelievers. Paul's point was that Christians are generally competent to settle disputes between people. After all, we have the help and wisdom of the indwelling Holy Spirit available to us, as well as the Scriptures.

<sup>171</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 231.

<sup>172</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 111.

<sup>173</sup>See Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 233-34.



Earlier Paul wrote that the Corinthians were judging him (cf. 4:3-5, 7), which was inappropriate in view of God's final judgment. Now they were judging in the courts, which also was inappropriate, since the saints will participate in eschatological judging.

6:3 Evidently God had not revealed the fact that believers will play a role in judging "angels" earlier in Scripture. He apparently revealed this for the first time, here, through Paul (cf. Jude 6).

6:4 The first part of this verse seems to refer to the disputes and judicial procedures ("law courts") the Christians should have used with one another, rather than to the heathen law courts. The context seems to argue for this interpretation. Paul was speaking here of Christians resolving their differences in the church rather than in the civil law courts.

The second part of the verse is capable of two interpretations. Paul may have been speaking ironically, as the next verse might imply (cf. 4:8). If so, he may have been telling the Corinthians, facetiously, that they should go ahead and select the least qualified people in the church to settle these disputes. His meaning, in this case, was that any Christian was capable of settling disputes among his brethren. He did not mean that the Corinthians should *really* choose as judges the most feeble-minded Christians in the church. The statement is ironical. This is the interpretation of the NIV.<sup>174</sup>

On the other hand, he may have been asking a question rather than making an ironical statement. This is how the NASB translators took Paul's words. In this case, he was asking if the Corinthians selected judges, in their church disputes, from the members who had the fewest qualifications to arbitrate. The obvious answer would be no. They would choose the brethren with the best qualifications. This interpretation understands Paul as forthrightly advocating the choice of the best qualified in the church, rather than the worst qualified, facetiously. This seems to me to be a better interpretation.<sup>175</sup>

A third possibility is that Paul really actually advocated the selection of the least qualified in the church for these judicial functions. He was not speaking ironically. The main argument against this view is its improbability. Why choose less qualified people for any job when better qualified people are available?

6:5-6 What was to the Corinthians' "shame"? It was that, by going into secular courts to settle their church problems, they seemed to be saying that there was no one in their church wise enough to settle these matters. Certainly they could count on the Holy Spirit to give them both the wisdom and the proper spirit they needed to accomplish this (cf. John 14:26; 16:13).

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<sup>174</sup>See also Robertson and Plummer, p. 113.

<sup>175</sup>See also Barrett, p. 137.

"A church has come to a pretty pass when its members believe that they are more likely to get justice from *unbelievers* than from their own brothers."<sup>176</sup>

Clearly this church did not understand its identity as an eschatological community, nor did it demonstrate much concern about its witness to the world.

"Every Jewish community throughout the Roman Empire and beyond its frontiers had its own *bet-din*, its own competent machinery for the administration of civil justice within its own membership; the least that could be expected of a Christian church was that it should make similar arrangements if necessary, and not wash its dirty linen in public."<sup>177</sup>

### Paul's judgment in the matter 6:7-11

The apostle now addressed the two men involved in the lawsuit, but at the same time wrote with the whole church in view.

6:7 By hauling one another into court, the Corinthians were intent on winning damages for themselves. Evidently a business or property dispute was the root of this case (cf. v. 10). Paul reminded them that they had already lost ("it is already a defeat for you"), even before the judge gave his verdict. The shame of people who professed to love one another, and who supposedly put the welfare of others before their own, suing each other, was a defeat in itself. This defeat was far more serious than any damages they may have had to pay. It would be better to suffer the wrong ("be wronged") or the cheating ("be defrauded"), than to fight back in such an unchristian way (Matt. 5:39-40; 1 Pet. 2:19-24).

"It is possible that this use of *meth heauton* ["with your own selves"] for *met allelon* ["with one another"] is deliberate, in order to show that in bringing a suit against a fellow-Christian they were bringing a suit against themselves, so close was the relationship."<sup>178</sup>

Christians should be willing to give to one another, rather than trying to get from one another. In other words, there should be no going to court with one another at all. Nevertheless if the Corinthians insisted on going to court, it should be a court of believers in the church, not unbelievers outside the church.

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>177</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 59.

<sup>178</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 116.

6:8 An even more shocking condition was that some of the Christians in Corinth were not simply the victims of wrong and fraud. They were even the perpetrators of these things (cf. Matt. 5:39-41).

6:9-10 Who are the "unrighteous" (NASB) or "wicked" (NIV) in view? Paul previously used this word (Gr. *adikos*) of the unsaved in verse 1 (cf. v. 6 where he called them "unbelievers"). However, he also used it of the Corinthian Christians in verse 8: "you yourselves wrong [*adikeo*]." Christians, not just unbelievers, have been guilty of unrighteous conduct—including all the offenses listed in these verses. Therefore, what Paul said about the "unrighteous" in this verse seems to apply to *anyone* who is unrighteous in his or her behavior, whether saved or unsaved. This warning does not apply exclusively to the unrighteous in their standing before God, namely: unbelievers. Some interpreters, however, have concluded that "the unrighteous" refers only to unbelievers.<sup>179</sup>

What will be true of the unrighteous? They will "not inherit the kingdom of God." Jesus explained who will inherit the messianic kingdom (Matt. 5:3, 10; Mark 10:14), whereas Paul explained who will not. In some passages, Paul used this expression to describe the consequences of the behavior of unbelievers when he compared it to the behavior of believers (cf. Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). That appears to be its meaning here, too.<sup>180</sup> "Inheriting the kingdom" and "entering the kingdom" are synonyms in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). Paul was apparently contrasting what the Corinthians did before their conversion with their conduct after conversion (v. 11). He did not mean that Christians are incapable of practicing these sins, but that these practices typically characterize unbelievers. Paul was exhorting the Corinthian believers to live like saints.<sup>181</sup>

Paul warned his readers about being deceived on this subject (v. 9). Probably many of them failed to see that the way Christians choose to live *here and now* will affect their eternal reward. Many Christians today fail to see this too. The fact that we are eternally secure should not lead us to conclude that it does not matter how we live now, even though we will all end up in heaven.

The meanings of most of these sins are clear, but a few require some comment. "Effeminate" (NASB) or "male prostitutes" (NIV; Gr. *malakoi*) refers to the passive role in a homosexual union, whereas "homosexuals" refers to the active role.<sup>182</sup> David Malick showed that Paul was

<sup>179</sup>E.g., MacArthur, pp. 127-29; and J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 283.

<sup>180</sup>See René A. López, "Views on Paul's Vice Lists and Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:669 (January-March 2011):81-97.

<sup>181</sup>See idem, "Does the Vice List in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Describe Believers or Unbelievers?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:653 (January-March 2007):59-73.

<sup>182</sup>See P. Michael Ukleja, "Homosexuality in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:560 (October-December 1983):350-58; and Sherwood A. Cole, "Biology, Homosexuality, and Moral Culpability," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (July-September 1997):355-66.

condemning all homosexual relationships, not just "abuses" in homosexual behavior.<sup>183</sup>

"Bisexuality was extremely common among Greeks, especially because of the shortage of available wives, which apparently occasioned the late age of marriage for most Greek men."<sup>184</sup>

"We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it [homosexuality]. Even so great a man as Socrates practised [*sic*] it; Plato's dialogue *The Symposium* is always said to be one of the greatest works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural but unnatural love. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practised unnatural vice."<sup>185</sup>

Note the seriousness of the sin, the fact it is included in the list, of covetousness or greed (cf. 5:10-11; 6:8). Greed may manifest itself in a desire for what one should not have (Exod. 20:17; Rom. 7:7), or in an excessive desire for what one may legitimately have (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

"The universality of wine drinking was of course due to the inadequate water-supplies. But normally the Greeks were sober people, for their drink was three parts of wine mixed with two of water."<sup>186</sup>

"The order of the ten kinds of offenders is unstudied. He enumerates sins which were prevalent at Corinth just as they occur to him."<sup>187</sup>

6:11 Some of the Corinthian Christians had been fornicators, and had practiced the other sins Paul cited, before they trusted in Christ. However, the blood of Christ had cleansed ("washed") them, and God had set them apart ("sanctified") to a life of holiness (1:2). The Lord had declared them righteous ("justified") through union with Christ by faith (cf. 1:30), and through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit who indwelt them. He had made them saints. Consequently they needed to live like saints.

"The quite unconscious Trinitarianism of the concluding words should be noted: *the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit, our God*. Trinitarian theology, at least in its New Testament form, did not arise out of speculation, but out of the fact that when Christians spoke of what God had done for them

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<sup>183</sup>David E. Malick, "The Condemnation of Homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:600 (October-December 1993):479-92.

<sup>184</sup>Keener, p. 55.

<sup>185</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 60.

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>187</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 119.

and in them they often found themselves obliged to use threefold language of this kind."<sup>188</sup>

This verse does not support the idea that once a person has experienced eternal salvation, he will live a life free of gross sin. Normally this is the consequence of conversion, thanks to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. However, believers can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit's ministry in their lives. In this letter, we have seen that not only were some of the Corinthian saints fornicators *before* their conversion, but one of them had continued in, or returned to that sin (5:1)—*afterwards*.

Paul's point in this whole section (vv. 1-11) was that genuine Christians should not continue in, or return to, the sinful practices that mark unbelievers. We should become what we are because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. This appeal runs throughout the New Testament, and is latent in every exhortation to pursue godliness. It is especially strong in this epistle. Rather than assuming that believers will not continually practice sin, the inspired writers constantly warned us of that possibility.

This passage does not deal with how we as Christians should respond when pagans defraud or sue us. But if we apply the principles Paul advocated in dealing with fellow believers, we should participate in public litigation only as a last resort.

### **3. Prostitution in the church 6:12-20**

The apostle proceeded to point out the sanctity of the believer's body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. He wanted to help his readers realize the seriousness of the sins that marked them to some extent as a church.

"The Greeks always looked down on the body. There was a proverbial saying, 'The body is a tomb.' Epictetus said, 'I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse.'"<sup>189</sup>

"The question is: If there are no restrictions in food, one appetite of the body, why must there be in sexual things, another physical desire?"<sup>190</sup>

"Apparently some men within the Christian community are going to prostitutes and are arguing for the right to do so. Being people of the Spirit, they imply, has moved them to a higher plane, the realm of the spirit, where they are unaffected by behavior that has merely to do with the body. So Paul proceeds from the affirmation of v. 11 to an attack on this theological justification.

"As before, the gospel itself is at stake, not simply the resolution of an ethical question. The Corinthian pneumatics' understanding of spirituality has allowed them both a false view of freedom ('everything is permissible') and of the body ('God will destroy it'), from which basis they

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<sup>188</sup>Barrett, p. 143.

<sup>189</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 62.

<sup>190</sup>Johnson, p. 1238.

have argued that going to prostitutes is permissible because the body doesn't matter."<sup>191</sup>

This is one of the more important passages in the New Testament on the human body.

### **Refutation of the Corinthians' false premises 6:12-14**

Paul began by arguing against his recipients' distortion of Christian freedom and their misunderstanding of the nature of the body. The influence of Greek dualism on the Corinthians continues to be obvious. He presented his teaching in the form of a dialogue with his readers, the diatribe style, which was familiar to them.

6:12 Paul was and is famous as the apostle of Christian liberty. He saw early in his Christian life, and clearly, that the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law. His Epistle to the Galatians is an exposition of this theme. He preached this freedom wherever he went. Unfortunately he was always subject to misinterpretation. Some of his hearers concluded that he advocated no restraints whatsoever in Christian living ("all things are lawful for me").

Similarly, the Protestant reformers fell under the same criticism by their Roman Catholic opponents. The Catholics said that the reformers were teaching that since Christians are saved by grace, they could live sinful lives. Unfortunately John Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), overreacted and argued that a true Christian *cannot* commit gross sin. This assertion led to the conclusion that the basis of assurance of salvation is the presence of fruit in the life, rather than the promise of God (e.g., John 6:47; et al.). This view, that a true Christian will not commit gross sin, has become popular in reformed theology, but it goes further than Scripture does. Scripture never makes this claim, but constantly warns Christians against abusing their liberty in Christ and turning it into a license to sin.<sup>192</sup>

Perhaps those in Corinth, who were practicing sexual immorality and suing their brethren in pagan courts, appealed to Paul to support their actions, though they took liberty further than Paul did.<sup>193</sup>

"Everything is permissible for me' is almost certainly a Corinthian theological slogan."<sup>194</sup>

"It could have been argued in Corinth . . . that the right course was for a husband to keep his wife 'pure', and, if

<sup>191</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 250-51.

<sup>192</sup>See Dillow, pp. 245-69.

<sup>193</sup>See Robert N. Wilkin, "Are All Things Lawful for Believers?" *Grace Evangelical Society Newsletter* 4:7 (July 1989):2.

<sup>194</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 251. Cf. 10:23.

necessary, find occasional sexual satisfaction in a harlot."<sup>195</sup>

In this verse, the apostle restated his general maxim but qualified it (cf. 10:23). Legality is not the only test the Christian should apply to his or her behavior. Is the practice also "profitable" (helpful, admirable, beneficial, expedient, good)? Furthermore, even though I have authority (mastery) over some practice, might it gain control over me ("I . . . be mastered by *anything*")? The Christian should always be able to submit to the Lord's control. We should give the Lord, not anyone or anything else, primary control of our bodies.

"Freedom is not to be for self but for others. The real question is not whether an action is 'lawful' or 'right' or even 'all right,' but whether it is good, whether it benefits. . . . Truly Christian conduct is not predicated on whether I have the right to do something, but whether my conduct is helpful to those about me."<sup>196</sup>

"We have no longer any right to do what in itself is innocent, when our doing it will have a bad effect on others. . . . We have no longer any right to do what in itself is innocent, when experience has proved that our doing it has a bad effect on ourselves."<sup>197</sup>

6:13-14

The first part of this verse is similar to the two parts of the previous verse. It contains a statement that is true, and it may have been a Corinthian slogan, but a qualifier follows. "Food" is not a matter of spiritual significance for the Christian, except that gluttony is a sin. As far as what we eat goes, we may eat anything and be pleasing to God (Mark 7:19). He has not forbidden any foods for spiritual reasons, though there may be physical reasons we may choose not to eat certain things. Both "food" and the "stomach" are physical and temporal. Paul probably referred to food here, not because it was the main issue, but to explain the issue of the "body" and sexual "immorality." However, gluttony and immorality often went together in Greek and Roman feasts. So gluttony may also have been an issue.<sup>198</sup> As food is for the stomach, so the body is for the Lord.

"Not only are meats made for the belly, but the belly, which is essential to physical existence, is made for meats, and cannot exist without them."<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup>Barrett, p. 145.

<sup>196</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 252.

<sup>197</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 122.

<sup>198</sup>Keener, p. 57.

<sup>199</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 123.

The same is *not* true of the body and fornication. Paul constructed his argument like this:

Proposition 1:

Part 1: Food is for the stomach [A, B], and the stomach is for food [B, A].

Part 2: God will destroy the stomach [B] and the food [A].

Proposition 2:

Part 1: The body is for the Lord [A, B] (not for sexual immorality), and the Lord is for the body [B, A].

Part 2: God has raised the Lord [B], and He will raise us [A] (by His power).

One might conclude, and some in Corinth were evidently doing so, that since sex was also physical and temporal, it was also irrelevant spiritually.<sup>200</sup> However, this is a false conclusion. The body is part of what the Lord saved and sanctified. Therefore it is for Him, and we should use it for His glory, not for fornication. Furthermore, the Lord has a noble purpose and destiny for our bodies. He is *for* them in that sense.

The Lord will resurrect the bodies of most Christians in the future, all but those that He catches away at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:17). The resurrection of our bodies shows that God has plans for them. Some in Corinth did not believe in the resurrection, but Paul dealt with that later (ch. 15). Here he simply stated the facts without defending them.

"The body of the believer is *for* the Lord because through Christ's resurrection God has set in motion the reality of our own resurrection. This means that the believer's physical body is to be understood as 'joined' to Christ's own 'body' that was raised from the dead."<sup>201</sup>

### Arguments against participating in prostitution 6:15-17

Building on the preceding theological base, Paul argued against participating in fornication with prostitutes. The Corinthians had not correctly understood the nature of sexual intercourse or the nature of Christian conversion.

6:15 Another rhetorical question affirmed the truth. As we are members of Christ's body, so our "bodies are members" of Him. This is not just clever wordplay. Our physical bodies are just as much a part of Christ—united with Him in a genuine spiritual union—as we are part of the mystical body of Christ, the church. However, Paul was not speaking here of the believer's union with Christ by becoming a member of His mystical body,

<sup>200</sup>Barrett, p. 147.

<sup>201</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 258.



the church (12:12-26). He was metaphorically speaking of our individual union with Christ's physical body.

When a Christian has sexual relations with a prostitute, he or she takes what belongs to God (his or her body) and gives it to someone else. This is stealing from God. When a Christian marries, this does not happen, because God has ordained and approves of marriage (cf. 7:14). He permits us to share our bodies with our lawful mates. Taking a member of Christ (a Christian's body), and uniting it to a prostitute's body, also involves the Lord in that immoral act. Paul's revulsion at the thought of this comes through graphically in his characteristic *me genoito* (lit. "May it not happen!").

"Sex outside of marriage is like a man robbing a bank: he gets something, but it is not his and he will one day pay for it. Sex within marriage can be like a person putting money into a bank: there is safety, security, and he will collect dividends. Sex within marriage can build a relationship that brings joys in the future; but sex apart from marriage has a way of weakening future relationships, as every Christian marriage counselor will tell you."<sup>202</sup>

6:16 Paul urged his readers not to think of sexual intercourse as simply a physical linking of two people for the duration of their act. God views intercourse as involving the whole person, not just the body. It is the most intimate sharing that human beings experience. A spiritual union takes place. Sexual relations very deeply affect the inner unseen (emotional and spiritual) conditions of the individuals involved. This is what is in view in the reference to two people becoming "one flesh" in Genesis 2:24. Consequently it is improper to put sexual relations on the same level of significance as eating food.

6:17 Compared to the union that takes place when two people have sex, the person who trusts Christ unites with Him in an even stronger and more pervasive oneness. This is an even stronger spiritual union (we have become "one spirit *with Him*"). Consequently it is a very serious thing to give to a prostitute what God has so strongly united to Christ.

Paul expressed his argument in a chiasm.

- A** Your bodies are members of Christ's body.
- B** So they must not be members of a prostitute's body.
- B'** Joined to a prostitute your members become one body with her.
- A'** Joined to Christ your members become one spirit with Him.

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<sup>202</sup>Wiersbe, 1:589.

### The reason participating in prostitution is wrong 6:18-20

Sexual immorality is wrong, Paul concluded, because it involves sinning against one's body, which in the case of believers belongs to the Lord through divine purchase.

6:18 In conclusion, believers should "flee" from fornication (*porneian*). Joseph is a good example to follow (Gen. 39:12). Fornication ("immorality") is more destructive to the sinner than other sins, because the people who engage in it cannot undo their act. Gluttony and drunkenness hurt the body as well, but they involve excess in things morally neutral, and abstinence may correct their effects.

Fornication is also an especially serious sin because it involves placing the body, which is the Lord's (vv. 19-20), under the control of another illegitimate partner (cf. 7:4).<sup>203</sup> No other sin has this result. All other sins are "outside," or apart from the body, in this sense. "Every sin that a man commits is outside the body," could be another incorrect Corinthian slogan that Paul proceeded to correct (cf. vv. 12, 13).

"Does God then forbid the restoration of fallen leaders? No. Does He leave open the possibility? Yes. Does that possibility look promising? Yes and no. If both the life and reputation of the fallen elder can be rehabilitated, his prospects for restoration are promising. However, rehabilitating his reputation, not to mention his life, will be particularly difficult, for squandering one's reputation is 'a snare of the devil' (1 Tim. 3:7), and he does not yield up his prey easily."<sup>204</sup>

6:19 Another rhetorical question makes a strong, important statement. Previously Paul taught his readers that the Corinthian church was a temple (*naos*; 3:16). The believer's body is also "a temple." The "Holy Spirit" is actually indwelling each of these temples (Rom. 8:9; cf. Matt. 12:6; 18:15-20; 28:16-20; Mark 13:11; John 14:17, 23).<sup>205</sup> He is a gift to us ("whom you have") "from God" (cf. 1 Thess. 4:8). He is the best gift God has given us thus far. Consequently we have a moral obligation to the Giver. Moreover, because He indwells us, we belong to Him.

6:20 Furthermore, God has purchased (Gr. *agorazo*) every Christian "with a [great] price," the blood of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24-25; Eph. 1:7; et al.). So we belong to Him for a second reason. In view of this, we should "glorify God" in our bodies, rather than degrading Him through

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<sup>203</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 262.

<sup>204</sup>Jay E. Smith, "Can Fallen Leaders Be Restored to Leadership?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):480.

<sup>205</sup>See Sweeney, p. 629.

fornication (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). Usually the New Testament emphasis is on redemption leading to freedom from sin (e.g., Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Rev. 5:9; 14:3), but here it is on redemption leading to faithfulness to God. Even our physical bodies are to be faithful to the Lord with whom we are joined.

"The reason to glorify God in the body and not engage in sexual immorality is rooted in a new way of understanding the self."<sup>206</sup>

"What Paul seems to be doing is taking over their own theological starting point, namely, that they are 'spiritual' because they have the Spirit, and redirecting it to include the sanctity of the body. The reality of the indwelling Spirit is now turned against them. They thought the presence of the Spirit meant a negation of the body; Paul argues the exact opposite: The presence of the Spirit in their present bodily existence is God's affirmation of the body."<sup>207</sup>

Paul's solution to the problem of the lack of discipline (chs. 5—6) was the same as his solution to the problem of divisions in the church (1:10—4:21). He led his readers back to the Cross (6:20; cf. 1:23-25).

Incest was one manifestation of carnality in the church (ch. 5), suing fellow believers in the public courts was another (6:1-11), and going to prostitutes was a third (6:12-20). Nevertheless, the underlying problem was a loose view of sin, a view taken by the unbelievers among whom the Corinthian Christians lived. In this attitude, as in their attitude toward wisdom (1:10—4:21), their viewpoint was different from that of the Apostle Paul and God. God inspired these sections of the epistle to transform their outlook and ours on these subjects.

### **III. QUESTIONS ASKED OF PAUL 7:1—16:12**

The remainder of the body of this epistle deals with questions the Corinthians had put to Paul in a letter. Paul introduced each of these with the phrase *peri de* ("now concerning," 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12), a phrase commonly used in antiquity.<sup>208</sup>

"Rather than a friendly exchange, in which the new believers in Corinth are asking spiritual advice of their mentor in the Lord, their letter was probably a response to Paul's Previous Letter mentioned in 5:9, in which they were taking exception to his position on point after point. In light of their own theology of spirit, with heavy emphasis on 'wisdom' and 'knowledge,' they have answered Paul with a kind of 'Why can't we?' attitude, in which they are looking for his response."<sup>209</sup>

<sup>206</sup>Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 99.

<sup>207</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 264.

<sup>208</sup>Keener, p. 62.

<sup>209</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 266-67.

## **A. MARRIAGE AND RELATED MATTERS CH. 7**

The first subject with which Paul dealt was marriage. He began with some general comments (vv. 1-7), and then dealt with specific situations.

"The transition from chapter 6 to chapter 7 illustrates the necessity Paul was under of waging a campaign on two fronts. In chapter 6 he dealt with libertines who argued that everything was permissible, and in particular that sexual licence [*sic*] was a matter of ethical indifference. In chapter 7 he deals with ascetics who, partly perhaps in reaction against the libertines, argued that sexual relations of every kind were to be deprecated, that Christians who were married should henceforth live as though they were unmarried, and those who were unmarried should remain so, even if they were already engaged to be married."<sup>210</sup>

". . . the controlling motif of Paul's answer is: 'Do not seek a change in status.' This occurs in every subsection (vv. 2, 8, 10, 11, 12-16, 26-27, 37, 40) and is the singular theme of the paragraph that ties the . . . sections together (vv. 17-24)—although in each case an exception is allowed."<sup>211</sup>

"Two other features about the nature of the argument need to be noted: First, along with 11:2-16, this is one of the least combative sections of the letter. Indeed, after the argumentation of 1:10—6:20, this section is altogether placid. Furthermore, also along with 11:2-16, this is one of the least 'authority-conscious' sections in all of his letters. Phrases like 'I say this by way of concession, not of command' (v. 6), 'it is good for them' (vv. 8, 26), 'I have no command, but I give my opinion' (v. 25; cf. 40) are not your standard Paul. Second, in a way quite unlike anything else in all his letters, the argument alternates between men and women (12 times in all). And in every case there is complete mutuality between the two sexes."<sup>212</sup>

### **1. Advice to the married or formerly married 7:1-16**

Paul proceeded to give guidelines to the married or formerly married. The statement "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (v. 1) may well have been a Corinthian slogan.<sup>213</sup> This hypothesis, which seems valid to me in light of Paul's argumentation, results in a different interpretation of the text than has been traditional. The traditional view takes the entire section as explaining Paul's position on marriage in general in response to the Corinthians' question about its advisability.<sup>214</sup> I believe Paul responded to the Corinthians' false view, as expressed in this slogan, in all that follows in this section.

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<sup>210</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 66.

<sup>211</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 268.

<sup>212</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 269-70.

<sup>213</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>214</sup>Advocates of the traditional interpretation include Godet, Lightfoot, Grosheide, Morris, Mare, and Wiersbe.

### The importance of sexual relations in marriage 7:1-7

Paul advised married people not to abstain from normal sexual relations.

7:1 Again Paul began what he had to say by citing a general truth. Then he proceeded to qualify it (cf. 6:12-13). The use of the Greek word *anthropos* ("man" generically, people), rather than *aner* ("man" as distinguished from woman), indicates that the statement pertains to human beings generally. To "touch a woman" (NASB) was a common ancient euphemism for sexual intercourse.<sup>215</sup> It was probably another Corinthian slogan (cf. 6:12, 13, 18). Evidently the Corinthians' question was something like this: Isn't it preferable for a Christian man to abstain from sexual relations with any woman (even one's own wife)? This would reflect the "spiritual" viewpoint of the Corinthians, which held a negative attitude toward the material world and the body (cf. 6:13; 15:12).

"Some difficulty is alleviated if these words [the slogan] are regarded as a quotation from the Corinthian letter, and this is a hypothesis that may very probably be accepted [cf. 6:12-13] . . ." <sup>216</sup>

Another view is that "touch a woman" was a euphemism for marrying.<sup>217</sup> However, this meaning is difficult to prove, and I do not prefer it. If this is what he meant, Paul's advice was to abstain from marrying. Paul wrote later that "because of the present distress," his readers would do well to remain in their present marital state (v. 26). Furthermore, throughout this passage Paul viewed marriage as God-ordained and perfectly proper for Christians. He also wrote that a single life is not wrong, but "good" (Gr. *kalon*), though not necessarily better than a married life.

7:2 This verse probably begins Paul's extended correction of the Corinthians' view of marriage. He proceeded to strongly urge them that the type of abstinence that they were arguing for—within marriage—was *totally wrong*. Notice the three sets of balanced pairs in verses 2-4. In this verse, Paul urged married couples to have sexual relations with one another, because of the prevalence of temptations to satisfy sexual desire inappropriately. "Having" one's spouse was a common euphemism in non-biblical Greek for having that person sexually.<sup>218</sup>

The view of verse 1 that understands Paul to be saying that it is better to avoid marrying, sees Paul as making a concession to that statement here. Those who hold this view believe that Paul was now saying in verse 2 that it is better to marry, since many single people cannot live in the single state without eventually committing "immoralities" (fornication, Gr. *porneias*). This is obviously not the only reason to marry (cf. Gen. 2:18-

<sup>215</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 275; Lowery, p. 517; Keener, p. 62.

<sup>216</sup>Barrett, p. 154.

<sup>217</sup>Morris, p. 105.

<sup>218</sup>Keener, p. 62.

24), but it appears to have been an important consideration in Corinth, where temptations to fornicate abounded. As noted above, I do not favor this interpretation. Another unappealing interpretation is as follows.

"This [i.e., "each . . . each"] forbids polygamy, which was advocated by some Jewish teachers."<sup>219</sup>

- 7:3 In view of the temptation to commit fornication, each partner in marriage needs to "fulfill his" or her sexual "duty" to the spouse. Part of the responsibility of marriage is to meet the various needs of the partner (Gen. 2:18), including sexual needs.
- 7:4 Moreover, in marriage each partner relinquishes certain personal rights, including the exclusive right to ("authority over") "his (or her) own body," to which he or she gives the mate a claim. Neither person has *complete* authority over his or her own body in marriage. Note that Paul was careful to give both husband and wife equal rights in these verses. He did not regard the man as having sexual rights or needs that the woman does not have, or vice versa.
- 7:5 Evidently the Corinthians, at least some of them, had concluded that since they were "spiritual," they did not need to continue to have sexual relations as husband and wife. Another, less probable situation, I think, is that there were some married Christians in the church who were overreacting to the immorality in Corinth—by abstaining from sexual relations with their mates. For whatever reason, Paul viewed this as "depriving one another" of their normal sexual needs, and he urged them to stop doing it. Husbands and wives should commit themselves to honoring the spirit of mutual ownership that these verses describe.

There are legitimate reasons for temporary abstinence, but couples should temporarily abstain only with the "agreement" of both partners. When there are greater needs, i.e., *spiritual* needs, the couple may want to set aside their normal physical needs. However, they should only do so temporarily ("for a time"). Laying aside eating (fasting) or sleeping (watching) temporarily, to engage in more important spiritual duties (e.g., "prayer"), is similar.

"Three conditions are required for lawful abstention: it must be by mutual consent, for a good object, and temporary."<sup>220</sup>

Normally we think of sexual activity as an indication of lack of self-control, but Paul also viewed the failure to engage in sex as a lack of self-control for a married person.

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<sup>219</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 133.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

7:6 Paul's "concession" was allowing temporary abstinence from sex. The concession was not permitting them to have sex. He never commanded abstinence in his teaching. He viewed regular marital relations as the norm. Paul was not an ascetic who favored as little sex as possible. Abstinence was the exception to what was normal in his view.

7:7 Paul evidently was not a married man when he wrote this epistle (v. 8). We do not have enough information about his life to know whether he had never married, had become a widower, or if his wife had left him.

To Paul, the single state had certain advantages for a servant of the Lord like himself. He had to put up with many hardships in his ministry that would have been difficult for a wife to share. Moreover, God had given him grace to live as a single person who did not feel consumed by the fires of lust (cf. v. 9). "Burning" was a very common description of unfulfilled passion in Greek and Roman literature.<sup>221</sup>

He wished everyone could live as he did ("I wish that all men were even as I myself am"), but he realized that most could not. "Each" person has his or her own special "gift (Gr. *charisma*) from God," some to live single, and some to live married (cf. Matt. 19:12). These are spiritual gifts just as much as those gifts listed in chapters 12—14 are. The gift of celibacy is a special ability, that God gives only some people, to feel free from the desire or need of sexual fulfillment in marriage.<sup>222</sup>

### **The legitimate option of singleness 7:8-9**

Paul moved from advice to the married, regarding sexual abstinence, to advice to the unmarried. He advised this group, as he had the former one, to remain in the state in which they found themselves, but he allowed them an exception too.

7:8 Who are the "unmarried" (Gr. *agamois*) that Paul had in view? Most interpreters have taken this word in its broadest possible meaning, namely, all categories of unmarried people. Others, however, take it to refer to "widowers," since Paul also specified "widows" in this verse, and since he dealt with males and females in balance in this chapter. There is a Greek word for "widowers," but it does not appear in the *koine* Greek period. *Agamos* served in its place.<sup>223</sup> I prefer the former view: all unmarried people.

The unmarried state has some advantages over the married state, even though it is better for most people to marry (Gen. 2:18). Since singleness is not a sinful condition, married people should not look down on single people, or pity them because they are unmarried. Sometimes married people tend to do this because singles do not enjoy the pleasures of

<sup>221</sup>Keener, p. 63.

<sup>222</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 284.

<sup>223</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 287-88 for additional support for this view.

married life. In any event, they enjoy the pleasures of single life that married individuals do not. Married people should not pressure single people to get married just because they are single.

7:9 However, if a single person cannot or does not control his or her passions ("have self-control"), it would be "better to marry than to burn" with lustful temptation (cf. v. 2). If a single has very strong sexual urges that may very well drive him or her into fornication, he or she would be wise to get married if possible. Of course a believer should marry a suitable Christian mate. This may be easier said than done, especially for a woman. The Lord has promised to provide the basic needs of those who put Him first in their lives (e.g., Matt. 6:33). I believe He will do so, in answer to prayer, either by providing a suitable mate, or by enabling the single person to control his or her sexual passions. In either case, He gives more grace (10:13).

### **No divorce for Christians whose mates are believers 7:10-11**

Some Corinthian spouses wanted to abstain from intercourse (7:1-7), but some others apparently wanted to extricate themselves from their marriages altogether (7:10-16).<sup>224</sup> Again Paul advised remaining as they were, but he also allowed an exception.

"While Paul displays ambivalence toward whether widowers and widows should get married (vv. 8-9), he consistently rejects the notion that the married may dissolve their marriages."<sup>225</sup>

7:10 The Lord Jesus Christ gave instruction concerning what believers are to do in marriage when He taught during His earthly ministry (Matt. 5:27-32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12). Paul cited some of this teaching and added more of his own. This is one of the rare instances when Paul appealed directly to Jesus' teachings (cf. 9:14; 11:23; 1 Tim. 5:18). Usually he taught in harmony with Jesus without citing Him. Of course, God's instructions through Paul are just as inspired and authoritative as His teaching through Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. This is one of Paul's few commands in this chapter (cf. vv. 2-5).

The main point of Paul's advice is that Christians should not break up their marriages (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:7-9). "Leaving" and divorcing (vv. 12-13) were virtually the same in Greco-Roman culture.<sup>226</sup> "Separate" (Gr. *chorizo*) was vernacular for "divorce."<sup>227</sup> In our day, one popular way to deal with marriage problems is to split up, and this has always been an attractive option for many people. Nevertheless, the Lord's will is that all people, including believers, work through their marital problems—rather than giving up on them by separating permanently.

<sup>224</sup>Keener, p. 64.

<sup>225</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 291.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>227</sup>William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 899.



7:11 If separation (divorce) occurs ("if she does leave"), they should ("she must") "remain unmarried" (i.e., stay as they are), "or else be reconciled" with their mate. Paul phrased this as the *wife's* course of action, only because if she was the one who left, then she would be the mate who had to decide what to do. However, the same procedure would be appropriate for the husband in the reverse situation. In Greco-Roman culture, wives could divorce their husbands, but among the Jews they could not.<sup>228</sup> Only the husband could initiate a divorce (Deut. 24:1).

I believe Paul did not deal with the exception that Jesus Christ allowed on the grounds of fornication (Gr. *porneia*; Matt. 5:32; 19:9), because it is an exception. Paul wanted to reinforce the main teaching of Christ on this subject, namely, that couples should not dissolve their marriages.

Some of the Corinthian Christians appear to have been separating for ascetic reasons: to get away from sexual activity. In many modern cultures, the reason is often the opposite; people often divorce to marry someone else. Regardless of the reason for the temptation, Paul commanded Christian husbands and wives to stay together, and to share their bodies—as well as their lives—with each other. It is impossible for a Christian husband and wife couple to provide a model of reconciliation to the world if they cannot reconcile with each other.

### **No divorce for Christians whose mates are unbelievers 7:12-16**

In this situation, too, Paul granted an exception, but the exceptional is not the ideal. He also reiterated his principle of staying in the condition in which one finds himself or herself.

". . . one of the great heathen complaints against Christianity was exactly the complaint that Christianity did break up families and was a disruptive influence in society. 'Tampering with domestic relationships' was in fact one of the first charges brought against the Christians."<sup>229</sup>

7:12-13 "The rest" refers to persons not in the general category of verse 10. Paul had been speaking of the typical married persons in the church, namely, those married to another believer. Now he dealt with mixed marriages between a believer and an unbeliever, as the following verses make clear.

For mixed couples, Paul could not cite a teaching of Jesus, because He had not spoken on this subject. At least, as far as Paul knew He had not. Nevertheless, the risen Lord inspired Paul's instructions on this subject, so they were every bit as authoritative as the teaching Jesus gave during His earthly ministry.

The Corinthians may have asked Paul: Should a believing partner divorce an unbelieving mate instead of continue living mismatched with him or her? This was the problem he addressed. He counseled the believer to go

<sup>228</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 69.

<sup>229</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 70.

on living with the unbeliever as long as the unbeliever was willing to do so.

"The point is clear: in a mixed marriage the Christian partner is not to take the initiative . . . in a move towards [permanent] separation."<sup>230</sup>

7:14 Even though an unbeliever might affect his or her mate negatively, morally or ethically, it is still better to keep the marriage together. This is because the believing mate will positively affect the unbeliever. "Sanctified" (Gr. *hagiadzo*) means to be set apart for a special purpose. God has set aside the unsaved ("unbelieving") spouse of a believer for special blessing, some of which comes through his or her mate (cf. Exod. 29:37; Lev. 6:18). God will deal with such a person differently than He deals with those not married to Christians.

I do not believe Paul would have objected to a couple separating temporarily, if the believer was in physical danger from the unbeliever (cf. v. 15). What he did not want was for believers to initiate the termination of their marriages, for this or any other reason. Paul did not get into all the possible situations that married people face.

Likewise, the "children" in such a marriage would enjoy special treatment from God, rather than being in a worse condition than the children in a Christian home. This special "setting apart" probably involves their protection in the mixed home, and the supply of grace needed for that sometimes difficult situation. "Holy" (Gr. *hagios*) means "set apart as different."

I do not believe Paul was saying unsaved spouses and children of mixed marriages are better off than the spouses and children in Christian families. His point was that God would offset the disadvantages of such a situation with special grace.

"This verse throws no light on the question of infant baptism."<sup>231</sup>

7:15 On the other hand, "if the unbeliever (unbelieving one)" in a mixed marriage wants to break up the marriage ("leaves"), the believing partner should allow him or her to do so ("let him [(or her)] leave"). The reason for this is that God wants peace to exist in human relationships. It is better to have a peaceful relationship with an unbelieving spouse who has departed, than it is to try to hold the marriage together. This is true if holding the marriage together will only result in constant antagonism and increasing hostility in the home. However, notice that the Christian does not have the option, apart from a threatening situation, of departing (vv. 10-11).

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<sup>230</sup>Barrett, p. 164.

<sup>231</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 142.

Another view is that Paul meant that separation should be prevented, if at all possible, since that would disrupt the peace of the marriage union.<sup>232</sup> However, this view presupposes that peace existed between the husband and wife, which seems unlikely since one of them wanted a divorce from the other.

When the unbeliever departs, the Christian is no longer "under bondage" (Gr. *douleuo*, lit. to be a slave). Does this refer to bondage to hold the marriage together, or to bondage to remain unmarried? Many of the commentators believed it means that the Christian is free to let the unbeliever depart; he or she does not have an obligation to maintain the marriage.<sup>233</sup> Among these, some hold that the believer is not free to remarry (cf. v. 11).<sup>234</sup> Most of these, however, believe that the Christian is free to remarry.<sup>235</sup> The Greek text does not solve this problem. I think Paul was not addressing the idea of remarrying here.

I would counsel a Christian, whose unsaved spouse has divorced him or her, to remain unmarried as long as there is a possibility that the unsaved person may return. However, if the unsaved spouse who has departed remarries, I believe the Christian would be free to remarry since, by remarrying, the unsaved partner has closed the door on reconciliation.<sup>236</sup>

7:16

It is possible that Paul meant Christians should not separate from their unbelieving spouses because, by staying together, the unbeliever might eventually become a Christian (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1).<sup>237</sup> He may have meant that the believer should not oppose the unbeliever's departing because he possibly could become a Christian through channels other than the witness of the believing spouse. Both possibilities are realistic, so even though we cannot tell exactly what the apostle meant here, what we should do is clear. The Christian can have hope that God may bring the unsaved spouse to salvation while the believer does the Lord's will.

Verse 16 is a positive note on which to close the instructions to Christians who have unsaved spouses.

## **2. Basic principles 7:17-24**

At this point, Paul moved back from specific situations to basic principles his readers needed to keep in mind when thinking about marriage (cf. vv. 1-7). He drew his illustrations in this section from circumcision and slavery.

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<sup>232</sup>Johnson, p. 1240.

<sup>233</sup>E.g., Robertson and Plummer, p. 143; Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 302-3.

<sup>234</sup>E.g., William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*.

<sup>235</sup>E.g., Barrett, p. 166; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 70; Lenski, pp. 294-95; Lowery, p. 518; Morris, p. 111; and Keener, p. 65.

<sup>236</sup>See Robertson, 4:128. See also Appendix 1 "What ends a marriage in God's sight?" at the end of these notes.

<sup>237</sup>Barrett, p. 167.

"Under the rubric 'It is good not to have relations with a woman,' they were seeking to change their present status, apparently because as believers they saw this as conforming to the more spiritual existence that they had already attained. Thus they saw one's status with regard to marriage/celebrity as having *religious* significance and sought change because of it. Under the theme of 'call' Paul seeks to put their 'spirituality' into a radically different perspective. They should remain in whatever social setting they were at the time of their call since God's call to be in Christ (cf. 1:9) transcends such settings so as to make them essentially irrelevant."<sup>238</sup>

7:17 Whether he or she is unmarried or married, married to a believer or to an unbeliever, the Christian should regard his or her current "condition" (v. 20) as what God has placed him or her in ("as the Lord has assigned to each one") for the time being. The concept of "call" is a way of describing Christian conversion (cf. 1:2, 9). He or she should concentrate on serving the Lord in that condition ("as God has called each"), rather than spending most of one's time and energy on trying to change it. Paul taught the priority of serving Christ, over trying to change one's circumstances, "in all the churches."

"Paul's intent is not to lay down a rule that one may not change; rather, by thus hallowing one's situation in life, he is trying to help the Corinthians see that their social status is ultimately irrelevant as such (i.e., they can live out their Christian life in any of the various options) and therefore their desire to change is equally irrelevant—because it has nothing to do with genuine spirituality as their slogan would infer (v. 1b)."<sup>239</sup>

This is the second of four instances where Paul appealed to what was customary "in all the churches" (cf. 4:17; 11:16; 14:33). He never did this in any of his other letters. He was reminding this church that its theology was off track, not his.

7:18-19 This principle of remaining in one's present condition applies to being "circumcised" or "uncircumcised," as well as to being married or unmarried. Both conditions were secondary to following the Lord obediently. God did not command celibacy or marriage, circumcision or uncircumcision (under the New Covenant). These are matters of personal choice in the church. One's ministry might be one factor, however, in his or her decision (e.g., Acts 16:3; cf. Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

The idea of becoming "uncircumcised" after one has been circumcised seems strange, but some Jews actually did this to avoid being known as

<sup>238</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 307.

<sup>239</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 311. Cf. Robertson and Plummer, p. 144.

Jews, when they participated in activities at the public gymnasiums.<sup>240</sup> They underwent an operation that reversed their circumcision.

7:20 The "condition" (NASB) or "situation" (NIV; Gr. *klesis*) is the calling (v. 17) in life (station; position), in which a person was at the time God called him or her into His family (cf. 1:2; Eph. 4:1). Our *calling* as Christians, to bear witness to Jesus Christ, is more important than our "calling" in life, namely, the place we occupy in the social, economic, and geographical scheme of things.

7:21 Paul did not mean that a Christian should take a fatalistic view of life, and regard his or her condition (station) as something he or she should definitely remain in *forever*. If we have the opportunity to improve ourselves for the glory of God, we should do so. If we do not, we should not fret about our state, but bloom where God has planted us. We should regard our calling by Christ as sanctifying our present situation. In the context, of course, Paul was appealing to those who felt compelled to dissolve their marriages.

Another example of this principle would be: if a person became a Christian while uneducated, he could still serve Christ effectively—without a formal education—in a variety of ways. Many outstanding servants of the Lord have done so. If he has the opportunity to get an education, and so serve God more effectively, he should feel free to take advantage of that opportunity. Unfortunately some Christians put more emphasis on getting an education than they do on serving the Lord. This is putting the cart before the horse, and is the very thing Paul warned against here.

7:22 Paul's emphasis on the wisdom of the world versus the wisdom of God comes back into view in this section of verses (cf. 1:10—4:21). Priorities are in view. Does the Corinthian slave view himself primarily as a "slave" or as a "freedman"? (A freedman was a person who had formerly been a slave but had received "manumission": had been set free.) The Corinthian slave was both: a slave of men but the freedman of God. Does the freedman view himself primarily as a freedman or as a slave? The freedman was both: a freedman socially but the Lord's slave spiritually.

"This imagery, of course, must be understood in light of Greco-Roman slavery, not that of recent American history. Slavery was in fact the bottom rung on the social order, but for the most part it provided generally well for up to one-third of the population in a city like Corinth or Rome. The slave had considerable freedom and very often experienced mutual benefit along with the master. The owner received the benefit of the slave's services; and the slave had steady

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<sup>240</sup>Ibid., p. 146. See also Keener, p. 66.

'employment,' including having all his or her basic needs met—indeed, for many to be a slave was preferable to being a freedman, whose securities were often tenuous at best. But the one thing that marked the slave was that in the final analysis, he did not belong to himself but to another. That is Paul's point with this imagery."<sup>241</sup>

It is unfortunate that many Christians today choose to focus on their limitations and not on their possibilities as representatives of Jesus Christ. We should use the abilities and opportunities that God gives us, rather than feeling sorry for ourselves because we do not have other abilities or opportunities.

7:23 Paul's thought returned to the Cross again (cf. 6:20). God has set us free from the worst kind of slavery, having purchased us with the precious blood of His Son. How foolish, then, it would be for us to give up any of the liberties we enjoy—that enable us to serve Jesus Christ! How ridiculous it would be to place ourselves back into a slave relationship to anyone or anything but Him ("do not become slaves of men"). This applies to both physical and spiritual bondage.

7:24 For the third time in this pericope (vv. 17, 20, 24), Paul stated the basic principle that he advocated. Evidently there was much need for this exhortation in the Corinthian church.

In our day, upward mobility has become a *god* to many Christians, and its worship has polluted the church. We need to be content to serve the Lord, to live out our calling, whether in a mixed marriage, singleness, a white collar or blue collar job, or whatever socioeconomic condition we may occupy.

In this section, Paul chose his examples from circumcision and uncircumcision, slavery and freedom. However, the larger context of the chapter is singleness and marriage. His point was that those who were single, when God called them to follow Him, should be content to remain single, and that those who were married should stay married. Faithfulness to God or effectiveness for God do not require a change. Yet if opportunity for more effective service of Christ presents itself, one should feel free to take advantage of it.

### **3. Advice concerning virgins 7:25-40**

The second occurrence of the phrase *peri de* ("now concerning") occurs in verse 25 and indicates another subject about which the Corinthians had written Paul (cf. v. 1). This was the subject of single women. This section belongs with the rest of chapter 7 because this subject relates closely to what immediately precedes. Paul continued to deal with questions about marriage that the Corinthians' asceticism raised.

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<sup>241</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 319.

### The advantage of the single state 7:25-28

In view of the verses in this section, it seems that the question the Corinthians had asked Paul was: Should an engaged girl get married or remain single? One might understand verses 17-24 as saying that no unmarried person should change her (or his) situation (station; position) and get married (cf. v. 8), but this was not necessarily what Paul advocated.

7:25 The "virgins" (Gr. *parthenoi*) were a group within the "unmarried" (*agamoi*) of verse 8. Paul used the feminine gender in five out of the six uses of this noun in verses 25-38. Consequently it seems clear that he was speaking of female virgins in particular.

There are three major views about the identity of these virgins. One view is that they were the "virgin daughters" of men in the Corinthian church, and that these fathers had questions about giving their daughters in marriage. A second view is that the virgins were both men and women who were living together in a "spiritual marriage" (i.e., without sexual relations). A third view is that the virgins were females who were engaged, or thinking of becoming engaged, but were experiencing pressure from the "spiritual" ones in the church to forgo marriage. I believe the text supports the third view best.

The Lord Jesus had not addressed this problem during His earthly ministry, as far as Paul knew (cf. v. 12). Paul gave his inspired opinion as a "trustworthy" (wise) steward of the Lord who had received "mercy" to be such (4:2). Note that Paul appealed to the Lord's mercy, not His command. As in the first part of this chapter, Paul was offering good advice, but he was not commanding that everyone do the same thing. Therefore, to choose not to follow Paul's advice did not amount to sinning.

7:26 What was the "present distress" or crisis (Gr. *anagke*) to which the apostle referred? It may have been a crisis in the Corinthian church or in Corinth, about which we have no more specific information. However, in view of Paul's description of this distress (vv. 29-31), it seems as though he was speaking of the fact that we live in the last days.<sup>242</sup> They are "last days" because the Lord's return for us could end them at any time.

If this is correct, we live in the same "present distress" as the Corinthian believers did. It is a time of distress because of the hostility of unbelievers and increasing apostasy (cf. 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3). Committed Christians constantly face opposition, antagonism, and stress because they hold values, morals, and priorities that the world rejects. The Apostle Paul consistently viewed the inter-advent age as a time of crisis and distress.

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<sup>242</sup>Barrett, p. 175; Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 77; et al.

The last part of the verse restates Paul's basic principle of abiding in one's calling (vv. 17, 20, 24). "Man" (NASB) or "you" (NIV) is *anthropos*, meaning "person."

7:27 Paul thought it prudent to stay married, rather than to seek a life of singleness with a view to serving the Lord more effectively. Obviously it would be wrong to split up a marriage for this purpose. If an unbelieving spouse had abandoned the Christian, or if he or she had lost his or her spouse to death, a single life would provide greater opportunity for Christian ministry.

7:28 Nevertheless, marrying in such a case is not sinful. Furthermore if a young woman decides to marry, rather than staying single, "she has not sinned." However, the decision to marry may complicate her service for the Lord.

For example, suppose a single woman gets into a position where an adversary may torture her for her faith. She could face that possibility more easily than a married woman could, who has children for whom she has responsibility. It is that kind of "trouble" that Paul evidently had in mind.

"One of the unfortunate things that has happened to this text in the church is that the very pastoral concern of Paul that caused him to express himself in this way has been a source of anxiety rather than comfort. Part of the reason for this is that in Western cultures we do not generally live in a time of 'present distress.' Thus we fail to sense the kind of care that this text represents. Beyond that, what is often heard is that Paul prefers singleness to marriage, which he does. But quite in contrast to Paul's own position over against the Corinthians, we often read into that preference that singleness is somehow a superior status. That causes some who do not wish to remain single to become anxious about God's will in their lives. Such people need to hear it again: Marriage or singleness per se lies totally outside the category of 'commandments' to be obeyed or 'sin' if one indulges; and Paul's preference here is not predicated on 'spiritual' grounds but on pastoral concern. It is perfectly all right to marry."<sup>243</sup>

### Reasons for remaining single 7:29-35

Paul next called his readers to take a different view of their relationship to the world, since they lived in distressing times, and the form of the world was passing away. We, too, need this view of the world, because we also live in distressing times, and the form of the world is still passing away.

7:29a While it is true that "the time" a person has to serve Christ grows shorter ("has been shortened") with every day he or she lives, Paul probably meant that the Lord's return is closer every day. However, it is not the

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<sup>243</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 334.



amount of time that we have left that concerned Paul, but the fact that we need to know our time is limited. Christians should live with a certain perspective on the future and, therefore, we should live with eternity's values consciously in view. We should be ready to make sacrifices now in view of the possibility of greater reward later (3:14; cf. Matt. 6:19-21).

- 7:29b-31a Married men ("those who have wives") should live as soldiers of the Cross, willing to forgo some of the comforts and pleasures of family life, but not its responsibilities, since we are in a spiritual battle. "Those who weep" should remember that present sorrow will be comparatively short (cf. Luke 6:21). Likewise, "those who rejoice" should bear in mind that we have a serious purpose to fulfill in life (Luke 6:25). When we make purchases ("those who buy"), we need to consider that we are only stewards of God and that everything really belongs to Him ("as though they did not possess"). The Christian should "use the world" and everything in it to serve the Lord, but he (or she) must not get completely wrapped up in the things of this world ("as though they did not make full use of it"). Therefore, whether a person is single or married, he or she should live with an attitude of detachment from the world. We should not let it engross or absorb us.
- 7:31b The reason for viewing life this way is that earthly life ("the world"), as we know it, is only temporary and "is passing away." This world is not our home; we're just a-pass'n' through.
- 7:32a Paul wanted his readers to be "free from concern[s]" about this present life, so that their devotion to the Lord would be consistent (v. 35; cf. Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:7). He wanted us believers to live as eschatological people. Our new existence in Christ should determine our lives, not the world in its present form. Buying and marrying should not determine our existence. A clear view of the future should do that.
- 7:32b-34 Comparing two equally committed Christians, an "unmarried" man can give more concentrated attention to "the things of the Lord." A "married" man needs to also be concerned about his family responsibilities. This is true of women, and particularly virgins, as well as men. Queen Elizabeth I said that England was her husband.<sup>244</sup> Some interpreters put more emphasis on the negative anxiety feeling ("concern"), while others stress the positive, legitimate "care" (caring concern) that each person needs to show. Both aspects of "concern" are probably in view. Even though the unmarried state is in one sense preferable, it is not intrinsically better.<sup>245</sup> Unfortunately, many single people—who have more time to devote to serving the Lord—choose to live for themselves.

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<sup>244</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 158.

<sup>245</sup>Barrett, p. 181.

7:35 Paul did not want his readers to regard his preceding comments as an attempt to build too strong a case for celibacy, as ascetics do. He wanted to help his readers appreciate the realities of the single and married states, so they could express unhindered (or "undistracted") "devotion to the Lord." Christians have genuine freedom under the Lord to choose to be single or married. Similarly, believers have freedom to choose how many children to have, and when to have them, assuming they are able to have them. There is no New Covenant legislation in this regard. However, we need to consider life in view of the "present distress" and the "shortened time" as we consider our options.

Paul counseled, not commanded, single women to remain unmarried for three reasons: the present difficult time for Christians (vv. 26-28), the imminent return of Christ (vv. 29-31), and the opportunity to serve Christ undistracted (vv. 32-35). Nevertheless, single women have freedom to choose whether they want to get married, as do single men. Yet the realities of life in Christ, that Paul outlined in this pericope, need to inform that decision.

### **The legitimacy of marriage 7:36-40**

This section concludes Paul's entire teaching on marriage in this chapter. However, it contains problems related to the meaning of "virgin," as is clear from the three different interpretations translated in: the NASB, the NIV, and the NEB. These verses may introduce a special case (advice to fathers of virgins<sup>246</sup>) or connect with verse 35. Perhaps the man in view is the fiancé of the virgin who is considering the possibility of marriage with her.<sup>247</sup> In the second case, the pericope then summarizes what Paul has already taught. I prefer the second view, but the first one has much to commend it.

7:36 Paul urged "any man" not to feel that he must remain single, or that he and his "virgin" girlfriend (or daughter) must forgo sexual fulfillment after marriage (vv. 1-7). He might have been reluctant to marry (or give her in marriage) because of what Paul had written about the single state being preferable (vv. 8, 28-34). Or he might have hesitated because of ascetic influences in the church that were due to a false sense of "spirituality," and possibly an overreaction to the fornication in Corinth.

"Roman and Greek fathers had the control of the marriage of their daughters."<sup>248</sup>

7:37 Likewise, the man who preferred to take Paul's advice to remain single should feel at peace ("stands firm in his heart") about his decision. External pressure from the ascetic Corinthians, or from what Paul himself had just written, need not constrain him ("being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will"). He should follow his own convictions

<sup>246</sup>E.g., Robertson and Plummer, p. 158; Lowery, p. 520.

<sup>247</sup>Barrett, p. 184.

<sup>248</sup>Robertson, 4:135.

("has decided this in his own heart") about marrying or not marrying, guided, of course, by the Holy Spirit.

7:38 The decision in view is one involving a choice between the good and the better, rather than right versus wrong, or not sinning versus sinning. This is a good example of an amoral (non-moral) situation. Paul addressed other non-moral situations later in this epistle (cf. 8:1—11:1).

"So at the end Paul has agreed, and disagreed, with the Corinthians in their letter. They prefer celibacy for 'spiritual' reasons; he prefers it for pastoral and eschatological ones. But quite in contrast to them, he also affirms marriage; indeed, he does so strongly: Such a man 'does well.' But there is one final word. These verses are addressed to the man; but in keeping with his response throughout, there is a final word for married women as well."<sup>249</sup>

7:39 The remaining two verses conclude both major sections of the discussion, by repeating that wives should not separate from their husbands (cf. vv. 1-24). This concluding reminder is especially important for virgins who are considering the possibility of marrying. Again Paul referred to marriage as a binding relationship (cf. vv. 15, 27). The wife "is bound" (Gr. *deo*) to "her husband," "as long as" he "lives." Does this mean that even if he leaves her the marriage tie is unbroken? That is what many interpreters have concluded. If that is the case, remarriage after a divorce or separation would constitute adultery (cf. Matt. 19:9; Mark 10:11-12). In that case, one should avoid remarriage before the death of the spouse.

Another possibility is that Paul conceded, but did not restate, the fact that desertion by an unbelieving spouse freed the Christian, and he or she was no longer under bondage to the mate (v. 15). This applied only to mixed marriages, however.

Paul regarded death as the only thing that always breaks the marriage bond. This may imply that present marital relationships will not continue in heaven in their current form (cf. Luke 20:34-36). Jesus taught that divorce (separation) may lead to adultery if the marriage partners do not reunite (Matt. 19:9). God may permit separation or divorce in certain circumstances (cf. Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15), but remarriage usually results in adultery, unless the former spouse of the divorced person has died.

When a Christian woman's husband dies, she is at liberty to marry whomever she chooses, provided he is a believer (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). The same rule would apply to a Christian man whose wife dies.

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<sup>249</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 355.

"Long, long ago Plutarch, the wise old Greek, laid it down, that 'marriage cannot be happy unless husband and wife are of the same religion.'"<sup>250</sup>

7:40 Paul expressed his opinion, that a widow would probably be better off to remain unmarried, with a very light touch, one that he used throughout this chapter. This decision, as well as all decisions about whether to marry or not, pivots on a delicate balance. Paul later acknowledged that given certain conditions some widows would usually be better off to marry (cf. 1 Tim. 5:9-13). For example, faced with the prospect of choosing between a fine Christian husband and a life of destitute poverty, it would probably be better for her to remarry. However, if all other things were equal, the single state seemed preferable to the apostle. Notice that the issue is the widow's happiness ("in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is"), not her obedience.

Paul undoubtedly knew he represented "the mind of the Spirit" in what he said. He simply expressed himself as he did to avoid laying too much weight on his preference.

This chapter is one of the central passages on the subject of marriage in the Bible (cf. Deut. 24; Matt. 5; 19; Mark 10).<sup>251</sup> It reveals that Paul was not a hard-nosed bigot and advocate of celibacy, as some have accused him of being. He was extremely careful to distinguish his personal preferences in non-moral aspects of this subject from the Lord's will. Even when the will of God was unequivocal (e.g., v. 39), he did not "pound the pulpit," but simply explained God's will in irenic fashion. May all of us who preach and teach on this sensitive subject follow his example.

### **B. FOOD OFFERED TO IDOLS 8:1—11:1**

The Corinthians had asked Paul another question, evidently in a combative spirit, judging by the apostle's response. It involved a practice common in their culture.

The commentators understand the situation that Paul addressed in two different ways. Some of them believe that the eating of marketplace food that pagans had previously offered to idols was non-moral (not a moral issue) in itself, but it was controversial enough to cause division among the church members. If this was indeed the issue that Paul addressed, it is only one of many similar "doubtful things." Advocates of this view believe that the apostle's directions to his readers, here, give us guidance in dealing with contemporary doubtful (non-moral) matters.

Other interpreters believe that eating food sacrificed to idols involved a specific form of idolatry and was, therefore, not non-moral but sinful (cf. 5:10-11). They assume that Paul was responding to the Corinthians' objection to his prohibition of this practice that he had written in his former letter to them. This view sees 8:10 and 10:1-22 as expressing the

<sup>250</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 79.

<sup>251</sup>See the bibliography of these notes for other helpful resources on this subject.

basic problem to which Paul was responding. I believe the text supports this interpretation of the facts better than the former one.

"That going to the temples is the real issue is supported by the fact that the eating of cultic meals was a regular part of worship in antiquity. This is true not only of the nations that surrounded Israel, but of Israel itself. In the Corinth of Paul's time, such meals were still the regular practice both at state festivals and private celebrations of various kinds. There were three parts to these meals: the preparation, the sacrifice proper, and the feast. The meat of the sacrifices apparently was divided into three portions: that burned before the god, that apportioned to the worshipers, and that placed on the 'table of the god,' which was tended by cultic ministrants but also eaten by the worshipers. The significance of these meals has been much debated, but most likely they involved a combination of religious and social factors. The gods were thought to be present since the meals were held in their honor and sacrifices were made; nonetheless, they were also intensely social occasions for the participants. For the most part the Gentiles who had become believers in Corinth had probably attended such meals all their lives; this was the basic 'restaurant' in antiquity, and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion.

"The problem, then, is best reconstructed along the following lines. After their conversion—and most likely after the departure of Paul—some of them returned to the practice of attending the cultic meals. In his earlier letter Paul forbade such 'idolatry'; but they have taken exception to that prohibition and in their letter have made four points:

"(1) They argue that 'all have knowledge' about idols [i.e., that there are no such things, so participation in these meals is not an issue, cf. vv. 1, 4]. . . .

"(2) They also have knowledge about food, that it is a matter of indifference to God (8:8) . . .

"(3) They seem to have a somewhat 'magical' view of the sacraments; those who have had Christian baptism and who partake of the Lord's Table are not in any danger of falling (10:1-4).

"(4) Besides, there is considerable question in the minds of many whether Paul has the proper apostolic authority to forbid them on this matter. In their minds this has been substantiated by two factors: first, his failure to accept support while with them; and second, his own apparently compromising stance on idol food sold in the marketplace (he abstained when eating with Jews, but ate when eating with Gentiles; cf. 9:19-23)."<sup>252</sup>

### **1. The priority of love over knowledge in Christian conduct ch. 8**

The amount of corrective instruction concerning knowledge in this epistle makes clear that the Corinthian Christians valued knowledge too highly. Paul wrote that the real aim of the faith should not be knowledge but love.

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<sup>252</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 360-62.

### Knowledge and love compared 8:1-3

Paul began by comparing the way of love and the way of knowledge to show their relative importance.

8:1 The key phrase *peri de* ("now concerning" or "now about"), as well as a change in subject matter, mark off a new section of this epistle.

Traditional interpreters of this passage have pointed out that in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, pagan Gentiles offered sacrificial animals daily to various pagan gods and goddesses in their temples. Only a token portion went to the deity and burned up on the altar. The temple priests, attendants, and their families ate most of the meat, but frequently they could not eat all that the worshippers brought. Consequently they sold what remained to the meat market operators in the *agora* (marketplace). There the general public purchased it. This meat was very desirable and popular, because the pagans usually offered only the best animals in sacrifice. However, the butchers did not usually identify it as meat that someone had offered to an idol. Traditional interpreters believe that this is the meat in view in the discussion.<sup>253</sup> As mentioned above, I think eating in an idol temple has better support.

In dealing with this issue, Paul began as he customarily did in this epistle, by identifying common ground of belief with his readers (cf. 6:2; 7:1). "We all have knowledge" may have been another Corinthian slogan. All the believers knew that there were no other gods besides the one true God. This knowledge was leading some in the church to think that eating in an idol temple was insignificant. It probably led others to make no distinction between the kinds of meat they bought in the market. This was perfectly proper, as Paul pointed out later. Nevertheless, knowledge of this fact was not the only factor his readers needed to consider in their relationship to eating this food.

The apostle established at the beginning of his discussion of this important subject that "knowledge" by itself produces arrogance ("makes arrogant"; cf. 1:5; 12:8). We have already seen that arrogance was one of the Corinthians' major weaknesses (4:6, 18-19; 5:2). In contrast, "love edifies." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (13:4). Paul did not mean his readers should abandon the knowledge that was foundational to their correct conduct. He meant that knowledge without love is incomplete, and by itself will not lead them to correct conduct.

8:2 Paul warned that "if anyone" thinks he or she has fully mastered any subject, he or she can count on the fact that he or she has not. The reason for this is that there is always more to any subject than any one person can ever learn or know. There is always another facet to it, another point of

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<sup>253</sup>E.g., Barrett, pp. 188-89; and Wiersbe, 1:594.

view that one has not considered when examining it, or more information about it.

This person's knowledge is deficient in another sense. His attitude toward his knowledge is wrong. He arrogantly and unrealistically claims to have exhausted his subject, rather than humbly realizing that he has not done so. To think one has fully mastered any subject is the height of arrogance. Paul said what he did here to humble some of his readers. Some claimed that since there are no such things as idols, it was perfectly obvious what the Christian's relation to eating meat in an idol's temple should be.

"True *gnosis* ["knowledge"] consists not in the accumulation of so much data, nor even in the correctness of one's theology, but in the fact that one has learned to live in love toward all."<sup>254</sup>

"The distinction which it seems that these rather cumbersome clauses seek to express is between, on the one hand, the collection of pieces of information (*gnosis*) about God, and, on the other, the state of being personally, and rightly, related to him."<sup>255</sup>

"A famous preacher used to say, 'Some Christians grow; others just swell.'"<sup>256</sup>

8:3 Paul chose one subject to illustrate the proper view. Accumulating all the facts about God that one possibly could will not result in the most realistic knowledge of Him. One must also *love* God. If a person "loves God," then God knows (recognizes) him in an intimate way, and reveals Himself to him (2:10; Matt. 11:27). Consequently it is really more important that God knows us than that we know Him ("he is known by Him"). When He knows us intimately, He will enable us to know Him intimately.

". . . If a man loves God, this is a sign that God has taken the initiative."<sup>257</sup>

Logically, not only will God enable those who love Him to know Him better, but He will also enable those who love Him to understand other subjects as well. Paul said this to establish the priority of *love* over knowledge in determining our behavior in various situations.

### **The content of the way of knowledge 8:4-6**

Paul resumed his discussion of knowledge here, after digressing briefly in verses 2 and 3 to comment on the superiority of love over knowledge.

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<sup>254</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 368.

<sup>255</sup>Barrett, p. 190.

<sup>256</sup>Wiersbe, 1:595.

<sup>257</sup>Barrett, p. 190.

- 8:4 In this verse, Paul returned to the original subject of eating meals in idol temples, and applied the priority of love over knowledge to it. Unquestionably, idols are not spirit beings like God is—who is real ("there is no such thing as an idol in the world"). There is only "one" *true* God (Deut. 6:4). Every Christian should know that, and the Corinthians did. "We know that" affirms what they all knew as true.
- 8:5 Nevertheless for many people, the pagans and even Christians who do not have a correct concept of deity, there are "many" beings they regard as "gods" and "lords" over various areas of life. The Greeks applied the term "gods" to their traditional deities, and the term "lords" to the deities of their mystery cults.<sup>258</sup>
- 8:6 For instructed Christians, there is only "one God" ("from whom are all things"), and "one Lord" ("by whom are all things"). Paul did not mean that there are two separate "God"-beings or two Gods: "God" and "Lord." These are two names for the one true God, who exists as united Father and Son. The Scriptures establish the deity of Jesus Christ elsewhere (e.g., John 1:1, 14; 10:30; Col. 1:15-19; et al.). Paul did not argue that point here, but simply stated the Son's equality with the Father within the triune Godhead.

The point of difference is this: The Father is the source ("*from* whom") and goal ("*for* whom") of "all things," whereas the Son is the agent "*through*" and "*by* whom all things" have come from God and will return to God ("exist"). Since Paul's point was the unity of the Godhead, there was no need to complicate matters by referring to the Holy Spirit here.

### **The criterion of care for a brother 8:7-13**

"He [Paul] develops an airtight case based on a solid theological foundation (8:6). But then comes the *alla* ('however' [v. 7]), and the argument moves in an entirely different direction.

"At issue is the nature of the community. Is it a community where those with a correct theology can ignore others who have an aversion to eating the idol-consecrated food? What must prevail is not the principle of superior knowledge but the realization that those who lack knowledge are those 'for whom Christ died' (8:11). Edification takes precedence over freedom; the other person's advantage takes precedence over one's own (10:23-24). The christological epistemology of 1:18—2:16 applied to the controversy over eating food offered to idols calls for a community of sensitivity and love."<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 373.

<sup>259</sup>Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 99.



8:7 The traditional interpretation of this verse is as follows: Whereas every Christian should know that there are no other gods but the one true God, some of the Corinthians, because of their previous belief in idols, had difficulty shaking that belief. They still had needless false guilt ("their conscience being weak is defiled") about eating meat that someone had previously dedicated to a heathen deity. They thought they were doing something wrong, even though they were not. This false guilt created a problem for them in their relationship with God.

A modern equivalent might be a Christian who gets saved out of a pagan background in which he was spending all of his free time and money on recreation of various kinds. He becomes a Christian and realizes that recreation had been his god. As a conscientious Christian, he wants to avoid slipping back into that trap, so he avoids recreation. He may even become critical of other believers who enjoy the forms of recreation to which he considers himself previously enslaved. He has trouble accepting recreation as a legitimate activity for Christians. When he sees other Christians enjoying recreation, he tends to look down on them as carnal. He has false guilt about participating in recreation.

Probably Paul was describing a Corinthian Christian who would attend a feast in an idol temple, in the same way he or she had done before conversion (eat meat "as if it were sacrificed to an idol"). That person would have pangs of true guilt, because by participating, he or she was tacitly approving the worship, and consequently the existence of the idol. Paul said the person's conscience was "weak," because even though he or she *intellectually* believed there was only one God, his or her *emotions* had not fully assimilated that truth. Evidently this was Peter's problem when he compromised by withdrawing from eating with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14).

8:8 Foods do not make us more or less pleasing ("food does not commend us") "to God." In our relationship to Him, we are no better or worse whether we participate or abstain. However, eating food in a pagan temple was something else.

"It is the clean heart, and not clean food, that will matter;  
and the weak brother confounds the two."<sup>260</sup>

8:9 The knowledge that some food is all right in itself is not the only factor that should determine whether we eat it or not. Love for a brother that our participation bothers is also important. The weak brother is weak because his emotions have not caught up to his intellect. In this context, "a stumbling block" is any barrier to another individual's personal relationship with God. The Corinthian Christians, who had returned to the pagan temples for their feasts, were disregarding how their participation

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<sup>260</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 170.

was affecting their brethren, who still viewed participation as worship, or at least approval, of the idol.

In the United States, the law permits a driver to turn right at most stoplights, provided there is no oncoming traffic. Turning right into oncoming traffic would pose a danger to others. The driver must make his or her decision to turn right, or to wait, on the basis of the welfare of everyone concerned. Just so, Christians must choose to exercise their liberty on the basis of the welfare of everyone concerned.

Some Christians have found it helpful to remember the acronym JOY: **J**esus first, **O**thers next, **Y**ourself last.

- 8:10 In verses 10-12, Paul proceeded to appeal on behalf of the rights of the weak. Suppose a Corinthian Christian appreciated the fact that eating meat offered to an idol was insignificant in itself. He might accept an invitation from friends to share a meal in a pagan temple, at which the cultic leader, *conducting an idolatrous ritual*, served sacrificed meat—if he saw another Corinthian believer there. Undoubtedly some of the believers in Corinth were attending these feasts, and were encouraging other Christians to take this "knowledgeable" stand. Some have argued that the meals there were spiritually harmless temple meals.<sup>261</sup> But this seems indefensible to me. This verse is one of the clearest evidences that participating in feasts in idol temples was the issue Paul was addressing, rather than simply eating marketplace meat.
- 8:11 Paul explained what had taken place in such a situation. The knowledgeable Christian had, by his "knowledge" of what he considered legitimate, and by acting on the basis of that knowledge alone, destroyed ("ruined") his brother's relationship with God. "Ruined" seems strong, but Paul evidently anticipated the weaker brother returning to idolatry, the next step after participating in a feast in an idol temple. The apostle stressed the value of the weaker brother ("he who is weak") by referring to the fact that "Christ died" for him. Therefore the stronger brother dare not view him and his scruples as insignificant or unimportant.
- 8:12 We are not free to damage another person's relationship with God. We "sin against" God ("Christ") and that person when we put an occasion for stumbling before him or her. This is the very opposite of what God has called us to do, namely, love God and other people (cf. Matt. 22:37-39). The ultimate wrong of the person, who lives only by his "knowledge," is not just that he lacks *true* knowledge, or that he causes a brother to stumble. It is that he sins "against Christ."

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<sup>261</sup>E.g., Bruce K. Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols: Corinthian Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8—10 (A Response to Gordon Fee)," *Trinity Journal* 10 NS:1 (Spring 1989):49-70.

8:13 Paul drew a conclusion about his own behavior from what he had said on this subject. He would make *love for his brethren* the "governor" over his knowledge of what was permissible.

The Greek word translated "causes to stumble [or fall]" is *skandalidzo*. A *skandalon*, the noun form of the word, described the trigger on a trap. Paul viewed eating in an idol temple as a kind of trigger that might set off a trap that could ensnare a fellow believer. It could retard his progress and cause him pain. Paul was willing to forgo all such eating if, by doing so, he could avoid creating problems for other Christians in their relationships with God (cf. Rom. 14:13-23).

Causing someone to stumble in his or her journey to come to faith in Christ, or to grow in Christ, is not necessarily the same as doing something that others do not like. Someone may not like your choice of clothing, for example—assuming it is not immodest or sexually provocative. But Paul did not mean that you should always try to please everyone by what you do. He meant that we should be careful, that what we are doing does not hinder someone else from coming to know Christ, or keep him from growing in Christ. Inviting an observant Muslim to dinner, and then feeding him pork, would be a modern example of what Paul warned against.

The issue in this chapter is not that of offending someone in the church. Paul dealt with that subject in 10:31—11:1 and Romans 14. It is, rather, doing something that someone else might repeat to his or her own hurt ("causing my brother to stumble"). Paul dealt with an attitude in the Corinthians. They were arguing for a behavior on the basis of knowledge. Paul said the proper basis was love.

"Love is the solution, not knowledge, in all social problems."<sup>262</sup>

Our culture, wherever we may live, promotes our personal rights very strongly. This emphasis has permeated the thinking of most Christians. We need to remember that there is something more important than our freedom to do as we please. That something is the spiritual development of other people. As those to whom other Christians look as examples, it is especially important for you and me to recall this principle as we live. Our willingness to accept this standard for ourselves will reveal our true love for God and people. Our failure to do so will reveal not only our lack of knowledge, but also our lack of love.

"As a final note to this chapter it should be understood that Paul did not say that a knowledgeable Christian must abandon his freedom to the ignorant prejudice of a 'spiritual' bigot. The 'weak brother' (v. 11) was one who followed the example of another Christian, not one who carped and coerced that knowledgeable Christian into a particular behavioral pattern.

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<sup>262</sup>Robertson, 4:137-38.

Also it was unlikely that Paul saw this weak brother as permanently shackling the freedom of the knowledgeable Christian. The 'weak brother' was no omnipresent phantom but an individual who was to be taught so that he too could enjoy his freedom (Gal. 5:1)."<sup>263</sup>

## **2. Paul's apostolic defense ch. 9**

The absence of the key phrase "now concerning" is the clue that this chapter does not deal with a new subject. It is a continuation of the discussion of eating in idol temples that Paul began in 8:1. Subjecting our freedom for the welfare of other people is not something any of us does naturally. Paul knew that his readers would profit from more instruction on this subject. He used himself as an illustration of the proper attitude toward one's freedom and responsibility in Christ.

Evidently the Corinthian Christians had misunderstood Paul's policy of limiting the exercise of his activities to help others (8:13). Some in the church had apparently concluded that because he did not exercise his rights, he therefore did not have them: for example, his right to material support (cf. 2 Cor. 12:13). His apparently vacillating conduct also raised questions in their minds about his full apostolic authority. For example, he ate marketplace food with Gentiles but not with Jews. Paul responded to this viewpoint in this chapter. There have been evidences of the Corinthians' unwillingness to yield to Paul's authority throughout this letter (4:1-5; 5—6; cf. 14:36-37). This was an appropriate place for him to confront the issue.

### **Apostolic identity 9:1-2**

- 9:1           The apostle's four rhetorical questions all expect a positive answer, and they become increasingly specific: "Am I not free?" Certainly he enjoyed the liberty that every other believer had. "Am I not an apostle?" Furthermore he possessed the rights and privileges of an apostle. The proof of his apostleship was twofold, and addressed the third and fourth questions: "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" "Are you not my work in the Lord?" He had "seen" the risen Christ (Acts 1:21-22) on the Damascus road (Acts 22:14-15; 26:15-18), and he had founded the church in Corinth, which was his apostolic "work" (cf. Rom. 15:15-21). Clearly Paul's apostleship was at stake in Corinth (cf. 1:1, 12; 4:1-5, 8-13, 14-21; 5:1-2).
- 9:2           "Others" might have doubts about Paul's "apostleship," but the Corinthians certainly should not in view of his ministry among them. They themselves were the proof that he was an apostle ("seal of [his] apostleship").

### **Apostolic rights 9:3-14**

The issue of Paul's right to their material support underlies this whole pericope.

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<sup>263</sup>Lowery, p. 522.

"Philosophers and wandering missionaries in the Greco-Roman world were 'supported' by four means: fees, patronage, begging, and working. Each of these had both proponents and detractors, who viewed rival forms as not worthy of philosophy."<sup>264</sup>

Paul did not begin by justifying his renunciation of his apostolic rights, but by establishing that he had these rights. He evidently had to begin there because the Corinthians were challenging these rights. They were assuming that Paul had worked with his hands because he lacked apostolic rights, not because he had chosen to forgo them.

- 9:3 If anyone was challenging his practice of forgoing his rights as an apostle, his response follows.
- 9:4 Paul used the series of rhetorical questions that begins here to force the Corinthians to recognize—they should already have known—that he possessed full apostolic rights. In view of the other rights that follow, Paul's reference to eating and drinking here probably means "to eat and drink" at the expense of others. It means to accept financial support in his ministry.
- 9:5 Evidently it was customary for the other "apostles" and the Lord's physical "brothers" to take their wives with them when they traveled to minister. The churches they served covered the expenses of these women as well as those of their husbands. Paul may have mentioned Peter ("Cephas"), in particular, because he had a strong following in Corinth (1:12). His references to the Lord's "brothers" in this verse, and to "Barnabas" in the next, do not necessarily mean that these men had visited Corinth. Perhaps the Corinthians knew second-hand about their habits of ministering.
- 9:6 The Corinthians had acknowledged the right of the other apostles to refrain from secular employment. Paul and Barnabas had chosen to work with their hands, at times, so their financial support would not burden their converts (4:12; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; Acts 20:34). Evidently the practice of Barnabas was well known. Paul had stooped to the demeaning work (in the Corinthians' eyes) of making tents while he ministered in Corinth (Acts 18:3). Apparently some of the Corinthian Christians took Paul's action as an indication that he did not think of himself as worthy of support because he was not equal with the other apostles.
- 9:7 Paul used six arguments in the following verses to support his point that those who work have a right to receive pay. First, it is customary. Three illustrations support the fact that Paul, as a servant of the Lord, had a right to accept support from those to whom he ministered. The Lord's servants are certainly not inferior to soldiers, farmers, and shepherds.

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<sup>264</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 399.

- 9:8-9           Second, the Old Testament supported this point. God made special provision in the Mosaic "Law" for the "oxen" that served people by threshing their grain (Deut. 25:4). In so doing, Paul said, God was teaching His concern for the maintenance of all who serve others, not just oxen ("God is not [*only*] concerned about oxen, is He?").<sup>265</sup>
- "Keep in mind that, for the most part, the Greeks despised manual labor. They had slaves to do manual labor so that the citizens could enjoy sports, philosophy, and leisure. The Jews, of course, magnified honest labor."<sup>266</sup>
- 9:10            God meant to encourage human laborers with His provision for animals that labored. He wanted human laborers to work with the "hope" of pay ("sharing *the crops*"). The people who profited from those services should consider those who served them worthy of support.
- "Not muzzling an ox . . . was probably a proverbial expression concerning just remuneration, properly understood and interpreted as such by Paul. A modern parallel would be the adage, 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks,' which is commonly applied in contexts other than canine obedience."<sup>267</sup>
- 9:11            Third, the basic principle of community reciprocity supports Paul's point. "Spiritual things" are intrinsically more important than "physical (material) things." The former will last forever, whereas the latter are only temporary. How much more, then, should those who benefit from spiritual ministry, physically support those who minister to them (cf. Gal. 6:6)! "Is it too much . . .?" reveals that Paul was contending with the Corinthians, not just exhorting them.
- 9:12            Fourth, the precedent of the practice of other Christian leaders supported Paul's point. As the planter of the Corinthian church, Paul had a "right" to the support of the Corinthians more than any of their other ministers did. Yet he did not insist on his ("we did not use this") "right." He chose rather to support himself, so his work of establishing the church might not suffer from the criticism that he was serving for the material benefits he derived from his converts.
- 9:13            Fifth, the practice of the priesthood further supported Paul's point. Paul appealed to the common Jewish practice, which was also prevalent in pagan religions, of allowing those who minister in spiritual matters to gain physical support from those they serve. The priests "eat the food of the temple" and "have their share from the altar."

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<sup>265</sup>See Jan L. Verbruggen, "Of Muzzles and Oxen: Deuteronomy 25:4 and 1 Corinthians 9:9," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:4 (December 2006):699-711, for a study of various ways Paul may have understood and used Deut. 25:4.

<sup>266</sup>Wiersbe, 1:599.

<sup>267</sup>Lowery, p. 523.

9:14 Sixth, Paul appealed to the teaching of Jesus ("so also the Lord directed") to support his point: "those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." The Lord Jesus taught the same right (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7).

"All too often, one fears, the objective of this text is lost in concerns over 'rights' that reflect bald professionalism rather than a concern for the gospel itself."<sup>268</sup>

### **Apostolic restraint 9:15-18**

Having argued vigorously for his right to the Corinthians' support, Paul now proceeded to argue just as strongly for his right to give up this right, his point from the beginning. He explained why he had deliberately not accepted their patronage. This pericope gives the reader a window into the apostle's soul. We see here what made him tick.

9:15 Paul had this right, but he chose not to use it. He did not want his readers to interpret what he had said on this subject as a veiled request for support ("I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case"). He had made his decision to support himself while he preached freely; the Lord did not require this of him. Consequently he could take justifiable pride in it, as anyone who makes a sacrifice for the welfare of others can.

9:16 He could not take justifiable pride ("I have nothing to boast of") in the fact that he preached the gospel, however. Even though it involved sacrificing for the benefit of others, he had made those sacrifices in obedience to the Lord (Acts 26:16-18; cf. Matt. 28:19-20). He had no choice about preaching the gospel, but he could choose how to make a living while he did so. Preaching was his divine destiny. Indeed he would be in serious trouble with his Lord ("woe is me") if he did not preach the gospel. (And so will we.)

9:17 If he preached the gospel willingly, he would receive a "reward" (pay) from the Lord. If he preached unwillingly, he would not receive a reward, because he would only be doing his duty as a steward (manager of a household; cf. 4:1-2; Luke 17:7-10).

9:18 Paul's reward for preaching the gospel willingly was the privilege of preaching it "without cost (charge)" to his hearers. His "highest pay" was the privilege of preaching "without pay."<sup>269</sup> This choice may seem as though it was Paul's decision rather than a reward from the Lord, but he viewed it as a privilege that came to him from the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7-12).

Paul had all the rights of an apostle, and was free to insist on them if he chose to do so. He also had the freedom not to insist on them. Relinquishing his right to support

<sup>268</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 414.

<sup>269</sup>Morris, p. 137. See also Barrett, p. 210.

corresponds to giving up his right to eat in a pagan temple (8:13). In both cases, it was the welfare of others that led him to forgo the right.

### **Apostolic freedom 9:19-23**

The extent to which the apostle was willing to lay aside his rights comes out in this pericope. Since Paul chose not to receive pay for his ministry in Corinth, he was free from the restrictions that patronage might impose. This left him free to become the slave of all.

9:19 Paul was a "free" man, not a slave of any other human being. Nevertheless as the Lord's servant, he had made himself subject to every other human being ("a slave to all") so he might win some ("that I may win more") to Christ. Serving people rather than commanding them is the way to win them (cf. Mark 10:45).

9:20 It was the apostle's custom to follow Jewish ways when he was in the company of Jews ("to the Jews I became a Jew"). He did so to make them receptive to him and his message rather than antagonistic (cf. Acts 21:20-26). He did not do this because he felt obligated to keep the Mosaic Law ("not being myself under the Law"). He did not feel obligated to do so (Rom. 6:14). The salvation of Jews was his objective in observing Jewish laws and customs ("as under the Law . . . that I might win those who are under the Law"), many of which dealt with abstaining from certain foods (cf. 8:13). He had circumcised Timothy at Lystra for this purpose, namely, more effective ministry to and among Jews (Acts 16:3).

9:21 Likewise when Paul was with Gentiles ("to those who are without law"), he behaved as a Gentile ("as without law"). This would have involved eating what they did, among other things.

The references to law in this verse may be confusing. In describing Gentiles as being "without law," Paul did not mean that Gentiles are totally lawless (cf. Rom. 2:14). He meant they were not under the Law of Moses like the Jews were (v. 20). Paul wanted his readers to understand that, even though he did not observe the Mosaic Law when he was with Gentiles (Gr. *anomos*), he was still under God's authority (*ennomos*). As a Christian, he was not under the Law of Moses, but he was "under the Law (law) of Christ" (cf. Gal. 6:2). The law of God for Jews, before the Cross, was the Law of Moses, but His law for Christians, in the present age, is the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ is the code of responsibilities that Christ and His apostles taught, which the New Testament contains. Some of the same commands are in the Mosaic Law, although the codes—the Mosaic Law and the Law of Christ—are not the same.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup>Femi Adeyemi, "The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:652 (October-December 2006):438-52, correctly equated the Law of Christ with the New Covenant Law (cf. Jer. 31:31-34).



"This is one of the most difficult sentences in the epistle, and also one of the most important, for in it Paul shows how the new relation to God which he has in Christ expresses his debt of obedience to God."<sup>271</sup>

- 9:22 The "weak" are those who have extremely sensitive consciences in the area of non-moral practices (cf. 8:9), such as the Jews. Here the apostle meant unbelievers, as is clear from what he said about them. Paul accommodated himself to their scruples. This policy undoubtedly led some people to conclude that Paul was inconsistent. His superficial inconsistency really manifested a more fundamental consistency. He did everything non-moral ("I have become all things to all men") with a view to bringing people to the Savior ("that I may by all means save some").<sup>272</sup>
- 9:23 The work of "the gospel" was the great axis around which everything in Paul's life revolved. He made it such so he might share in its blessings ("become a fellow partaker of it"). He proceeded to explain what this involves in the following verses.

#### **Apostolic exhortation and example 9:24-27**

This passage is transitional, concluding Paul's defense of his apostolic authority (9:1-23), and returning to the argument against participating in cultic meals (ch. 8). Metaphors from the athletic games fill the pericope. Philosophers and other orators in Paul's world frequently used athletic metaphors to describe their labors.<sup>273</sup>

- 9:24 The Corinthians were familiar with athletic contests. The Isthmian Games took place in a nearby town every two or three years. They were second only to the Olympic Games in importance, in all of Greece.<sup>274</sup> The Greek word translated "race" is *stadion*, the word used to describe the standard 600-foot Greek race.<sup>275</sup>
- Paul's emphasis in this verse was on the last statement. We should "run" our race "in such a way" that we will receive a reward from the Judge. In the Christian race, we do not compete with one another for the prize. We compete with ourselves. The emphasis is on self-discipline, not competition. In a foot race only one person is the winner, but in the Christian race all who keep the rules and run hard will receive a reward (cf. Matt. 6:19-21; 2 Tim. 2:5).
- 9:25 "Competes" is a translation of *agonidzomai*, from which we get the English word "agonizes." To receive the prize of our Lord's "well done" we need to give all our effort. We also need to exercise self-control.

<sup>271</sup>Barrett, p. 212.

<sup>272</sup>See H. Chadwick, "'All Things to All Men' (1 Cor. IX. 22)," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954-55):261-75.

<sup>273</sup>Keener, pp. 81-82.

<sup>274</sup>Morris, p. 139.

<sup>275</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 89.

Competitors in the Isthmian Games had to train for 10 months.<sup>276</sup> An athlete in training denies himself or herself many lawful pleasures, in order to gain an extra edge of superiority. Likewise, as spiritual athletes, we may need to limit our liberty ("exercise(s) self-control") for a higher goal.

Winners in the Isthmian Games received a "perishable" wreath of parsley, wild celery, or pine.<sup>277</sup> In the Olympian Games, the prize was a wild olive wreath.<sup>278</sup> In contrast, the victorious Christian's reward is "imperishable" (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8), and it lies in the eschaton.<sup>279</sup> How much more important it is, to be willing to forgo our rights for the spiritual advancement of others, than it is to train for a physical footrace (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17-18)!

<b>BELIEVERS' CROWNS</b>		
<b>Title</b>	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Reference</b>
An Imperishable Crown	For leading a disciplined life	1 Cor. 9:25
A Crown of Rejoicing	For evangelism and discipleship	1 Thess. 2:19
A Crown of Righteousness	For loving the Lord's appearing	2 Tim. 4:8
A Crown of Life	For enduring trials	James 1:12; Rev. 2:10
A Crown of Glory	For shepherding God's flock faithfully	1 Pet. 5:4

9:26

In view of the comparative value of these rewards, Paul ran the Christian race purposefully, not aimlessly or halfheartedly. He wanted to gain a prize at the judgment seat of Christ. To use a different figure and make the same point, he did not throw wild punches but sought to make every punch score ("I box . . . not beating the air"). Christian service is not just activity. It is activity focused on a target, namely: the building of the church, and the defeat of the enemy who wants to destroy people. It is the work of the gospel.

Good parents adapt their behavior to the limitations of their small children. For example, they often walk more slowly with a toddler in hand than they would normally. So Paul adapted his behavior to the needs of others, and we should too.

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<sup>276</sup>Morris, p. 139.  
<sup>277</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 89.  
<sup>278</sup>Robertson, 4:149.  
<sup>279</sup>See Wall, pp. 79-89.

9:27 In another sense, Paul viewed his flesh as his enemy. He recognized the need to exercise strict self-discipline ("I discipline my body and make it my slave"). Obviously Paul was not speaking of self-discipline in the physical realm alone. He also had in mind moral discipline, and discipline in the non-moral areas of his life, including voluntary curtailment of personal rights and liberties (cf. ch. 8; 1 Tim. 4:8).<sup>280</sup>

We must be careful not to confuse the fear of disqualification with the fear of damnation. Paul had no fear that he would lose his salvation (Rom. 8:1, 29-39). In the context, what he could lose would be a reward ("so that . . . I myself will not be disqualified").<sup>281</sup> How ironic and pathetic it would be for Paul to forfeit a crown by his own lack of self-discipline, or by breaking the Judge's rules, since he had instructed others concerning how to win one.

This whole chapter is an explanation of the last verse of the preceding chapter. More generally it clarifies the importance of limiting our legitimate liberty as Christians for higher goals, namely, the glory of God and the welfare of other people.

"Almost in reaction against . . . globalization, many people are responding with increasing nationalism, sometimes with almost frightening ethnocentrism. Christians are not immune to these sweeping currents of thought. They, too, can be caught up in flag-waving nationalism that puts the interests of my nation or my class or my race or my tribe or my heritage above the demands of the kingdom of God. Instead of feeling that their most important citizenship is in heaven, and that they are just passing through down here on their way 'home' to the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22-23), they become embroiled with petty priorities that constitute an implicit denial of the lordship of Christ."<sup>282</sup>

### **3. The sinfulness of idolatry 10:1-22**

Paul continued dealing with the subject of going to idol temples to participate in pagan feasts in this section. In it, he gave a warning to the believer who considered himself strong, the individual who knew there were really no gods but the one true God. Such a person felt free to accept the invitation of a pagan neighbor to dine in a pagan temple (8:10). The apostle cautioned this group in the Corinthian church because, even though there are no other gods, the possibility of participating in idolatry was very real. He drew his lesson from the experience of Israel during the wilderness wanderings (cf. Exod. 13—17; Num. 10—15).

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<sup>280</sup>See Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Historical Background of Paul's Athletic Allusions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 July-September 2004):343-59.

<sup>281</sup>See J. Smith, "Can Fallen . . .," pp. 466-67.

<sup>282</sup>Carson, p. 116.

### **The tragic example of Israel 10:1-5**

The point of this example is that God's people can practice idolatry, and persisting in idolatry has dire consequences. Paul stressed the similarity of experience that the church, the Corinthian church particularly, and Israel shared, by pointing out that each group had its own "baptism" and "Lord's Supper." Israel had five advantages, according to the following verses.

10:1-2 Paul did not want his readers to overlook a very important possibility as they thought about eating special meals in idol temples. He reminded them that their fathers in the faith, Israelite believers, were also "all under" the protective influence of God ("the cloud"). The Corinthians knew these facts from the Old Testament, but they did not appreciate their significance sufficiently. First, "the cloud" that led them in their wilderness wanderings symbolized God's loving care, and evidenced His prolonged supernatural guidance. Likewise, second, they all experienced a supernatural deliverance when they crossed the Red Sea ("passed through the sea"). Moreover, third, all of them associated with (were "baptized into") "Moses," who was their leader and God's instrument in their redemption. Moses provided supernatural leadership for them under God.

Baptism is the outward expression of the believer's identification with the object of his or her faith (cf. Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Consequently Paul could say the Israelites were "baptized into Moses," even though they did not undergo literal water baptism in the name of Moses. By following him, and submitting to his authority, they expressed their identification with him. The parallel with water baptism was most vivid when they went under the cloud and crossed the Red Sea. These experiences constituted a dry baptism for the Israelites.

10:3-4 Furthermore, fourth and fifth, all the Israelites, not just some of them, ate the manna and drank water from the rock. They ate supernatural food and received supernatural sustenance. They ate manna throughout their wilderness sojourn (Deut. 8:2-4), and they drank from the rock at the beginning (Exod. 17:1-7) and at the end of it (Num. 20:2-13), namely, throughout their wilderness experience. Paul called the manna and water "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink," because God provided them supernaturally, and because they have spiritual significance. Both of them came, ultimately, from "Christ," and point to Christ, the real Sustainer of His people (cf. John 6:35, 48-51; 7:37-38). The Israelites thought of God as a "rock" (Deut. 32: 4, 15, 18, 30-31; et al.). He ("Christ"), as "a spiritual rock," not some physical rock, accompanied them in the wilderness. Their eating and drinking of God is similar to and anticipated the Christian Lord's Supper.

Paul's point in these first four verses was that the Israelites were the chosen people of God then, just as Christians are now the chosen people of

God. God accompanied them and provided for them faithfully, in the past, just as He does for all Christians now.

- 10:5 In spite of these blessings, similar to those that Christians enjoy, God was not happy ("not well-pleased") with His people Israel ("most of them"). He permitted none of the adult generation of military age, 20 years old and older, to enter the Promised Land, except Caleb and Joshua, not even Moses (Num. 20:12). All but those two individuals, from that generation, died ("were laid low") "in the wilderness." How the majority displeased God and lost their privileges follows next.

### **The application of Israel's example 10:6-13**

Though idolatry was the main cause of Israel's failure, as well as the focus of Paul's warning to this church, four other evil characteristics of Israel also seem to have marked the Corinthians. These characteristics also resulted in the Israelites dying in the wilderness.

- 10:6 The experiences of the Israelites provide lessons ("examples") for us. Their baptism and partaking of spiritual food and drink did not protect them from God's discipline when they "craved . . . evil things." Participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper will not protect Christians either. We should never regard participation in these ordinances as immunizing us against God's discipline if we sin against Him. The Israelites had sometimes felt immunized against God's judgment because they were His chosen people.

The Greek word translated "examples" is *typos*, from which we get the English word "type." The experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness are types. They were early examples of situations that would recur later in history, that God designed for teaching His people lessons.<sup>283</sup>

- 10:7 In verses 7-10, Paul cited four practices that got the Israelites into trouble with God. All of them were hazards for the Corinthians as well, since they fraternized with pagans by participating in their feasts. They are all possible pitfalls for us, too.

First, the Israelites participated in "idolatry" when they ate and played in the presence of the golden calf (Exod. 32:6).<sup>284</sup> It is possible that their "play" involved sexual immorality (cf. Gen. 26:8; Num. 25:1-3). The scene on that occasion could well have been similar to what happened at the feasts that some of the Corinthians attended. There is a danger that we believers may compromise our commitment to God, as the Israelites did,

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<sup>283</sup>For further information on types, see Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 196-219; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 334-46; Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*; and Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, pp. 126, 208-9.

<sup>284</sup>See Jerry Hwang, "Turning the Tables on Idol Feasts: Paul's Use of Exodus 32:6 in 1 Corinthians 10:7," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:3 (September 2011):573-87.

when we participate in sinful pagan celebrations—perhaps some forms of entertainment. We can make an idol out of just about anything by giving it too much emphasis (time, money, or attention) in our lives.

10:8 Second, the Israelites practiced *immorality*, or "acted immorally" (lit. fornication), when they participated in one of the Moabites' religious feasts (Num. 25:1-9). Paul said "23,000" Israelites "died in one day." Moses, in Numbers 25:9, wrote that "24,000" died as a result of the plague God sent to judge the people. There is, therefore, no conflict between the numbers, since they describe somewhat different groups of people. Another explanation that has been suggested is that the larger number included Israel's leaders, and the smaller one did not. If immorality is only implicit in the record of the Golden Calf incident, it is explicit in the account of the Baal Peor incident. Clearly this was taking place in the Corinthian church (5:1-5, 10-11; 6:9-10, 12-20). Some modern Christians have participated in fornication that unbelievers have lured them into.

10:9 Third, the Israelites *tested Christ* by taxing His patience. The best manuscript evidence suggests that "Christ" rather than "Lord" is the correct word here. If so, Paul again stressed that it was Christ Himself whom both the Israelites and the Corinthians were testing (cf. v. 4). He made the apostasy in both cases Christological. They dared Him to live up to His promise to discipline them if they doubted His word. They continued to complain even though He faithfully provided for them (Num. 21:4-9). His provision of manna and water was not adequate from their point of view, and they despised it (Num. 21:5). The Corinthians had given evidence of being dissatisfied with God's prohibition of participation in pagan feasts by opposing Paul's teaching on this point.

Likewise, contemporary Christians are in danger of failing to appreciate God's provisions for them in Christ, and thus despising Him. We can feel (become) dissatisfied, rather than thankful and content. Evidence that this attitude existed in the Corinthian church surfaces in 1:12 and 11:17-34. Perhaps the fact that some of the believers were participating in pagan feasts also indicated their dissatisfaction with the Christians' special feast, the Lord's Supper. We can also "test (try) the Lord" by demanding that He perform for us, on our timetable and in the way that we prefer, rather than waiting for Him to work in His own time and way. "Name it and claim it" theology tends to encourage people to put God to the test.

10:10 Fourth, the Israelites *grumbled* frequently against the Lord during the wilderness wanderings. Moses recorded 10 separate instances in Exodus and Numbers. However, the occasion Paul had in mind was when God sent fire that consumed some of the people at the outer edge of the camp (Num. 11:1-3). Here Paul added that God executed His wrath ("they were destroyed") by using an angel ("the destroyer"), a fact that Moses did not

mention in Numbers. The Septuagint translators used the same term, "the destroyer" (Gr. *olothreutes*), to describe the angel who executed the Egyptians' first-born on the night of the Exodus (Exod. 12:23; cf. Heb. 11:28).

Many instances of the Corinthian Christians' dissatisfactions with God's provisions for them come out in this epistle. Not the least of these was their rejection of some of the Lord's servants, who had come to minister to them, because they preferred some others (1:10—4:21). They did not appreciate Paul's earlier instruction to break off company with idolaters and the sexually immoral (5:9-11). Another example is the impatience of the "strong" in the church with the "weak" (8:1-3). Grumbling is a telltale sign of selfishness and discontent with what God has given us. Yet we too often grumble about our church leaders, what a preacher says, or our lot in life.

10:11 Having cited four specific examples of Israelite failure (vv. 7-10), Paul restated the general principle (cf. v. 6).

The last phrase in this verse ("upon whom the ends of the ages have come") refers to the present age, as the time of fulfillment about which the Old Testament prophet had spoken. We should be careful that we do not overlook the lessons of history, since we live in these referred to times.

10:12 Paul concluded with a word of warning to those who were overconfident ("him who thinks he stands") that they were all right with God (cf. vv. 1-4; 8:4-6): "take heed that he does not fall." The "strong," who felt free to participate in pagan feasts, seem to be those he had in mind. Self-confidence could lead to a spiritual fall, as it had so often done in Israel's history.

10:13 The apostle did not want his readers to overreact and become paranoid, either, as they considered Israel's record. Failure was not inevitable. The temptations the Corinthians faced were not unique, and the Lord would give them grace to handle any "temptation" they might face.<sup>285</sup> In the context, the temptations Paul had just mentioned were idolatry, immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. Perhaps these were still in his mind, though verse 13 covers more temptations than these. This is a general promise of victory over any temptation ("no temptation has overtaken you").

God has promised to enable us to do His will in any and every situation, and He will stand true to His promise (cf. Matt. 28:20; et al.). He provides "a (the) way of escape" with every temptation He allows to touch us, namely: the power to overcome every temptation. The use of the definite

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<sup>285</sup>For other verses dealing with God's part in temptation, see Exod. 16:4; Deut. 8:2; 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:12; 2:6; Matt. 6:13; and James 1:13.

article "the" with both "temptation" and "way of escape" suggests a particular way of escape that is available in each temptation. However, Paul did not mean there is one way of escape that is available regardless of the temptation. If we deliberately position ourselves in the way (path; allurements) of temptation, and so put God to the test (v. 9), we are not taking advantage of the way of escape. We may fall. Therefore we should flee from idolatry (v. 14; cf. 1 John 5:21).

The Corinthians were putting themselves in danger by continuing to attend cultic meals, which they needed to stop doing. Nevertheless God had made a way of escape open to them, as He had with Israel. The Lord's Supper, and the Christian fellowship connected with it, were His divine replacement for this idolatrous activity (v. 16).

This whole section (vv. 1-13) deals with the dangers involved in participating in pagan activities. Some of these activities are wrong in themselves, because they involve idolatry, and Christians should not participate in them. If we do participate, we need to be aware that in doing so, we are walking on the edge of a precipice over which many other believers have fallen, including the Israelites in the wilderness. We dare not underestimate the danger of the situation, or overestimate our own ability to handle it. We need to walk closely with God every day.

### **The incompatibility of Christianity and idolatry 10:14-22**

The apostle proceeded to further warn his readers of the danger of idolatry (cf. v. 7). This paragraph concludes the long argument that Paul began in 8:1 concerning going to temple feasts.

10:14           Formerly Paul urged the Corinthians to flee fornication (6:18; cf. v. 8). Now he concluded all he said in verses 1-13 with the charge to "flee from idolatry," the worship of idols (cf. 1 John 5:21). He commanded his readers to use the way of escape, God's enabling grace, immediately. He softened his strong command with an affectionate address ("my beloved"). Non-moral activities are all right for the Christian, but if they involve or lead to idolatry we should avoid them.

10:15           This statement prepares for what follows. The apostle was confident that the Corinthians had the wisdom to understand the correctness of what he was about to tell them. He believed they could make correct judgments about what they should do. Still, to follow his logic they would need to use their minds. As we have seen, the Corinthians considered themselves very "wise." They therefore should "judge" for themselves that Paul was right.

10:16           The apostle employed rhetorical questions again to make his point. He was setting the Corinthians up for what he would say in verses 19-21.

Most New Testament references to the bread and the cup in the Lord's Supper occur in that order. Here Paul reversed the normal order. He probably turned them around because he wanted to give more attention to



the bread in the verses that follow. "The cup" may focus on the vertical dimension of fellowship between the believer and the Lord, whereas "the bread" focuses on the horizontal dimension (cf. v. 17).<sup>286</sup> The pagan feasts also emphasized both dimensions of fellowship, with the god and with the fellow-worshippers.

The "cup of blessing" was a technical term for the third of four cups of wine that the Jews drank in the Passover celebration. At the "Last Supper," the drinking of this cup preceded the giving of thanks for the bread (cf. Luke 22:17-20). However, the Lord's Supper after this only involved eating bread and drinking *one* cup (cf. 11:23-29).

Paul described the cup as a "cup of blessing," a common Jewish expression for the last cup of wine drunk at many meals. The Jews used it as a kind of toast to God for His goodness.<sup>287</sup> However, Paul turned this around by saying that "we bless" the cup. Meaning, we *give thanks to God for the cup* because of what it symbolizes, namely, our "sharing in" the benefits of Christ's shed "blood" (cf. 11:25).

Likewise "the bread," used at the Christian feast, the Lord's Supper, symbolizes our participation ("sharing") in the effects of Christ's slain "body" (cf. 11:24). The Greek word here translated "sharing" (NASB) or "participation" (NIV; *koinonia*), in other places reads "fellowship" or "communion." This is why another name for the Lord's Supper is the "communion service."

- 10:17 When Christians take communion, they all eat from "one bread," symbolic of the physical body of Christ. In the early church, believers apparently used one "loaf," the literal meaning of the word translated "bread" in this verse (*artos*). Paul stressed that many people eating from one loaf symbolized the *solidarity* of our relationship as a redeemed community ("we who are many are one body") in Christ. (He developed the idea of the *unity* of the body more fully in 12:14-27, in his explanation of the diversity that exists within the unity of the spiritual body of Christ, the church.) The emphasis here is on the solidarity of believers that forbids all other unions.
- 10:18 We can see the partnership of those who partake of ("sharers in") sacrifices with everything the altar stands for in Judaism (cf. Deut. 14:22-27). Paul generally referred to Israel literally as "Israel according to the flesh." He contrasted all the physical Israelites ("the nation of Israel") with those who are Jewish Christians (cf. Phil. 3:3). This description ("those who eat the sacrifices") lends no support to the idea that the church replaces Israel in the program of God. "Israel" always refers to Jewish people in the New Testament.

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<sup>286</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 467.

<sup>287</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 94.

Paul's line of reasoning was proceeding as follows. Christians who eat the bread at the Lord's Supper thereby express their solidarity with one another and with Christ. Likewise, Jews who ate the meat of animals offered in the sacrifices of Judaism, expressed their solidarity with one another and with God. Therefore, Christians who eat the meat offered to pagan gods, as part of pagan worship, express their solidarity with pagans and with the pagan deities.

"As in the Holy Communion, therefore, so also in the Temple services, participating in sacrificial feasts is sacrificial fellowship with an unseen power, a power that is Divine. There is something analogous to this in the sacrificial feasts of the heathen; but in that case the unseen power is not Divine."<sup>288</sup>

The "wise" man in Corinth (v. 15) could have replied to Paul's conclusion as follows: "Yes, Paul, but you agreed before that idols have no real existence and there is only one true God."

10:19 Paul proceeded to clarify what he meant. He was not saying that "sacrifices" to idols, or idols themselves, were "anything." That is, sacrifices to idols were not in themselves sinful, nor were idols genuine entities. On this point, he and the Corinthians agreed. Idols were only pieces of wood or stone, not gods with supernatural powers. Nevertheless these idols represented supernatural powers (v. 20), and so eating cultic meals had genuine significance.

10:20 The power behind pagan religion is demonic (cf. Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37). Consequently, people who sacrifice to idols express solidarity with demonic powers ("sacrifice to demons"). Eating the food sacrificed to idols means that the people who participated, shared in what had been sacrificed to demons, just as the Israelites shared in what had been sacrificed to God. The cultic feasts were really sacrifices to demons, so they involved the *worship of demons*.

". . . when St. Paul told the Corinthians that though 'idols' in themselves are nothing, yet the sacrifices offered to them were, in reality, offered to 'daemons [*sic*],' he spoke of those false divinities which were the enemies of the True."<sup>289</sup>

10:21 It is inconsistent for a Christian to partake in the Lord's Supper and to also take part in pagan religious feasts. In the former, he eats and drinks in union with Christ, and in the latter, he is in union with demons who direct

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<sup>288</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 215.

<sup>289</sup>Howson, p. 230.

the devotees to worship idols. What the Lord promotes, and what the demons promote, are opposite. This inconsistency must be obvious to "wise men" (v. 15). Christians have a unique relationship with the Lord and with fellow believers, which the Lord's Supper symbolizes. It is, therefore, inappropriate for us to have a similar association with demons and unbelievers (vv. 20-21), which participation in pagan cultic events involves.

10:22 The Israelites "provoke[d] the Lord to jealousy" by doing just such a thing when they joined in Moabite worship (Num. 25; cf. Deut. 32:17, 21-22). We are to learn from their experiences. It would be folly to provoke the Lord unless we are "stronger than He." If we provoke Him and are not stronger, we can count on His chastening, since He is a jealous God.

The Corinthians were arguing for the right to attend pagan religious meals. They even viewed pagan temple attendance as a way of building their "weaker" brethren. Paul responded that attending pagan meals was wrong on two counts: it was unloving, and it was incompatible with life in Christ, which their participation at the Lord's Table symbolized. He forbade any relationship with the demonic. The demonic is not as remote as some modern Western Christians would like to believe.

#### **4. The issue of marketplace food 10:23—11:1**

As with the issue of marriage, however, Paul granted that there are some matters connected with idolatry that are not wrong. He next gave his readers some help in making the tough choices needed, in view of the non-moral nature of some practices connected with pagan worship, and the immoral nature of others. Paul suggested applying the test of "What is edifying?" to these decisions. He proceeded to explain that food, formerly offered to idols but sold in the marketplace, was all right for Christians to eat at home. He himself had eaten such food (9:19-23), and the Corinthians had challenged him for doing so (10:29).

"But the real issues seem to lie deeper than the mere question of eating food. Both the nature of their argument for eating at the temples (8:1, 4, 8) and their criticism of Paul (9:1-3, 19-23) have revealed a basic confusion between absolutes and *adiaphora* (nonessentials). They had tried to make temple attendance an *adiaphoron*; for Paul it was an absolute because it was idolatry. At the same time they had confused the true basis for Christian behavior. For them it was a question of knowledge and rights (*gnosis* and *exousia*). For Paul it is a question of love and freedom (*agape* and *eleutheria*).<sup>290</sup>

This section's chiasmic structure reflects Paul's alternating concern for personal freedom and love for others.

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<sup>290</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 477.

- A** The criterion stated: the good of others (10:23-24)
- B** Personal freedom explained (10:25-27)
- C** The criterion illustrated: love governing liberty (10:28-29a)
- B'** Personal freedom defended (10:29b-30)
- A'** The criterion generalized: that all may be saved (10:33—11:1)
- 10:23 Earlier, Paul had addressed the issue of Christian liberty, and had said that "all things" were lawful for him, but not all things were beneficial ("profitable"; 6:12). Now he went further and clarified that "profitable" (beneficial) means beneficial for others, not just self. Thus he sought to bring the rights-conscious Corinthians to their knees.
- 10:24 The well-being of one's "neighbor" is of primary importance. The exercise of all one's liberties is of secondary importance (cf. Rom. 15:2; Phil. 2:4). The Corinthians viewed their freedom as an opportunity to pursue their own interests. Paul viewed it as an opportunity to benefit ("seek [the] good") and build up ("edify") another person.
- 10:25-26 It was not wrong in itself to eat the meat that pagans had offered in sacrifice to an idol. Any food ("anything sold in the meat market") for which one thanks God thereby becomes acceptable for human consumption, assuming it is wholesome (healthful; v. 30; cf. 1 Tim. 4:3-5). This was a very un-Jewish viewpoint coming from a Jew. As he did earlier in this epistle, and elsewhere in his writings, Paul appealed to Scripture for a supporting summary statement (Ps. 24:1; 50:12).
- Remember, Paul was talking about distinctions based on spiritual issues. In Christianity, there is no distinction between kosher (fit) and non-kosher (unfit) food (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15). Paul was not talking about distinctions in food based on physical factors such as fat content, calories, and nutritional value. The issue was whether certain foods commend us to or condemn us before God. They do not.
- 10:27 The invitation in view must be to the home of an unbeliever, for a meal, rather than to a pagan temple for participation in a religious feast. This seems clear from the next verse. This freedom may have been hard for many Jewish Christians to accept (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:2-3). Nevertheless it belonged to them. It was wise not to ask ("without asking questions") if someone had offered the meat to an idol. A Christian might have naturally posed this question in the home of a pagan host or in the marketplace (v. 25). Not inquiring would obviate the possibility of unnecessary guilt arising in the mind of a scrupulous believer ("without asking questions for conscience' sake").
- 10:28-29a A pagan host might warn his Christian guest that the food before him had been offered in an idol temple. The context (v. 27) and the terminology (Gr. *hierothyton*, "sacrificial meat," rather than *eidolothyton*, "idol meat,"

the standard Jewish and Christian designation) present a situation in which a Christian is eating privately with a pagan, not in a temple, as in 8:10. Only in verse 32 does the broader principle of not giving offense to fellow believers arise. The pagan's "conscience" is not a reference to his convictions about what is right and wrong for himself, but his moral consciousness.<sup>291</sup> He does not want his Christian guest to be unaware that he is being served food that the Christian might object to, and might choose to abstain from eating. Another view is that the pagan host is trying to test the Christian's commitment to Christ, but this seems less probable. Pagans often associated Christians with Jews at this stage of church history, and many pagans would have assumed that Christians observed the same dietary restrictions as the Jews.

We might think that in such a situation, Paul would have advocated exercising Christian liberty to eat the meat, but he did not. He advocated abstaining, not because such meat was out of bounds for believers. It was not out of bounds; normally Christians could eat such meat. He advocated abstaining for the sake of the pagan's moral consciousness. Specifically, if the Christian ate the meat, the pagan might conclude that his guest was doing something Christians should not do. He would be wrong, of course. Yet Paul advocated not violating the pagan's understanding of what Christians should or should not do, rather than have the Christian instruct the pagan about Christian freedom at the table.

"A present-day analogy may be imagined if someone with strong principles on total abstention from alcohol were the guest of friends who did not share these principles. He would be well advised not to enquire too carefully about the ingredients of some specially palatable sauce or trifle, but if someone said to him pointedly, 'There is alcohol in this, you know', he might feel that he was being put on the spot and could reasonably ask to be excused from having any of it."<sup>292</sup>

10:29b This question resumes the thought of verses 26 and 27. Verses 28-29a are somewhat parenthetical, being an illustration. We could restate Paul's thought this way: Why should another person's scruples determine my liberty? The answer is: They should affect you, because his spiritual welfare is more important than my Christian freedom.

10:30 Paul brought into the picture his own conduct in similar situations. He had eaten non-kosher food with Gentiles, but in the argument preceding this verse, he advocated abstaining from such food when eating with pagans. The key, of course, is that sacrificial meat was only off limits for Paul

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<sup>291</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 485.

<sup>292</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 100.

when it offended the moral consciousness of the pagans he was with, not all the time.

"The blessing offered at one's meal, predicated on God's prior ownership of all things, means that no fellow Christian may condemn another on this question."<sup>293</sup>

The Christian can give thanks to God for whatever he or she eats, but should limit one's own liberty out of consideration for what other people think is proper. We do not need to alter our *convictions* for the sake of others even if they speak evil of us, as the Corinthians "slandered" Paul (cf. 9:19-23). Nevertheless we should be willing to change our *behavior* for the sake of unbelievers.

- 10:31 What glorifies God? Consideration for the consciences of other people and promotion of their well-being does. This contrasts with the observance of distinctions between foods, the satisfaction of one's personal preferences, and insistence on one's own rights. What glorifies God is what puts His preferences, plans, and program first (cf. Col. 3:17). Paul not only advocated asking, "Is this non-moral activity edifying?" (vv. 23-30; cf. 6:12), but "Will it glorify God?"

". . . God's own glory is the ultimate foundation of Pauline ethics (10:31)."<sup>294</sup>

- 10:32 To "give no offense" means putting no obstacle in the path of a person, be he "Jew" (cf. 9:20) or "Gentile" (cf. 9:21), so that he might come to faith in Christ. If he is already a believer, it means putting nothing in his way that would hinder his growth in Christ (cf. 9:22). It is not a matter of simply not "hurting someone's feelings."

Paul regarded these three groups (Jews, Gentiles, and Christians) as equal in this verse. Therefore he was probably thinking of three religious groups rather than two racial groups and one religious group. If so, he distinguished between Israel and the church in this verse. This distinction is basic to Dispensationalism.

- 10:33 If we took the first part of this verse out of context, we might conclude that Paul was a "man pleaser" (cf. Gal. 1:10). Obviously he meant he did not allow any of his own attitudes or activities *in non-moral areas* to create barriers between himself and those he sought to help spiritually.

He tried to practice what he preached about putting the welfare of others first (cf. v. 24). "Saved" in this context probably includes Christians, and means *saved* in the wide sense of "delivered from anything that keeps

<sup>293</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 488.

<sup>294</sup>Idem, "Toward a . . .," p. 40.

someone from advancing spiritually" (cf. Rom. 15:1-3). "Will this non-moral activity profit others and possibly lead them closer to God?"

"Christian freedom is not given to us for our own sake but for the sake of others."<sup>295</sup>

11:1 Paul recommended that his readers follow his example of exercising and limiting their Christian liberty, glorifying God, and giving no offense, as well as in other areas of their lives (cf. 4:16).<sup>296</sup>

All of chapters 8, 9, and 10, including 11:1, deal with the subject of the Christian's relationship to food sacrificed to idols. In summary, Paul prohibited going to pagan temples for cultic meals. However, he permitted the eating of marketplace meat under normal circumstances. If something is not sinful, it is permissible for the believer, but even so it may be wise to avoid it for the sake of the spiritual welfare of others. The Christian should be willing to limit his or her exercise of his or her Christian liberty because of love for others.

The four principles Paul taught were these: Balance your knowledge with love (ch. 8). Balance your authority with discipline (ch. 9). Balance your experience with caution (10:1-22). And balance your freedom with responsibility (10:23-33).<sup>297</sup>

### **C. PROPRIETY IN WORSHIP 11:2-16**

This section and the next (11:17-34) deal with other subjects than meat offered to idols, but Paul did not introduce them with the phrase "now concerning." These were additional subjects about which he wanted to give the Corinthians guidance. He had evidently learned of the Corinthians' need for instruction in these matters, either through their letter to him, from the messengers that brought that letter to him, or from other sources.

#### **1. The argument from culture 11:2-6**

Paul introduced the first of the two subjects he dealt with in this chapter, the Corinthian women's participation in church worship, with "praise." He did not introduce the second subject this way (vv. 17, 22). As with the other sections of this epistle, we can see the influence of Corinthian culture and worldview in this one, particularly in the behavior of the women in the church.

11:2 Paul commended his original readers for remembering his teaching and example. This chapter deals primarily with things that were going on in the meetings of the church, as the context shows (cf. v. 16). The "traditions" (NASB) were "teachings" (NIV; Gr. *paradoseis*) the

<sup>295</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 105.

<sup>296</sup>See Robert L. Plummer, "Imitation of Paul and the Church's Missionary Role in 1 Corinthians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:2 (June 2001):219-35.

<sup>297</sup>Wiersbe, 1:594.

Corinthians had received from the apostle. Some of these involved divinely inspired revelations, and others just prudent advice (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6-10). The Corinthians may have been following his instructions, but not in the proper ways, as his following discussion makes clear.

*"The traditions* (as the other references show) were the central truths of the Christian faith, handed on at this stage (before the emergence of Christian literature) orally from evangelist and teacher to convert."<sup>298</sup>

Of course, there were already a few inspired New Testament documents circulating among the churches.

11:3 "But" indicates that things were not quite as Paul thought they should be. He began dealing with his subject by reminding the Corinthians again (cf. 3:23; 8:6) of God's administrative order. This is the order through which He has chosen to conduct His dealings with humans.

Jesus "Christ" is the "head" of every "man," i.e., every male human being (Gr. *aner*). Second, the male ("man") is the "head" of "woman" (Gr. *gune*). This Greek word for woman is very broad and covers women of any age, virgins, married women, or widows. Paul used it earlier in this epistle of *a wife* (7:3-4, 10-12, 14, 16). In this chapter, it evidently refers to any woman who was in a dependent relationship to a man, such as a wife to a husband, or a daughter to a father. Paul probably did not mean every woman universally, since he said the male is the head of woman, or "a woman," but not *the* woman. He was evidently not talking about every relationship involving men and women, for example the relationship between men and women in the workplace. Third, "God" the Father is the "head" of God the Son ("Christ"). This shows that headship exists even within the Godhead.

The New Testament uses the term "head" (Gr. *kephale*) to describe headship in two ways. Sometimes it describes origin (source), and other times it describes authority (leader). Some scholars favor one interpretation and others the other.<sup>299</sup> Both meanings are true to reality, so it is difficult to decide what Paul meant here.

In favor of the origin view, it is true that Christ created mankind, Eve came from Adam, and Christ came from the Father in the Incarnation to provide redemption. In favor of the authority view, humanity is under

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<sup>298</sup>Barrett, p. 247.

<sup>299</sup>For helpful studies, see Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of *kephale* in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS5 (1954):211-15; Paul S. Fiddes, "'Woman's Head Is Man': A Doctrinal Reflection upon a Pauline Text," *Baptist Quarterly* 31:8 (October 1986):370-83; Wayne Grudem, "Does *kephale* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6NS (1985):38-59; idem. "The Meaning of *kephale*: A Response to Recent Studies," *Trinity Journal* 11NS (1990):3-72; and idem, "The Meaning of *kephale* ('head'): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001):25-65.



Christ's authority, God created woman under man's authority, and the Son is under the Father's authority. The idea of origin is more fundamental than that of authority. Also "head" occurs later in this passage with the idea of source (vv. 8, 12), so origin may be the preferable idea here too.<sup>300</sup>

11:4 In this verse Paul used the word "head" twice. In the first instance he clearly meant the man's physical head. What did he mean the second time he referred to the man's head? He could have meant his physical head again. However, in view of what he just said (v. 3) and would say, he probably meant his spiritual head: Jesus Christ. In Judaism, when a man prayed with his physical head covered, as was common, he did not thereby dishonor himself. In Roman, but not in Greek worship, both men and women covered their heads. However, in both Roman and Greek cultures, both men and women covered their heads as signs of shame and mourning.<sup>301</sup> It was later, in the Middle Ages, that Jewish men began to cover their heads when praying, and in fact, most of the time. In Christian worship, the men did not wear head coverings in Paul's day.

Paul's reference to praying and prophesying seems to set his instructions in the context of the church at public worship. Others have argued that 11:2-16 does not address congregational settings.<sup>302</sup> "Praying" involves expressing one's thoughts and feelings to God and, specifically, asking things of God. Prophesying might involve any of four things: Prophets (and prophetesses) led God's people in worship (cf. Exod. 15:20-21; 1 Chron. 25:1). Second, they foretold future events pertaining especially to the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:13; Acts 2:17-18; 21:9). Third, they declared new revelation from God, though not necessarily having to do with future events (Matt. 26:68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64; cf. 7:39; John 4:19). Fourth, they could, under divine impulse, utter some lofty statement or message that would glorify God (Luke 1:67; Acts 9:6; cf. 1 Chron. 25:1), or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others (1 Cor. 13:9; 14:1, 3-5, 24, 31, 39). This last type of prophecy did not contain a new revelation or a prediction involving the future. It was what we call preaching today, though not expository teaching, which the New Testament calls teaching.<sup>303</sup> The fourth activity is what seems to

<sup>300</sup>Barrett, p. 248.

<sup>301</sup>Keener, p. 91.

<sup>302</sup>E.g., Harold R. Holmyard III, "Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Refer to Women Praying and Prophesying in Church?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):461-72; J. N. Darby, *Notes of Readings on the Epistles to the Corinthians*, pp. 85-87; Olshausen, p. 174; C. T. Ellicott, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 202; W. E. Vine, *1 Corinthians*, p. 147; J. A. Beet, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, p. 181; Lenski, p. 437; Grosheide, pp. 341-42; and J. MacArthur Jr., *1 Corinthians*, p. 256.

<sup>303</sup>A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "propheteuo," p. 553. See also Wayne A. Grudem, "Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul's Consistent Advocacy of Women's Participation Without Governing Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:1 (March 1987):11-23; and idem, "Why Christians Can Still Prophesy," *Christianity Today*, September 16, 1988, pp. 29-31, 34-35. Grudem sought a middle position between the charismatic and non-charismatic interpretations of the gift of prophecy. See his *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* and *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament*

be in view in other references to prophesying in this epistle, and it suits the context here as well. Praying and prophesying were two major features of Christian worship services (cf. Acts 2:42).

11:5a The opposite condition existed when women prayed or prophesied in the church meetings. Every woman who had her physical head *uncovered* thereby dishonored ("disgraced") her metaphorical head, namely: her husband (if married) or father (if single; v. 3).

What did Paul mean when he described a woman's head as "uncovered"? There have been three major explanations. He may have meant that her head lacked some type of external cover, such as a shawl. Second, he could have meant that she had short hair that did not cover her head as completely as long hair. Third, he may have meant that she had let her hair down rather than leaving it piled up on her head. In this culture, it was customary for women to wear their hair up when they went out in public. Probably he meant that she did not have an external covering on her head (view one).<sup>304</sup> The woman would dishonor her man by participating in public worship as he did, namely, with head uncovered.

Christian women typically wore a head-covering in the church meetings. This was not a stylish hat, skullcap, or inconspicuous doily, as some western women do today, but a shawl that covered her entire head and concealed her hair.<sup>305</sup>

"Her face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils, a head-band on the forehead with bands to the chin, and a hairnet with ribbons and knots, so that her features could not be recognized."<sup>306</sup>

This was similar to what some modern Islamic women wear: a head-covering (Arabic *hijab*) and a face-veil (Arabic *niqab*). In Paul's culture most women, Christians and non-Christians alike, wore such a covering whenever they went out in public. Conservative Islamic women still veil themselves similarly when they go out in public.

Probably the issue in the Corinthian church, that Paul was addressing, was that certain "wise," "spiritual," so-called liberated women had stopped wearing this covering in the church meetings. Paul had previously written that in Christ, males and females are equal before God (Gal. 3:28). He meant they are equal in their standing before God. This teaching, combined with the Corinthians' carnal tendencies, were evidently the root of the problem.

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*and Today*. Robert L. Thomas, "Prophecy Rediscovered? A Review of *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:593 (January-March 1992):83-96, gave a helpful critique of Grudem's views.

<sup>304</sup>See Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 495-97, 509-10.

<sup>305</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 104.

<sup>306</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 359.

"It seems that the Corinthian slogan, 'everything is permissible,' had been applied to meetings of the church as well, and the Corinthian women had expressed that principle by throwing off their distinguishing dress. More importantly they seem to have rejected the concept of subordination within the church (and perhaps in society) and with it any cultural symbol (e.g., a head-covering) which might have been attached to it. According to Paul, for a woman to throw off the covering was an act not of liberation but of degradation."<sup>307</sup>

11:5b-6 A woman who shaved her head in Greco-Roman culture did so to look like a man. This resulted in the blurring of the relationship between men and women, particularly the sexual distinctions. Men typically wore their hair shorter, and women wore theirs longer. If a woman cut her hair short, it indicated that she wanted to be regarded as a man. Not covering her head made the same statement in that society.

"The prostitutes wore their hair very short, and they did not wear a head-covering in public. Their hairstyle and manner announced to others just what they were and what they were offering. . . .

"In Jewish law, a woman proved guilty of adultery had her hair cut off (Num. 5:11-31)."<sup>308</sup>

It was a shameful ("disgraceful") thing for a woman not to cover her head in the early New Testament churches. Such an act made a statement that she was either repudiating her position as a woman, or that she was an immoral woman. It was not so much a repudiation of her submission to her male authority, as it was a repudiation of her origin as being a woman who had come from man (v. 3). The issue again appears to be primarily *origin* throughout the passage, not primarily authority. Obviously a woman who repudiated her origin as a woman might also repudiate her authority to function under her male head. However, in this passage, Paul seems to have been dealing with the more fundamental issue of origin.

Today it is not shameful for a woman to have short hair, but it was in Paul's day. There are many short hairstyles that no one regards as "disgraceful." However in Paul's culture, short hair for a woman represented rebellion, and people considered it shameful. Paul used the common reaction to women's short hair, in his day, to urge his female readers to wear a head-covering. His point was that, since it was shameful for a woman to have short hair, it was also shameful for her to have her head uncovered when she prayed or prophesied.

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<sup>307</sup>Lowery, p. 529. See also H. Wayne House, "Should a Woman Prophecy or Preach before Men?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:578 (April-June 1988):141-61, who concluded that she should not.

<sup>308</sup>Wiersbe, 1:604.

Must a Christian woman cover her head in church meetings today? I think not. Covering the head and wearing short hair do not normally mean the same thing in modern times, at least in the West, as they did in Paul's culture. If he were writing to a western church today, for example, I do not believe Paul would have said it is a shameful thing for a woman to have short hair. Therefore I do not think he would have said she ought to cover her head. Covering the head was a sign of acknowledgement of origin in Paul's day, which implied some acknowledgement of authority, but it is not today typically. Today there is no item of clothing that makes such a statement, nor does the length of a woman's hair. Perhaps her willingness to take her husband's family name when she marries does, or her willingness to wear a wedding ring might, or the way she speaks about her husband to others, or her modest dress, but not necessarily. A woman's whole personal demeanor, especially how she views herself as a woman, reveals this about her.<sup>309</sup>

"Although various Christian groups have fostered the practice of some sort of head covering for women in the assembled church, the difficulties with the practice are obvious. For Paul the issue was directly tied to a cultural shame that scarcely prevails in most cultures today. Furthermore, we simply do not know what the practice was that they were abusing. Thus literal 'obedience' to the text is often merely symbolic. Unfortunately, the symbol that tends to be reinforced is the subordination of women, which is hardly Paul's point. Furthermore, it would seem that in cultures where women's heads are seldom covered, the enforcement of such in the church turns Paul's point on its head."<sup>310</sup>

## **2. The argument from creation 11:7-12**

Paul proceeded with a second supporting argument to correct the Corinthians' perversion regarding women's head-coverings.

11:7           Men should not cover their heads in Christian worship because they are the glory of God. Whereas Paul referred to man being "the image and glory of God," his primary point was that man is the "glory of God." His reference to man as the "image" of God clearly goes back to Genesis 1:26-28, but there "glory" does not appear. "Glory" is Paul's word, his reflection on the creation of man. This is the word that he proceeded to use to contrast man and woman.

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<sup>309</sup>For defenses of the view that women should wear head coverings today in church meetings, see Bruce K. Waltke, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (January-March 1978):46-57; and S. L. Johnson Jr., pp. 1247-48.

<sup>310</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 512. See also David K. Lowery, "The Head Covering and the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:2-34," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:570 (April-June 1986):159; Kenneth T. Wilson, "Should Women Wear Headcoverings?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:592 (October-December 1991):442-62; and Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 110.

Notice that Paul did not say that the woman is to cover her head because she is the "glory of man." Instead he proceeded to describe what being man's "glory" means. A subordinate glorifies the one in authority over him or her just by being in a subordinate position.

". . . he [Paul] says that woman is the glory of man—not his image, for she too shares the image of God, and is not (as some commentators have thought) more remote from God than is man."<sup>311</sup>

11:8 Woman is the glory of man, first, because she came (originated) "from" him in creation. As Adam glorified God by being the product of His creation, so Eve glorified Adam because she came from him. The female sex did not produce the male sex, but the first woman came from the first man. God formed Eve out of a part of Adam whom He created first (Gen. 2:21-22).

11:9 Furthermore woman is the glory of man because God created Eve to complete Adam. God did not create the man as a companion for the woman, but the woman "for (the) man's sake" (Gen. 2:18, 20).<sup>312</sup>

"Man, then, was God's authoritative representative who found in woman a divinely made ally in fulfilling this role (Gen. 2:18-24). In this sense she as a wife is the glory of man, her husband."<sup>313</sup>

When Adam saw Eve for the first time, he "gloried" in her (Gen. 2:23). Neither of these verses (vv. 8-9) refers to the *subordination* of woman under man, though many interpreters have read this into the text. Rather they refer to her *origin* as being from man.

11:10 Paul drew a conclusion ("Therefore . . .") from what he had already said (vv. 7-9), and gave a supporting reason for his conclusion.

Unfortunately the NASB translators have added "a symbol of" to the original text, thus implying that the *head-covering* is what women ought to wear on their heads. The Greek text simply says "the woman ought to have authority on her head." In the preceding verses, the reason given is that she is the man's glory. In light of verse 7, we might have expected Paul to say that because the woman is the glory of the man, she should cover her head. Yet that is not what Paul said.

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<sup>311</sup>Barrett, p. 249.

<sup>312</sup>See Benjamin L. Merkle, "Paul's Arguments from Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14: An Apparent Inconsistency Answered," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:3 (September 2006):527-48.

<sup>313</sup>Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 529.

What is this "authority" that women ought to have on their heads? Some interpreters believe it refers to *the man* in her life who is *in authority over her*. The covering is the sign that she recognizes him in this role. The Living Bible gives this interpretation by paraphrasing the verse, "So a woman should wear a covering on her head as a sign that she is under man's authority."<sup>314</sup> This view lacks support in the passive use of *exousia* ("authority"). Furthermore, the idiom "to have authority over" never elsewhere refers to an external authority different from the subject of the sentence.

Other interpreters view "authority" as a metonym for "veil." A metonym is a figure of speech in which one word appears in place of another associated with or suggested by it (e.g., "the White House says" for "the President says"). The RSV translation gives this interpretation: "That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head." This view is unlikely because "authority" is an unclear word to use if Paul really meant "veil." It would have been more natural for him simply to say "veil" or "covering."

A third view is to take "to have authority" as meaning "a sign of authority, namely, as a means of exercising authority." Advocates believe Paul meant that women were to have authority to do things in worship previously forbidden, such as praying and prophesying along with men. Her covering would serve as a sign of her new liberty in Christ.<sup>315</sup> There does not seem to be adequate basis of support for this view in the passage.

The fourth major view takes having "authority" in its usual meaning of having the freedom or right to choose. The meaning in this case would be that the woman has authority over her head (man) to do as she pleases.<sup>316</sup> Obviously this view seems to run contrary to what Paul taught in the passage and elsewhere. I think perhaps Paul meant that women have freedom to decide how they will pray and prophesy—within the constraint that Paul had imposed, namely, with heads covered. The head-covering, then, symbolized both the woman's subordinate position under the man and the authority that she had to pray and prophesy in public.<sup>317</sup>

The other major interpretive problem in this verse is "because of the angels." Why did Paul introduce angels into this discussion? Perhaps the Corinthian women needed to wear a head-covering because angels observe with great interest what is taking place among God's people as they worship (cf. 4:9; Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:21). "Angels" are the guardians of God's created order, they are submissive to God, and they—too—praise

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<sup>314</sup>See also F. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2:122; and Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 211.

<sup>315</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 106; M. D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of I Cor. XI. 10," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):410-16.

<sup>316</sup>William M. Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul*, pp. 202-5; Morris, p. 154.

<sup>317</sup>See Barrett, p. 255.

God. For other people to see Christian women unveiled was bad enough, because it was a sign of insubordination, but for angels to see it would be *worse*.<sup>318</sup> They would really be offended!

There may also be something to the suggestion that these Corinthian women, and some of the men as well, may have been exalting themselves to the position of angels (cf. 7:1; 13:1).<sup>319</sup> Paul may have mentioned the angels to remind these Corinthians that they were still under angelic scrutiny.

Other less acceptable interpretations of "because of the angels" are these: Women should cover their heads because evil angels were lusting after women in the church (cf. Gen. 6:2). If this were the reason, should not all women wear veils at all times, since angels apparently view humans elsewhere than in church meetings? Or they should do so because the word angels (lit. messengers) refers to pastors of the churches who might lust after them. Or they should wear head-coverings because good angels learn to be submissive to authority from the women's example. They need to cover themselves because good angels are an example of subordination and would take offense if they viewed insubordinate women. Or finally, they should wear head-coverings because a woman's insubordination would tempt good angels to be insubordinate.

Is observance by angels not a reason Christian women should cover their heads in church meetings today? Again I think not. In that culture, a woman's appearance in public, unveiled, was a declaration of her rejection of her God-given place in creation. The angels would have recognized it as such, and it would have offended them. However today, a woman's decision to appear unveiled does not usually make that statement. Consequently her unveiled condition probably does not offend the angels.

11:11 Even though the positions of man and woman differ in God's administrative order, this does not mean they can get along without each other. They are mutually dependent on each other, and they complement one another. They are interdependent, even as the Son and the Father are. Paul's main point was that woman is not "independent" of man. This is further evidence that he was countering an illegitimate spirit of independence among some Corinthian women.

In a family, companionship should replace isolation and loneliness. There must be oneness in marriage for a husband and a wife to complete one another. Self-centered individuality destroys unity in marriage. If you are married, you need your husband or wife. Your spouse is necessary for you to be a more well-rounded person.

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<sup>318</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 233.

<sup>319</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 522.

11:12 Even though God created Eve from Adam, *now* every male comes from a female ("*has his birth* through the woman"). This fact illustrates male/female interdependence, and balances Paul's emphasis in verse 11. Together, verses 11 and 12 form a chiasm structurally. Husbands and wives have equal worth. Still, "God . . . originate[s]" both of them ("all things"), and both are subordinate to Him.

The apostle's emphasis in this section was on the authority that a woman has in her own right by virtue of creation. She must not leave her divinely appointed place in creation by seeking to function exactly as a man in church worship. Furthermore, she should express her submission to this aspect of God's will in a culturally approved way. At the same time, she must maintain a healthy appreciation for the opposite sex, as should the men.

### **3. The argument from propriety 11:13-16**

Paul returned to the main argument (vv. 4-6), but now he appealed to the Corinthians' own judgment and sense of propriety. He raised two more rhetorical questions. The first question (v. 13b) expects a negative answer, and the second (vv. 14-15) a positive one. The apostle appealed to the nature of things. His points were that "nature" itself distinguishes between the sexes, and that a woman's naturally longer hair reinforces the propriety of covering her head in worship (in that culture).

11:13 In Paul's culture, it was not proper for a woman to act as a spokesman for people with God by praying publicly "with her head uncovered." To do so would be tantamount to claiming the position of a man in God's order. The apostle did not think it wise for Christian women to exercise their liberty in a way that would go against socially accepted behavior, even if they were personally submissive. Today what is socially accepted is different, but her attitude is still crucial. Notice the similarity of what Paul advocated here with what he advocated in 8:1—11:1, namely, doing what is generally perceived as appropriate (as well as what is morally correct).

11:14-15 Women's hair naturally grows longer than men's hair. Paul reasoned from this fact that God intended for women to have more head-covering than men ("her hair is given to her for a covering"). People generally regard the reverse of what is natural as dishonorable: In the man's case this would be "long hair," and in the woman's case short hair ("if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her"). By "nature," Paul evidently meant how his culture felt about what was natural ("Does not even nature itself teach you . . .?").<sup>320</sup> "Glory" means "honor."

This is a very general observation. The fact that some acceptable men's hairstyles are longer than some women's, does not mean these styles are perversions of the natural order. Men are usually taller than women, but this does not mean that short men or tall women are dishonorable. I understand that women's hair generally grows fuller and faster due to the

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<sup>320</sup>Barrett, p. 257.



estrogen in women, whereas men's hair tends to become thinner and fall out faster because of the testosterone in men.

11:16 If any of his readers still did not feel inclined to accept Paul's reasoning ("inclined to be contentious"), he informed them that the other churches ("the churches of God") followed what he had just explained. This is one of four similar statements in this epistle that served to inform the Corinthians that they were out of step with the other churches in their conduct (cf. 3:18; 8:2; 14:37). Some women were evidently discarding their head-covering in public worship because they were repudiating their place in God's administrative order.

This section contains five arguments for women wearing head-coverings in that culture. First, Paul referred to the divine order (God, Christ, man, and woman; vv. 3-6), second, creation (vv. 7-9), third, the angels (v. 10), fourth, nature (vv. 13-15), and fifth, universal church practice (v. 16).

As with the issues of eating in idol temples and meat offered to idols, Paul dealt with a cultural practice when he dealt with head-coverings. As should be clear from his argumentation, he did not feel that this was a major issue. He appealed to maintain a custom, not to obey God, and he used shame, propriety, and custom to urge the Corinthians to cooperate, not Scriptural imperatives or apostolic authority. However, important issues lay behind the practices. In the case of head-coverings, the issue is women's position in the life of the church, in particular their relationship to the men. In modern society, no item of clothing consistently identifies a woman's acceptance or rejection of her role in God's administrative order. At least none does in western culture. It is usually her speech and her behavior that do. The important thing is her attitude toward her womanhood and how she expresses it, not whether she wears a particular item of clothing.

#### **D. THE LORD'S SUPPER 11:17-34**

Most of the Corinthians had been following Paul's instructions regarding women's head-coverings, so he commended them for this (v. 2), but he could not approve their behavior at the Lord's Supper. They needed to make some major changes there. What they were doing cut at the heart of both the gospel and the church. This was the one certain situation in the Corinthian church, that Paul addressed in chapters 7—16, that the Corinthians themselves had not asked him about. He wrote that he had heard about it (v. 18).

By way of background, we need to remember that in antiquity, meals typically accompanied public worship: in the early church, in Judaism, and in the pagan world. The early Christians observed the Lord's Supper as part of such a meal, often called "the love feast." Paul's concern was that the love feast had become an occasion, not of love for fellow believers, but of selfishness.

#### **1. The abuses 11:17-26**

The first abuse reflects a problem on the horizontal level, between believers in the church. The second, more serious abuse, was vertical, involving the church and its Lord.

**Abuse of the poor 11:17-22**

This aspect of the problem involved showing disregard for the poorer members of the church.

"Because there was no landed aristocracy in the new Corinth, there arose an aristocracy of wealth."<sup>321</sup>

11:17 The Corinthians' behavior at the Lord's Supper was so bad that Paul could say they were "worse" off, for observing it as they did, rather than "better" off. Their failure was not that they failed to observe the Lord's Supper. It was that when they gathered, they did not behave as the church—in which there is no distinction between "Jews or Greeks," "slaves or free" (12:13). In the unsaved Gentile culture of Paul's day, it was typical for hosts to give preferential treatment to persons of status.<sup>322</sup>

11:18 "In the first place" evidently refers to all that follows in verses 18-34. Paul decided to wait to deal with other similar matters until he arrived in Corinth (v. 34).

The context of the occasion in view was the assembling of the whole church family (cf. 14:23). When Paul later wrote his epistle to the Romans from Corinth, the Corinthian church was meeting in the home of Gaius (Rom. 16:23). If there were several house-churches in Corinth at this time, probably all of them were guilty of this abuse.

The "divisions" (Gr. *schismata*) to which Paul referred here were social groupings within the church, not differences involving loyalty to leaders (1:12).

Evidently, those who had reported this abuse in the Corinthian church to Paul, had given him much detail about what was happening. Paul said he believed enough of this ("in part I believe it") to conclude that there was a serious problem.

11:19 Divisions or factions (Gr. *haireseis*) of this type have a positive aspect. They clarify whom God approves as faithful and trustworthy ("those who are approved"), and those who are not (cf. Matt. 10:34-37; 18:7; 24:9-13). God's approval (Gr. *dokimoi*) contrasts with what Paul had written earlier about being disapproved (disqualified, *adokimos*; 9:27) by God.

11:20 In the Christian church's early years, the Lord's Supper occupied a more central position in the life of local assemblies than it does in most churches today. The early believers often celebrated it daily or weekly (cf. Acts 2:42-46; 20:7). However, it was just as impossible to observe this feast properly, in an atmosphere of social discrimination, as it was to do so while also attending feasts that honored idols (10:21).

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<sup>321</sup>Carson and Moo, p. 420.

<sup>322</sup>Keener, p. 98.

- 11:21 The Lord's Supper was usually part of a meal the Christians shared together, the so-called "love feast." In Corinth, instead of sharing their food and drinks, each family was bringing its own and eating what they had brought. The result was that the rich had plenty, but the poor had little (were "hungry")—and suffered embarrassment as well. This was hardly a picture of Christian love and unity (cf. Acts 2:44-46; 4:32, 34-35). Furthermore some, with plenty of wine to drink, were evidently drinking too heavily (got "drunk"). They were eating their "own" private meals, rather than sharing a meal consecrated to the Lord.
- 11:22 This verse contains some of the apostle's most critical statements in this epistle. If his original readers chose to behave in such a selfish way, they should stay home and "eat" there, rather than humiliating their less fortunate brethren ("shame those who have nothing"). Such conduct showed disrespect for the church as the temple of God (cf. 3:17).

"The early Church was the one place in all the ancient world where the barriers which divided the world were down. The ancient world was very rigidly divided; there were the free men and the slaves; there were the Greeks and the barbarians—the people who did not speak Greek; there were the Jews and the Gentiles; there were the Roman citizens and the lesser breeds without the law; there were the cultured and the ignorant. The Church was the one place where all men could and did come together. . . . A Church where social and class distinctions exist is no true Church at all. A real Church is a body of men and women united to each other because all are united to Christ.

"A Church is not true Church where the art of sharing is forgotten."<sup>323</sup>

### **Abuse of the Lord 11:23-26**

There was an even more serious dimension to this problem. The Corinthians were sinning *against the Lord* as well as one another.

- 11:23 What Paul taught here came ultimately from the Lord Jesus Himself. This reminder stresses the importance of this revelation.

"The verbs 'received' and 'passed on,' which occur again in combination in 15:3, are technical terms from Paul's Jewish heritage for the transmission of religious instruction. His present concern is to establish that the tradition about the Supper they had received from him came from Jesus himself: 'I received [it] from the Lord.'"<sup>324</sup>

<sup>323</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, pp. 112-13.

<sup>324</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 548.

The terminology used here ("I received from the Lord") does not require us to understand that the Lord Jesus communicated this information to Paul personally. Paul's wording suggests that he may have been repeating exactly what others had taught him. This is not a verbatim quotation from one of the Gospel accounts.<sup>325</sup>

Paul described "the night" Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as "the night in which He was betrayed." This draws attention to the Savior's great love for His own. The Lord was graciously providing for His disciples while one of them was plotting to do away with Him.

11:24 The Greek word *eucharisteo*, "to give thanks," accounts for the fact that another name for the Lord's Supper is "the Eucharist." Likewise, some Christians call it "the Breaking of Bread" because Jesus "broke" the "bread," as Paul stated here.

There have been various interpretations of what Jesus meant when He said, "This is My body." There are four main views. Roman Catholics take it as a literal statement, meaning they believe the bread really becomes the body of Christ, and the contents of the cup become the blood of Christ. They believe this is true only when duly authorized representatives of the church conduct the service properly. This is the *transubstantiation* view. Adherents believe God transfers the body and blood of Christ into the substance of the elements. The bread and wine actually become the physical body and blood of Christ, according to this view.

A second view is not quite so literal. It is the *consubstantiation* view and, as the word implies, its advocates see the body and blood of Christ as present "in, with, and under" the elements. Christ is "really" present, though not physically present, in this Lutheran view.

The third major view is the *spiritual presence* view, that Presbyterians and some other followers of Calvin hold. For them the spiritual presence of Christ is in the elements and, as in the former views, God ministers grace to the communicant in a concrete way through participation.

The fourth view is the *memorial* view. Advocates believe that when Jesus said, "This is My body," He meant, "This represents My body." In other words, they understand His statement as completely metaphorical. They view the elements as pictures or emblems of the body and blood of Christ. In contrast to the preceding views, this one does not see Christ present in any special sense in the elements. Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, promoted this view. Today most of the churches from the Anabaptist branch of Protestantism (i.e., Baptists, Methodists, independent Bible churches, et al.) follow this interpretation.<sup>326</sup> As the following quotation

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<sup>325</sup>See David Lincicum, "Paul and the *Testimonia*: Quo Vademus?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:2 (June 2008):297-308.

<sup>326</sup>For more information on these views, see articles on the Lord's Supper and synonymous terms in Bible encyclopedias.

clarifies, this view expresses how Jesus' Jewish disciples probably first understood "This is My body (and blood)."

"The identification of the bread with the body is semitic imagery in its heightened form. As in all such identifications, he means 'this signifies/represents my body.' It lies quite beyond both Jesus' intent and the framework within which he and the disciples lived to imagine that some actual change took place, or was intended to take place, in the bread itself. Such a view could only have arisen in the church at a much later stage when Greek modes of thinking had rather thoroughly replaced semitic ones."<sup>327</sup>

Jesus invited His disciples to take the bread that represented His body. He thus gave them a share in His body, and invited them to participate in the meaning and benefits of His death. His body was "for" them in a double sense. It was what secured atonement *on their behalf* (cf. 15:3; Rom. 5:6, 8), and it was a body offered *in their place* (e.g., Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The Lord's request that His disciples remember Him by partaking of bread and the fruit of the vine is rich with significance. Many followers remember their leaders by erecting stone monuments to their memories and making pilgrimages to these sites. In contrast, the Lord Jesus made remembering Him easy, yet profound. Partaking the elements helps us appreciate the fact that Christ is really within us, and eating together reminds us of our unity with other believers in Christ's body, the church.

"Remembering," in biblical terminology, does not mean only calling to memory. It includes realizing what the event remembered involved (cf. Exod. 13:3; 20:8; Deut. 5:15; 7:18; et al.). The Lord's Supper is not just something Christians do to bring the memory of Jesus back into fresh view, though it does that too. It is a memorial of the salvation that He accomplished by His death and resurrection. First Corinthians 11:24 contains the Lord's command to observe the Eucharist, as do the Gospel accounts of the institution of this ordinance.<sup>328</sup> It is impossible to be an obedient Christian without observing the Lord's Supper.

Some Christian groups refer to the Lord's Supper as one of the "sacraments." They mean by this that the elements minister grace to the participant in a more direct and physical way, than those who speak of it as an "ordinance," assuming they are using these terms properly. An "ordinance" or a "sacrament" is a rite that the Lord commanded His followers to observe.

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<sup>327</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 550.

<sup>328</sup>For further study of the ordinances, see Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 421-27, or any of the standard theologies.

Most Protestants believe there are two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. A few Protestant groups include "foot-washing" as a third ordinance on the basis of John 13:12-17 (e.g., the Grace Brethren, some Mennonites, et al.).

11:25 As Jesus had taken the bread and given thanks for it, so ("in the same way") He also took the cup and gave thanks for it (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).

When Jesus shed His blood on Calvary, that blood ratified (gave formal sanction to, authoritative approval of) the New Covenant that Jeremiah had predicted (Jer. 31:31-34, cf. Exod. 24:8). The New Covenant replaced the old Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 8:8-13; 9:18-28). Even though the Jews will be the major beneficiaries of the benefits of this covenant in the Millennium, all believers began to benefit from the death of Christ when He died.<sup>329</sup>

This arrangement resembles one that is possible to set up in a Charitable Lead Unit Trust under the Internal Revenue Code of the United States. Suppose there was a vastly wealthy and generous philanthropist of the magnitude of a John D. Rockefeller or Bill Gates. As he prepared his will, he bequeathed millions of dollars to various charitable causes that would benefit millions of people all over the world when he died. He also wrote into his will that when his only son reached the age of 21, the son would inherit billions of dollars. When the man died, his son was only five years old, so for 16 years he did not enter into his father's inheritance. However, as soon as the philanthropist died, the millions of dollars he had bequeathed to charity went to work immediately to help many people.

This illustration shows how the church enters into the blessings of the New Covenant. When Christ established the Lord's Supper, it was as though He notarized His will; it became official right then. The "will" is the New Covenant. When Jesus died, His "estate" immediately became available to those He chose to profit from it. Soon many people around the world, Jews and Gentiles alike in the church, began to benefit from the blessings of His death. However, His chosen people, His "son" Israel, will not enter into *his* inheritance until the appointed time, namely, the Millennium. Blessings for the church began almost immediately after Christ's death. Blessings for Israel will not begin until Christ's appointed time arrives.

Whenever the Jews celebrated the Passover, the father who was conducting the service would explain the significance of each part to the rest of the family (cf. Deut. 16:3). Jesus did the same for His disciples when He instituted the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>329</sup>See Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):290-305.

11:26 Paul continued Jesus' explanation. Participation in the Lord's Supper dramatizes the gospel. The service becomes a visual, as well as an audio setting forth, of the death of Christ and its significance.

"The Eucharist is an *acted* sermon, an *acted* proclamation of the death which it commemorates; but it is possible that there is reference to some *expression of belief* in the atoning death of Christ as being a usual element in the service."<sup>330</sup>

Paul may have referred to "the cup" rather than "the wine," which would have been parallel to "the bread," in order to avoid the direct identification of the wine in the cup with *blood*. The idea of drinking blood was revolting to most people in the ancient world, particularly the Jews.<sup>331</sup> On the other hand, he may have viewed both elements symbolically, the cup being a symbol of one's lot in life, particularly judgment, and the bread a symbol of what sustains life.

The Lord's Supper is not only a memorial celebration looking back to Jesus Christ's first advent. It is also an anticipatory celebration looking forward to His second advent. Paul used the same term ("proclaim"), that the Jews used to describe the Passover liturgy, the *Haggadah* (lit. "showing forth"), to describe the Lord's Supper.<sup>332</sup> It "shows forth" ("proclaims") His death "until He comes" (cf. Exod. 13:8).

". . . to 'declare the Lord's death till he come' in judgment means nothing else than that we should by the confession of our mouth declare what our faith recognizes in the Sacrament: that the death of Christ is our life."<sup>333</sup>

Evidently when the Lord returns to set up His earthly kingdom, He will establish a new form of worship that will include the offering of certain animal sacrifices (Ezek. 40—46). These will be similar to the animal sacrifices the Jews offered under the Old Covenant. However, since Jesus Christ has made a final sacrifice, these animal offerings will evidently be for *memorial* purposes, and entirely for worship, not for the expiation of sin. Another possibility is that they will have some role in restoring fellowship with God then.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>330</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 249.

<sup>331</sup>Barrett, p. 268.

<sup>332</sup>Edersheim, p. 232.

<sup>333</sup>Calvin, 4:17:37.

<sup>334</sup>See Jerry M. Hullinger, "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40—48," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:607 (July-September 1995):279-89.

"The Communion is not supposed to be a time of 'spiritual autopsy' and grief, even though confession of sin is important. It should be a time of thanksgiving and joyful anticipation of seeing the Lord!"<sup>335</sup>

In this section, Paul reviewed and expounded the significance of the Lord's Supper so that his readers would value and celebrate it appropriately.

"In short, Paul is doing one thing and one thing alone. He is impressing on the Corinthians the tremendous importance of doing just this: eating *this* bread and drinking *this* cup. It is, after all, a matter of celebrating the Lord's *death*."<sup>336</sup>

## **2. The correctives 11:27-34**

Paul proceeded to urge the Corinthians to change their observance of the Lord's Supper, and explained what they should do to correct their conduct.

### **Discerning the body 11:27-32**

He explained that the Lord's Supper is more than a personal, introspective remembering. It has implications for the church, because in His death, Jesus Christ laid the foundation for a new community of believers who bear His name. Thus, the Lord's Supper should lead us to reflect on our relationship to one another as fellow Christians, as well as to recall Calvary.

11:27 "An unworthy manner" is any manner that is not consistent with the significance of Christ's death. This does not mean that every participant must grasp the fullness of this significance, which is hardly possible. Nevertheless, everyone should conduct himself or herself appropriately, in view of the significance of the Lord's death. Even a child is capable of doing this. The divisions that existed in their church (v. 18), plus their selfish behavior (v. 21), constituted the unworthiness of the manner in which the Corinthians were observing the Lord's Supper. They had also lost the point of the memorial, which involves proclaiming salvation through Christ's death portrayed in ritual. The gospel goes out when we observe the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

Being "guilty" of Christ's "body and blood" means being guilty of treating them in an unworthy manner, i.e., guilty of profaning them. It does not mean that such a person is in some special sense responsible for the death of Christ.

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<sup>335</sup>Wiersbe, 1:607.

<sup>336</sup>Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Proclaiming the Lord's Death," in *Pauline Theology. Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians*, p. 116.



11:28 "The Corinthians neglected to examine themselves, but they were experts at examining everybody else."<sup>337</sup>

The reason for examining oneself is to determine that we are partaking in a worthy manner rather than in an unworthy manner. In the context, this would involve behaving in a loving and unselfish way toward our fellow Christians, as well as being appreciative of the significance of the Lord's body and blood. We need to "examine" ourselves, or else the Lord will have to *examine and judge* us for failing to participate worthily (v. 31).

Having conducted this brief self-examination, the believer should then proceed to participate. An unusually sensitive Christian might hesitate to participate, after thoughtful reflection, feeling overwhelmed by his or her personal unworthiness. However, no one is ever worthy to partake. If someone thinks he is, he is not. We are only worthy because Christ has made us worthy. We ought to partake *feeling unworthy* to do so. This attitude is part of what it means to partake in a worthy manner.

This simple reflection and participation lie at the very root of the motivation for living a life that glorifies God. The church has invented many ways to motivate Christians to "put Jesus Christ first" in their lives. These include altar calls, "revival" services, campfire dedication services, and many others—all of which have value. Unfortunately, we have also neglected what the Lord Jesus instructed us here to do, which will motivate His people to live for Him better than anything else. If this observance has lost its punch, it is because those who lead it have failed to give it the preparation, attention, and priority it deserves in church life. The frequent observance of the Lord's Supper—in a way that takes us back to the Cross—is one of the most powerful and effective motivators for living the Christian life. If you think a frequent observance of the Lord's Supper tends to become tiresome, remember that your spouse never tires of your frequent expressions of love for him or her.

11:29 Eating and drinking in an unworthy manner results in divine "judgment." Judgment is inevitable at the Lord's Table. We must "judge" ourselves (Gr. *diakrino*) before we partake, and then participate in a worthy manner, or else God will *judge* (*krino*) us. The "body" has a double sense: the body of Christ given on the cross, and the mystical body of Christ, the church.

"The 'unworthy' or 'inappropriate' participation in the Lord's Supper that entails eating and drinking judgment against the participants comes in not 'discerning (*diakrino*) the body' (11:29). How members of the community view one another, whether they are sensitive to the poor and latecomers or whether the prevailing social customs dictate their behavior, becomes the decisive issue. Does the

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<sup>337</sup>Wiersbe, 1:606.

congregation recognize itself as the distinctive body of Christ?"<sup>338</sup>

- 11:30 In Corinth, God was judging with sickness ("many . . . are weak and sick") and death ("a number sleep"). The reasons were the unjudged sin of selfish living (v. 21) and thoughtless participation in the communion service.
- 11:31 If God's people do not judge their own sins themselves, God will judge them. This judgment may involve physical illness—or even, in extreme cases, premature physical death (cf. Acts 5; 1 John 5:16).
- 11:32 We should regard this kind of God's punishment of Christians as *discipline* (Gr. *paideia*, lit. child training; cf. Heb. 12:5-11). The condemnation which God intends this discipline to spare us from experiencing, is not the eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord that the unsaved world will suffer (Rom. 8:1). It is premature death, and or the Lord's disapproval at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 3:15; 5:5). This is another instance of wordplay in the Greek text. If we discerned (*diakrino*) ourselves, we would not come under divine judgment (*krino*). When God judges us (*krino*), it is to correct us, so that "we will not be condemned" (*katakrino*) "with the world."

#### **Waiting for one another 11:33-34**

Practical application now follows theological explanation.

- 11:33 Rather than disregarding the members of the congregation, who had little or no food to bring to the love feasts, those who had plenty should share what they had. They should also "wait" to eat until all had been served.
- Many churches these days have potluck suppers, periodically, that provide a modern counterpart to the first-century love feast. Some Christians have felt that we should practice the love feast whenever we observe the Lord's Supper today. Most have concluded that the love feast was just the *setting* in which the Lord's Supper took place in the early church. Jesus did not specifically command His disciples to observe the *love feast* when He urged them to eat the Lord's Supper. Therefore most Christians believe the love feast is not an ordinance of the church, and thus we are not bound to perpetuate it as the early church practiced it.
- 11:34 If some of the Corinthian Christians were too "hungry" to wait before eating, they should "eat" something "at home" before they came to the service. Otherwise, their unloving selfishness might result in the Lord's "judgment." It is very important to the Lord that we put the needs of others before our own needs (cf. 9:22; 10:33; Mark 10:45; Rom. 15:2; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 2:3; et al.).

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<sup>338</sup>Cousar, "The Theological . . .," p. 100.

Evidently there were other details ("the remaining matters"), of how the Corinthians were behaving when they congregated, that Paul did not want to comment on in this letter. Perhaps they were of local importance only. He planned to address these issues when he visited Corinth again (cf. 4:18-21; 16:2-3, 5-7).

The selfish attitude that marked the Corinthian church comes through strongly in this section of the epistle. It manifested itself in a particularly ugly display at the Lord's Table. Paul dealt with it severely, both for the sake of the reputation of the Savior, and for the welfare of the saints.

### **E. SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND SPIRITUAL PEOPLE CHS. 12—14**

Paul had been dealing with matters related to worship since 8:1. He had forbidden the Corinthians from participating in temple meals, but had allowed eating marketplace meat under certain circumstances (8:1—11:1). Then he dealt with two issues involving their own gatherings for worship: head-coverings and the Lord's Supper (11:2-34). The issue of spiritual gifts (chs. 12—14) was the third issue involving their own gatherings for worship. This is the most important of the three as evidenced by the amount of text Paul devoted to it and by the issue itself. Paul explained that being "spiritual" at present, since the perfect state has not yet come (13:8-13), means to edify the church in worship.

"More than any other issue, the Corinthians and Paul are at odds over the role of the Spirit. For them 'Spirit' has been their entrée to life in the realm of *sophia* ('wisdom') and *gnosis* ('knowledge'), with their consequent rejection of the material order, both now (7:1-7) and for the future (15:12), as well as their rejection of the Christian life as modeled by Paul's imitation of Christ (4:15-21). Their experience of tongues as the language(s) of angels had allowed them to assume heavenly existence now (4:8), thought of primarily in terms of nonmaterial existence, rather than ethical-moral life in the present. Thus Paul tries to disabuse them of their singular and overly enthusiastic emphasis on tongues (the point of chaps. 12—14); but in so doing, he tries to retool their understanding of the Spirit so as to bring it into line with the gospel."<sup>339</sup>

Paul wanted to correct the Corinthians in this section, not just provide more teaching, as he did throughout this epistle. This becomes clear in chapter 14. They were abusing the gift of tongues. The whole section divides into three parts and structurally follows an A-B-A chiastic pattern, as do other parts of this letter (i.e., chs. 1—3; 7:25-40; chs. 8—10). First there is general instruction (ch. 12), then a theological interlude (ch. 13), and finally specific correction (ch. 14).

". . . there is not a single suggestion in Paul's response that they were themselves divided on this issue or that they were politely asking his advice. More likely, the crucial issue is their decided position over against him as to what it means to be *pneumatikos* ('spiritual'). Their view

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<sup>339</sup>Fee, "Toward a . . .," p. 45.

apparently not only denied the material/physical side of Christian existence (hence the reason why chap. 15 follows hard on the heels of this section), but had an element of 'spiritualized (or overrealized) eschatology' as well.

"The key probably lies with 13:1, where tongues is associated with angels. As noted elsewhere (7:1-7; 11:2-16), the Corinthians seem to have considered themselves to be already like the angels, thus truly 'spiritual,' needing neither sex in the present (7:1-7) nor a body in the future (15:1-58). Speaking angelic dialects by the Spirit was evidence enough for them of their participation in the new spirituality, hence their singular enthusiasm for this gift."<sup>340</sup>

### **1. The test of Spirit control 12:1-3**

The apostle began his discussion by clarifying the indicators that a person is under the control of the indwelling Spirit of God. With this approach, he set the Corinthians' former experience as idolaters in contrast to their present experience as Christians. "Inspired utterance" in itself does not identify what is truly "spiritual." The intelligible content of such an utterance does, when the content is the basic confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

12:1           The presence of the phrase *peri de* ("Now concerning" or "Now about"), plus the change in subject, mark another matter about which the Corinthians had written Paul with a question (cf. 7:1; 8:1). It has to do with the "gifts" (abilities) that the Holy Spirit gives those believers He indwells.<sup>341</sup> This subject is the focus of all that Paul wrote in chapters 12—14, including the famous thirteenth chapter on love.

As in 10:1, Paul implied that what followed was instruction his readers needed. "Spiritual gifts" is literally "the spirituals" (Gr. *ton pneumatikon*). Paul used *pneumatika* when he wanted to emphasize the Spirit, and he used *charismata* when he wanted to stress the gift. *Pneumatikon* is a broader term than the gifts themselves, though it includes them. It appears to refer primarily to the people who are spiritual (cf. 2:15; 3:1). Evidently the Corinthians' question dealt with the characteristics of a spiritual Christian. A spiritual Christian is a believer under the control of the Holy Spirit, compared to one under the control of his or her flesh (Gal. 5:16), or a demonic spirit (10:20-21). In 2:15, Paul described mature Christians as "spiritual" (Gr. *pneumatikos*, having the Spirit) in contrast to "natural" (i.e., unsaved, not having the Spirit). However, he proceeded immediately to clarify that it is not only *possession of* the Spirit, but also *control by* the Spirit, that marks one as truly spiritual (3:3).

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<sup>340</sup>Idem, *The First . . .*, pp. 572-73.

<sup>341</sup>For defense of the view that spiritual gifts are ministries rather than abilities, see Kenneth Berding, "Confusing Word and Concept in 'Spiritual Gifts': Have We Forgotten James Barr's Exhortations?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000):37-51.

12:2 Many of the Corinthian believers had been "pagans." Various influences had led them away from worship of the true God into idolatry.

"Corinth was experience-oriented and self-oriented. Mystery religions and other pagan cults were in great abundance, from which cults many of the members at the Corinthian church received their initial religious instruction. After being converted they had failed to free themselves from pagan attitudes and they confused the true work of the Spirit of God with the former pneumatic and ecstatic experiences of the pagan religions, especially the Dionysian mystery or the religion of Apollo."<sup>342</sup>

"Dumb (mute) idols" are idols that do not speak, in contrast with the living God who does speak. Paul previously said that demons are behind the worship of idols (10:20). He did not specifically say that the prophecy or *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), being spoken in the Corinthian church, proceeded from demonic sources. He only reminded his readers that there are "inspired" utterances that come from sources other than the Holy Spirit. Probably some of them had spoken in tongues when they were pagans.

"In classical [Greek] literature, Apollo was particularly renowned as the source of ecstatic utterances, as on the lips of Cassandra of Troy, the priestess of Delphi or the Sibyl of Cumae (whose frenzy as she prophesied under the god's control is vividly described by Virgil); at a humbler level the fortune-telling slave-girl of Ac. 16.16 was dominated by the same kind of 'pythonic' spirit."<sup>343</sup>

12:3 Enthusiasm or ecstasy or "inspired" utterance do not necessarily indicate spirituality. By "inspired" utterance, I mean any utterance that the speaker claimed came from God, not necessarily a truly inspired new revelation from God. Paul's original readers needed to pay attention to what the person speaking in such a state said.

"Not the manner but the content of ecstatic speech determines its authenticity."<sup>344</sup>

What the person said about Jesus Christ was especially important. No one motivated by the Holy Spirit would curse Jesus Christ (or say Jesus is "accursed"). Probably no one in the Corinthian church had. In the Septuagint, *anathema* means a thing devoted to God without being redeemed, something doomed to destruction (Lev. 27:28-29; Josh. 6:17;

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<sup>342</sup>H. Wayne House, "Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:558 (April-June 1983):147-48.

<sup>343</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 117.

<sup>344</sup>Barrett, p. 279. Cf. Deut. 13:2-6; 18:21-22.

7:12).<sup>345</sup> *Anathema* is an Aramaic term carried over from the church's Jewish background. Likewise, no one would sincerely acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, Savior and or Sovereign, unless the Holy Spirit had some influence over him or her. This was true regardless of whether the person was speaking in an ecstatic condition or in plain speech. Paul was not instructing his readers to test the spirits to see if they were of God (cf. 1 John 4:1-3). His point was that "inspired" utterance as such does not indicate that the Holy Spirit is leading a person.

The "Holy Spirit" leads those under His control to glorify "Jesus" Christ, not dumb idols, with their speech (cf. 2:10-13).

"The ultimate criterion of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. Whatever takes away from that, even if they be legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move away from Christ to a more pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself."<sup>346</sup>

## **2. The need for varieties of spiritual gifts 12:4-31**

Paul planned to return to the subject of *glossolalia* (ch. 14), but first he wanted to talk more generally about spiritual gifts. In the verses that follow, he dealt with differences in gifts in the church.

"Having given the negative and positive criterion of genuine spiritual endowments as manifested in speech, the Apostle goes on to point out the essential oneness of these very varied gifts."<sup>347</sup>

Diversity, not uniformity, is necessary for a healthy church, and God has seen to it that diversity exists (vv. 6, 7, 11, 18, 24, 28). Notice that the Corinthians were doing in the area of spiritual gifts essentially what they were doing in relation to their teachers (3:4-23). They were preferring one over others, and thereby failing to benefit from them all. This section of Paul's argument puts the subject of gifts into proper theological perspective, whereas the previous pericope put it into its proper Christological perspective.

### **Diversity in the Godhead and the gifts 12:4-11**

12:4            Although there is only one ("the same") Holy "Spirit," He gives many different abilities ("varieties of gifts") to different people. Everything in this pericope revolves around these two ideas. "Gifts" (Gr. *charismata*, from *charis*, meaning "grace") are abilities that enable a person to glorify and serve God. God gives them freely and graciously. That they are abilities seems clear from how Paul described them here and elsewhere (cf. Rom. 12).<sup>348</sup>

<sup>345</sup>Robertson, 4:167.

<sup>346</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 582.

<sup>347</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 262.

<sup>348</sup>See Eliezer Gonzalez, "Healing in the Pauline Epistles: Why the Silence?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:3 (September 2013):557-75.

- 12:5 Likewise there are different ("varieties of") "ministries" or services (Gr. *diakonia*; opportunities for service) that the one ("same") "Lord" over the church gives.
- 12:6 Furthermore there are different ("varieties of") "effects" or workings (Gr. *energēmata*; manifestations of the Spirit's power at work) that the one ("same") "God," who is responsible for all of them, bestows. Just as "Spirit," "Lord," and "God" are distinct yet closely related in verses 4-6, so are "gifts," "ministries," and "effects." We should probably not view these words as representing entirely separate ideas, but as facets of God's work in and through the believer. It is God who is responsible for our abilities, our opportunities for service, and the individual ways in which we minister, including the results.
- 12:7 Each believer, regardless of his or her gifts, ministries, and the manner and extent of God's blessing, demonstrates the Holy Spirit through his or her life. Paul's point here was not that each believer has a gift, though that is true (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10). His point was that the Spirit manifests Himself in a great variety of ways. Gifts, ministries, and effects, all working in concert, "manifest" the Spirit's presence, not just the more spectacular ones in each category. Believers who have spectacular gifts, ministries, or effectiveness are not necessarily more spiritual than Christians who do not. Each believer makes a unique contribution "for the common good," not just certain believers (cf. vv. 12-27; 3:4-10). Several examples of this fact follow in verses 8-10.
- 12:8 Paul mentioned nine ways in which the Spirit manifests Himself through believers. The list is representative rather than exhaustive, as is clear when we compare this list with other similar ones (cf. vv. 28, 29-30; 7:7; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26; Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:11).
- In this verse, there is no definite article before the word "word" in either of its uses. This probably points to Paul's referring to an utterance of wisdom or of knowledge, namely, a wise or a knowledgeable utterance (cf. 1:17—2:16).<sup>349</sup> The difference between the utterances probably lies in "wisdom" representing a mature perception of what is true to reality (cf. 1:24; 2:6-13; 14:6), and "knowledge" being the understanding of God's mysteries (revelations) in particular (cf. 13:2; 14:6).
- "It is the discourse, not the wisdom or knowledge behind it, that is the spiritual gift, for it is this that is of direct service to the church . . ." <sup>350</sup>
- 12:9 "Faith" is trust in God. Every Christian has some faith, just as every Christian has some wisdom and knowledge. However, some believers have more God-given ability to trust God than others, just as some have

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<sup>349</sup>Morris, p. 170.

<sup>350</sup>Barrett, pp. 284-85.

more God-given wisdom or knowledge than others. All believers should seek to cultivate wisdom, knowledge, and faith, but some have a larger God-given capacity for one or another of them than other Christians do.

The "gifts of healings" (literally) by definition refer to abilities to cause healing to take place. Evidently there were various types of healings that those so gifted could produce, for example: physical, psychological, and spiritual healings. Counselors and medical doctors have a degree of ability to produce healing today. However, most Christians believe God has not given the ability to restore people to health *instantaneously*, today, as He did in the early church.<sup>351</sup>

12:10 "Miracles" are mighty works (Gr. *dynameis*) that alter the natural course of events. Probably all types of miracles other than healings are in view. God gave the ability to do miracles to His Son, and to some Christians in the early church, to signify that He was with them and empowering them (cf. Luke 4:14—9:50; Gal. 3:5; Heb. 2:4). Luke's Gospel, in particular, presents Jesus as teaching and then validating His teaching by doing miracles. Acts shows the apostles doing the same thing.

"Prophecy" has a four-fold meaning in the New Testament: Prophets foretold future events. They also declared things known only by special new revelation from God. Third, they uttered under the Spirit's prompting some lofty statement or message in praise of God, or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others (cf. 11:4; 13:9; 14:1, 3-5, 24, 31, 39). Fourth, they led in worship (Exod. 15:20-21; 1 Chron. 25:1). Evidently the first and second of these abilities passed out of existence with the composition of the last New Testament books. The last of the New Testament books that God inspired was probably Revelation, which most likely dates from about A.D. 95.<sup>352</sup>

"First, although prophecy was an especially widespread phenomenon in the religions of antiquity, Paul's understanding—as well as that of the other NT writers—was thoroughly conditioned by his own history in Judaism. The prophet was a person who spoke to God's people under the inspiration of the Spirit. The 'inspired utterance' came by revelation and announced judgment (usually) or

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<sup>351</sup>For a discussion of the temporary nature of some of the gifts, namely, that they were in use in the early church but not thereafter, see Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:580 (October-December 1988):371-86; and John F. Walvoord, "Contemporary Issues in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Part IV: Spiritual Gifts Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:520 (October-December 1973):315-28. This article was reprinted under the title "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:570 (April-June 1986):109-21. See also Vern S. Poythress, "Modern Spiritual Gifts as Analogous to Apostolic Gifts: Affirming Extraordinary Works of the Spirit within Cessationist Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:1 (March 1996):71-101.

<sup>352</sup>See Mark L. Hitchcock, "A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary), 2005.



salvation. Although the prophets often performed symbolic acts, which they then interpreted, the mainstream of prophetic activity, at least as it came to be canonized, had very little to do with 'ecstasy,' especially 'frenzy' or 'mania.' For the most part the prophets were understood only too well! Often the word spoken had a futuristic element, so in that sense they also came to be seen as 'predicters'; but that was only one element, and not necessarily the crucial one."<sup>353</sup>

The ability called "distinguishing of spirits" was apparently a gift of discernment. It enabled a person to tell whether a propounded prophecy was genuine or counterfeit, namely, from the Holy Spirit or a false spirit (cf. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20-21). Thus it had a connection to prophecy similar to that between interpretation and tongues.<sup>354</sup>

The gift of "tongues," about which Paul would say much more in chapter 14, was the ability to speak in one or more languages that the speaker had not learned. However, the languages do not seem limited to human languages (cf. 13:1). Nevertheless they were intelligible with interpretation (14:10-14). They were not just gibberish. The New Testament writers did not consider the ecstatic utterances of pagans or Christians, that were other than languages, to be manifestations of the Spirit's gift of tongues.

It should be noted . . . that only tongues is included in every list of 'gifts' in these three chapters [12:8-10, 28, 29-30; 13:1-3, 8; 14:6, 26]. Its place at the *conclusion* of each list in chap. 12, but at the beginning in 13:1 and 14:6, suggests that the problem lies here. It is listed last not because it is 'least,' but because it is the problem. He always includes it, but at the end, after the greater concern for diversity has been heard."<sup>355</sup>

The person with the ability to interpret ("interpretation of") "tongues" (languages) could accurately translate what a tongues-speaker said, so that others present could know the meaning of what he or she said. Presumably some Christians with the gift of tongues also had the gift of interpreting tongues, so they were also able to explain or translate what they had said.

"With the possible exception of faith, all these gifts seem to have been confirmatory and foundational gifts for the establishment of the church (cf. Heb. 2:4; Eph. 2:20) and were therefore temporary."<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>353</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 595.

<sup>354</sup>Keener, p. 101.

<sup>355</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 572. Cf. idem, "Tongues—Least of the Gifts? Some Exegetical Observations on 1 Corinthians 12—14," *Pneuma* 2 (1980):3-14.

<sup>356</sup>Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 533.

12:11 This section concludes with another reminder that, though these manifestations of the Spirit vary, they all indicate the presence and working of the ("one and the same") Spirit of God. Paul also stressed again the Spirit's sovereignty in "distributing" the gifts (cf. John 3:8). The Corinthians should not try to manipulate the Spirit, but should accept and submit to His distribution of the gifts as He saw fit.

There is a general progression in this list from the more common to the more uncommon and esoteric gifts (cf. v. 28). The more unusual gifts that appear toward the end of this list attracted the Corinthians. Some gifts were probably more common at one place and in one church, than were others, depending on the Spirit's sovereign distribution (cf. 1:4-5). Some were probably more common at some times than at others, too, as the Spirit bestowed them.

Since spiritual gifts are abilities that God gives Christians to serve Him with, it behooves us to know what our gifts are. Though some Christians have become overly preoccupied with analyzing themselves, we need to know the equipment that God has given us if we are to put our abilities to their best use. A helpful free tool to use is the "Spiritual Gifts Analysis" available at [www.churchgrowth.org](http://www.churchgrowth.org). Often people who know us well, and or have observed us in a variety of ministry situations, can spot our spiritual gifts better than we can. What do other people say you do well? What do you enjoy doing? What has God blessed that you have done? What do you believe is important for you to do? The answers to these questions can also help to identify one's gifts.

Some Christians struggle because they do not like the gifts, ministries, and or fruit that God has given them. They would prefer to have something else. In this case, one needs to yield to the Spirit's control and accept the abilities, ministries, and results that He has given. I struggled with this issue, but eventually God gave me peace about my giftedness. I have learned that I can make the greatest contribution to the building of Christ's church by using what He has provided, not by insisting on serving Him as I prefer.

### **The body and its members 12:12-14**

Paul now compared the body of Christ, the universal church, though by extension the local church as well, to a human body. Again, his point was not that the church needs to have unity, but that it needs to have diversity.

12:12 The apostle spoke of this comparison in other epistles as well (Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:18; 2:19). He probably adapted the idea of the body politic, an essentially secular but commonly understood concept, to illustrate the church. There can be unity in a body without uniformity. Here the apostle stressed the fact that *diversity* among the members is an essential part of a unified body. Evidently the Corinthians were striving for unanimity (toward all having the same function), and did not appreciate that there can and must be diversity in a "spiritual" church.

"One of the marks of an individual's maturity is a growing understanding of, and appreciation for, his own body. There is a parallel in the spiritual life: as we mature in

Christ, we gain a better understanding of the church, which is Christ's body. The emphasis in recent years on 'body life' has been a good one. It has helped to counteract the wrong emphasis on 'individual Christianity' that can lead to isolation from the local church."<sup>357</sup>

12:13 The baptism of the Spirit took place initially on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:33; 11:16). Since then, individual believers experienced Spirit baptism ("by one Spirit . . . were all baptized") when they personally trusted Christ as their Savior (Acts 11:15-17; Rom. 8:9).

In Spirit baptism, the Holy Spirit baptizes (Gr. *baptidzo*, lit. submerges) the believer into the body of Christ. He makes us a part of it. Water baptism simply illustrates this. Every believer experiences Spirit baptism, regardless of his or her race or social status. We are now on equal footing in the sense that we are all members of the body of Christ.

The figure of *drinking* "of one Spirit" recalls John 7:37-39, where Jesus invited the thirsty to come and drink of Him to find refreshment. Baptism and drinking are both initiation experiences, and take place at the same time. In the first figure, the Spirit places the believer into Christ, and in the second, the Spirit comes into the Christian. This is probably a case of Semitic parallelism, in which both clauses make essentially the same point. We have come into the body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit has come into us.

". . . the Spirit not only surrounds us, but is within us."<sup>358</sup>

12:14 Both bodies, the physical human body and the spiritual body of Christ, consist of "many" members. This fact helps us realize our limited contribution to the larger organism. A body composed of only "one organ (member)" would be a monstrosity.

The modern church often uses this pericope to stress the importance of unity, which is a great need today. However, Paul's emphasis originally was on the importance of diversity.

### **The application of the figure 12:15-26**

Paul proceeded to spell out the implications of his analogy.

12:15-16 Perhaps Paul chose the feet, hands, ears, and eyes as examples because of their prominence in the body. Even though they are prominent and important, they cannot function alone. They need each other.

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<sup>357</sup>Wiersbe, 1:607.

<sup>358</sup>Barrett, p. 289.

". . . Chrysostom remarks that the foot contrasts itself with the hand rather than with the ear, because we do not envy those who are very much higher than ourselves so much as those who have got a little above us . . ."359

- 12:17 Different functions as well as different members are necessary in the body (cf. v. 4). Paul's point was not the inferiority of some members, but the need for all the members.
- 12:18 Paul again stressed, in this verse, God's sovereignty in *placing* each member in the body as He has chosen. We need to discover how God has gifted us, and to become as effective as possible where He has "placed" us. We should concentrate on using the abilities we have received, rather than longing to be different, or insisting on doing things that God has not gifted us to do (cf. 7:26-27).
- "Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Christian Church, the possibility of really Christian work is gone."<sup>360</sup>
- 12:19 If all the members of the human body were the same ("all one member"), it would not be able to function as a body (" . . . where would the body be?"). It would be incapable of getting anything accomplished. For example, if all had the gift of tongues, the gift that the Corinthians valued so highly, the body would not function.
- 12:20 *Uniformity* (all one member or function) is not the case in the human body, however. It has a variety of ("many") "members" and many functions, but it is one *unified* organism.
- 12:21 It is interesting that Paul used the "head" and the "feet" as examples—the top of the body and the bottom. He was probably reminding those who felt superior that those whom they regarded as inferior were also necessary for the body to function (cf. 11:17-34). Too often, because we differ *from* each other, we also differ *with* each other.
- 12:22 Rather than regarding themselves as superior, the "haves" in the church needed to remember that the "have nots" were important for the effective operation of the whole organism. Even the "weaker" little toe, or the rarely appreciated pancreas, plays a crucial role in the physical body.
- 12:23-24a When dealing with our human bodies, "we bestow more . . . honor" on our less honorable parts by covering them up. This makes our unseemly members more seemly. Paul may have been referring to the sexual organs.<sup>361</sup> On the other hand, the more honorable parts, such as our faces, do not require special covering. The point is that we take special pains to

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<sup>359</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 273.

<sup>360</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 127.

<sup>361</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 613-14.

honor our less esteemed physical members, and we should do the same in the church, rather than neglecting or despising them. When was the last time your church gave public recognition to the nursery workers or the cleanup crew?

12:24b-25 God has so constructed ("composed") bodies, both human and spiritual, so the different members can "care for one another" equally. He does not ignore any member, but makes "the same" (sufficient) provision for each one. We do not always see this in the human body, but it is true. Likewise, God's honoring the less prominent members in the church may not be apparent now, but it will be at the judgment seat of Christ—if not before then.

God does not want dissension ("division"; Gr. *schisma*) in His body. There was some in the Corinthian church (1:10; 11:18). Rather ("But"; strong contrast in the Greek, *alla*), the members should have concerned, loving care for one another. Paul illustrated this attitude with what follows.

12:26 The suffering of "one" means the suffering of "all," and the well-being (honor) of one means the well-being (rejoicing) of all.

"Plato had pointed out that we do not say, 'My finger has a pain,' we say, 'I have a pain.'"<sup>362</sup>

In view of this, we can and should honestly "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15).

"Ancients emphasized that true friends shared each other's joys and sorrows."<sup>363</sup>

Paul's preceding comments about the body (vv. 12-26) are applicable to both a physical body and the spiritual body of Christ. However, he was speaking about the human body mainly as an illustration of the spiritual body.

### **The fact of diversity restated 12:27-31**

Next, the apostle spoke more specifically about the members of the body of Christ again (cf. vv. 1-11).

12:27 "You" is emphatic in the Greek text and is plural. The Corinthian Christians are in view, but what Paul said of them applies to all groups of Christians. Together we make up "the body of Christ," and each of us is an "individual member" of it. Again, what Paul said of the church is true of it in its *macro* and in its *micro* forms: the universal church and the local church.

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<sup>362</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 126.

<sup>363</sup>Keener, p. 104.

12:28

Paul listed eight kinds of members with special functions. This list differs somewhat from the one in verses 8-10, where he identified nine manifestations of the Spirit's working. This list, as the former one, is selective rather than exhaustive.

The ranking of these gifted individuals is evidently in the order of the importance of their ministries. When Paul said earlier that all the members were essential (v. 21), he did not mean that some did not have a more crucial function to perform than others. He did not mention this distinction there, because he wanted each member to appreciate the essential necessity of all the other members. In another sense, however, some gifts are more important than others (v. 31; 14:1).

God called and gifted the apostles to plant and to establish the church in places the gospel had not yet gone. *Apostello* means "to send out," so it is proper to think of "apostles" as *missionaries* sent out. "Prophets" were the channels through whom God sent His revelations to His people (cf. Eph. 2:20). Some of them also wrote the books of the New Testament. "Teachers" gave believers instruction in the Scriptures. Teachers were more important in the church than the prophets, who simply gave words of edification, exhortation, and consolation (14:3), but they were less important than the prophets who announced authoritative revelation. The latter type of prophet is in view in this verse.

". . . a scholar will learn more from a good teacher than he will from any book. We have books in plenty nowadays, but it is still true that it is through people that we really learn of Christ."<sup>364</sup>

"Workers of miracles" and healers ("gifts of healings") gave dramatic proof that the power of God was working in the church, so that others would trust Christ. They may have ministered especially to the Jews, since the Jews looked for such indications (signs) of God's presence and blessing (cf. 1:22). Helpers seem to have provided assistance of various kinds ("helps") for people in need. Administrators managed and directed the affairs of the churches ("administrations"). "Tongues"-speakers bring up the rear in this list, as being the least important of those mentioned. Paul said more about their relative importance in chapter 14.

"The shortness of the list of charismata in Eph. iv. II as compared with the list here is perhaps an indication that the regular exercise of extraordinary gifts in public worship was already dying out."<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 129.

<sup>365</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 281, footnote. Cf. *A Dictionary of the Bible*, "Lord's Day," 3:141, by N. J. D. White.

The traditional view is that Paul wrote Ephesians (ca. A.D. 62) about six years after he wrote 1 Corinthians (ca. A.D. 56).

12:29-30 These two verses contain a third list of gifts, in a descending order of priority. Each of Paul's seven questions expects a negative answer. The apostle's point was that it would be ridiculous for everyone to have the same gift. Variety is essential. It is wrong to equate one gift, particularly speaking in tongues, with spirituality.

"All of the believers in the Corinthian assembly had been baptized by the Spirit [v. 13], but not all of them spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30)."<sup>366</sup>

". . . in these verses Paul strikes a deathblow to the theory that speaking in tongues is the sign of the possession of the Spirit, for the answer 'No' is expected to each question (cf. Greek)."<sup>367</sup>

12:31 Paul advised the Corinthians to seek ("earnestly desire") some "gifts" more than others, because some are more significant ("greater") in the functioning of the body than others. While the bestowal of gifts is the sovereign prerogative of the Spirit (vv. 8-11, 18), human desire plays a part in His bestowal (cf. James 4:2). This seems to indicate that the Spirit does not give all His gifts to us at the moment of our salvation. I see nothing in Scripture that prohibits our viewing the abilities God gives us at birth as part of His spiritual gifts. Likewise, a believer can receive a gift or an opportunity for service, or the Spirit's blessing on his ministry, years after his conversion. Everything we have or ever will have is a gift from God.<sup>368</sup>

God did not give the gift of apostleship, in the technical sense, to any other than those whom Christ Himself selected—who had seen the risen Lord. It went to a small group in the first generation of the church's history. Apostleship, in the general sense of "one sent out with a message," continues today. Normally we refer to these gifted people as "missionaries" to distinguish them from Paul and the 12 apostles.

Likewise, we use the term "prophet" in both a technical and in a general sense today. Usually we think of prophets as people who gave new revelation from God or predicted the future. As I mentioned previously, prophets also spoke forth a word from the Lord, by exhorting or encouraging the church, and some of them led the church in worship. The Greek word *prophetes* means "one who speaks forth." In the first, technical sense, prophets have ceased in the church. In the second, general

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<sup>366</sup>Wiersbe, 1:609.

<sup>367</sup>S. L. Johnson Jr., p. 1251.

<sup>368</sup>See Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 120.

sense, they are still with us.<sup>369</sup> We usually refer to the exhorters and encouragers as "preachers," to distinguish them from first-century prophets who gave new revelation and predicted the future.

Today, some people who desire to sharpen their ability to preach and teach the Scriptures, enroll in Bible college or seminary to do so. This is one example of "zealously (earnestly) desir[ing] the greater gifts."

However, Paul said there is an even more important discipline that a believer should cultivate to reach the goal of being maximally effective. That way involves valuing and cultivating love (ch. 13). The apostle did not mean, of course, that one should disregard the most important gifts in order to seek love. We should give attention to both: cultivating love and cultivating abilities that are strategically important in Christ's body. Nevertheless, as important as sharpening abilities is, it is even more important that we excel in loving.

"The most excellent way' which Paul will now show his friends at Corinth is not one more gift among many, but 'a way beyond all this.' That extraordinary way is, of course, the way of *agape*, that fruit of the Spirit which is of primary importance to every believer and to the body of Christ."<sup>370</sup>

"What Paul is about to embark on is a description of what he calls 'a way that is beyond comparison.' The way they are going is basically destructive to the church as a community; the way they are being called to is one that seeks the good of others before oneself. It is the way of edifying the church (14:1-5), of seeking the common good (12:7). In that context one will still earnestly desire the things of the Spirit (14:1), but precisely so that others will be edified. Thus it is not 'love versus gifts' that Paul has in mind, but 'love as the only context for gifts'; for without the former, the latter have no usefulness at all—but then neither does much of anything else in the Christian life."<sup>371</sup>

Chapter 12 is a chapter that stresses balance (cf. Gal. 5). On the one hand, each Christian is only a part of a larger organism, but each is an indispensable part. In one sense, we are equally important because we all serve an essential function, but in another sense, some are more crucial than others. God determines our gifts, ministries, and individual effectiveness, yet our desire and initiative have something to do with our service as well. Ability, ministry opportunity, and individuality are very important, but love is even more

<sup>369</sup>See John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):182-200.

<sup>370</sup>Thomas A. Jackson, "Concerning Spiritual Gifts: A Study of I Corinthians 12," *Faith and Mission* 7:1 (Fall 1989):68.

<sup>371</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 625.



important. A good measure of our personal maturity as Christians will be how well we can keep these paradoxes in balance in our personal lives and ministries. The Corinthians needed help in this area.

"The Church is neither a dead mass of similar particles, like a heap of sand, nor a living swarm of antagonistic individuals, like a cage of wild beasts: it has the unity of a living organism, in which no two parts are exactly alike, but all discharge different functions for the good of the whole. All men are not equal, and no individual can be independent of the rest: everywhere there is subordination and dependence. Some have special gifts, some have none; some have several gifts, some only one; some have higher gifts, some have lower: but every individual has some function to discharge, and all must work together for the common good. This is the all-important point—unity in loving service."<sup>372</sup>

	UNITY	DIVERSITY	MATURITY
<b>1 Corinthians</b>	12:1-13	12:14-31	13:1-13
<b>Romans</b>	12:1-5	12:6-8	12:9-21
<b>Ephesians</b>	4:1-6	4:7-12	4:13-16 <sup>373</sup>

### **3. The supremacy of love ch. 13**

Paul now proceeded to elaborate on the fact that love surpasses the most important spiritual gifts. Some of the Corinthian Christians may not have possessed any of the gifts mentioned in the previous three lists in chapter 12, but all of them could practice love. Clearly all of them needed to practice love more fully. The *fruit* of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) is a more obvious demonstration of the Spirit's presence in a life, and His control over a life, than the other *gifts* of the Spirit.

Love is the most fundamental and prominent of these graces. The love in view is God's love, that He has placed in the believer by the indwelling Spirit, that should overflow to God and others. It is the love that only the indwelling Holy Spirit can produce in a believer and manifest through a believer. Fortunately we do not have to produce it. We just need to cooperate with God by doing His will, with His help, and the Spirit will produce it. I believe that love is a spiritual gift, not just a spiritual grace and a fruit of the Spirit, because God gives us the ability to love.

"A Christian community can make shift somehow if the 'gifts' of chapter 12 be lacking: it will die if love is absent. The most lavish exercise of spiritual gifts cannot compensate for lack of love."<sup>374</sup>

<sup>372</sup>Robertson and Plummer, pp. 269-70.

<sup>373</sup>Wiersbe, 1:607.

<sup>374</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 124.

This chapter is something of a digression in Paul's argument concerning keeping the gift of tongues in its proper perspective (cf. 14:1), but it strengthens his argument considerably. As we have seen throughout this epistle, the Corinthians needed to love one another and others. It is not coincidental that the great chapter on love in the Bible appears in a letter to this unloving church.

### The necessity of love 13:1-3

In these first three verses, Paul showed that love is superior to the spiritual gifts he listed in chapter 12. He progressed from the lesser to the greater gifts, and from the easier to the more difficult abilities.

"It is hard to escape the implication that what is involved here are two opposing views as to what it means to be 'spiritual.' For the Corinthians it meant 'tongues, wisdom, knowledge' (and pride), but without a commensurate concern for truly Christian behavior. For Paul it meant first of all to be full of the Spirit, the *Holy Spirit*, which therefore meant to behave as those 'sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be his holy people' (1:2), of which the ultimate expression always is to 'walk in love.' Thus, even though these sentences reflect the immediate context, Paul's concern is not simply with their over-enthusiasm about tongues but with the larger issue of the letter as a whole, where their view of spirituality has caused them to miss rather widely both the gospel and its ethics."<sup>375</sup>

"All four classes of gifts (xii. 28) are included here: the ecstatic in v. 1; the teaching (*propheteia*) and the wonder-working (*pistis*) gifts in v. 2; and the administrative in v. 3."<sup>376</sup>

"It has well been said that love is the 'circulatory system' of the body of Christ."<sup>377</sup>

13:1           Probably Paul began with tongues because of the Corinthians' fascination with this gift (cf. ch. 14). That is where the problem lay. He also built to a climax in verses 1-3, moving from the less to the more difficult actions. Evidently Paul used the first person here, because the Corinthians believed that they themselves spoke with the tongues of men and of angels (cf. 14:14-15).

Speaking with "the tongues of men and of angels" does not refer to simple eloquence, as the context makes clear (cf. 12:10, 28, 30). The "tongues of men" probably refer to languages that humans speak. The "tongues of angels" probably refer to the more exalted and expressive language with which angels communicate with one another.<sup>378</sup> They may refer to

<sup>375</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 630.

<sup>376</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 288.

<sup>377</sup>Wiersbe, 1:610.

<sup>378</sup>See John C. Poirier, *The Tongues of Angels: The Concept of Angelic Languages in Classical Jewish and Christian Texts*.

languages unknown to humans, namely: ecstatic utterance. However, throughout this whole discussion of the gift of tongues, there is no evidence that Paul regarded tongues as anything but *languages*. Throughout the whole New Testament, "tongues" means languages.<sup>379</sup>

Of course, humans do not know the language of the angels, but it is an exalted (higher, more advanced) language because angels are superior beings. The Corinthians evidently believed that they could speak in angelic languages. Some writers have concluded that "tongues of angels" is part of the hyperbole that appears in verse 2.<sup>380</sup> That is, there is really no such thing as angelic tongues; the phrase simply depicts exalted speech.

In Psalm 78:25, the poet Asaph described the manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness as "the bread of angels [lit. 'mighty ones']." This is clearly a reference to the manna that stresses its heavenly origin and high quality—not that angels actually feed on manna. Perhaps Paul was using "the tongues of angels" in a similar way here: to emphasize the heavenly origin and high quality of messages from God given in tongues.

Paul's point seems to have been that, even if one could speak in this exalted language, but the person did not have love (i.e., act lovingly), his or her speech would be hollow and empty. To act lovingly, of course, means to actively seek the benefit of someone else. "Gongs" and "cymbals" were common in some of the popular pagan cults of the time.<sup>381</sup> They made much noise but no sense. Some so-called tongues-speakers today claim that their gibberish is the language of angels, but it needs to be interpreted coherently to qualify as a language. Usually this claim is just a way to justify speaking gibberish.

13:2 "Prophecy" was a higher gift than *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), but was still inferior to "love" (cf. 14:1-5). Earlier Paul wrote of the importance of understanding life from God's perspective, and grasping the truths previously not revealed but now made known by His apostles (2:6-13). Nevertheless, the truth without love is like food without drink. Possession of spiritual gifts is not the sign of the Spirit, but loving behavior is.

Even "faith" great enough "to move (remove) mountains" is not as important as love (12:9; cf. Matt. 17:20; Mark 11:23; Luke 17:6). A mountain is a universal symbol of something immovable. This is hyperbole and metaphor.

13:3 Even what passed for charity, or self-sacrifice for less fortunate individuals ("give all my possessions to feed the poor"), is not the same as

<sup>379</sup>See Lowery, "1 Corinthians," pp. 537-38.

<sup>380</sup>E.g., *ibid.*, p. 535; Keener, p. 108.

<sup>381</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 125; Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 131; Robertson and Plummer, p. 289.

real love (Gr. *agape*). It is inferior to it. It might profit the receiver, but it did not profit the giver.

Paul's personal sufferings for the salvation of others were also worthless without love (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-29; 12:10). Even one's acceptance of martyrdom ("if I surrender my body") might or might not spring from love. But if it did not, it was valueless in the sight of God, and would bring no divine reward to the one who submitted to it ("profits me nothing"; cf. Dan. 3:28; Rom. 5:2-3; 2 Cor. 1:14).

Paul was not setting love in contrast to gifts in this pericope. He was arguing for the necessity and supremacy of love if one is to behave as a true Christian.

"Love is the indispensable addition which alone gives worth to all other Christian gifts."<sup>382</sup>

"Love defines which gifts are the 'best': those that build up the body."<sup>383</sup>

### **The character of love 13:4-7**

The apostle next pointed out the qualities of love that make it so important. He described these in relationship to a person whose character love rules over. We see them most clearly in God and in Christ, but also in the life of anyone in whose heart God's love reigns.

"The observance of the truths of this chapter . . . would have solved their [the Corinthians'] problems."<sup>384</sup>

"Paul's central section [vv. 4-7] uses anaphora (repetition of the first element) extensively. One of the three major types of rhetoric was epideictic (involving praise or blame), and one of the three types of epideictic rhetoric was the encomium, a praise of a person or subject. One common rhetorical exercise was an encomium on a particular virtue, as here (or Heb 11:3-31, also using anaphora)."<sup>385</sup>

Love was notably absent in the Corinthian church. This was probably why Paul wrote so much about it in this epistle.

13:4a           Patience and kindness, like love, are aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The first characteristic is love's passive response, and the second its active initiative. Patience and kindness characterize God, Christ, and truly Christian behavior.

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<sup>382</sup>Barrett, p. 303.

<sup>383</sup>Keener, p. 107.

<sup>384</sup>S. L. Johnson Jr., p. 1251.

<sup>385</sup>Keener, p. 107.

13:4b-5 Paul followed the two positive expressions of love with seven verbs that indicate how it does not behave. The first five of these typified the Corinthians, as we have seen: They were envious or "jealous" (cf. 3:3; 4:18), boastful or "brag"-gadocio (ostentatious; 3:18; 8:2; 14:37), proud or "arrogant" (4:6, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1), rude or acting "unbecomingly" (7:36; 11:2-16), and self-seeking or seeking their "own" interest (10:24, 33). Their behavior was not loving. Love does not deal with other people in a way that injures their dignity. It does not insist on having its own way ("not seek its own"), nor does it put its own interests before the needs of others (cf. Phil. 2:4). It is not irritable or touchy ("not provoked"), but it absorbs offenses, insults, and inconveniences for the sake of others' welfare. It does not keep a record of offenses received ("not take into account a wrong") to pay them back (cf. Luke 23:34; Rom. 12:17-21; 2 Cor. 5:19).

"One of the great arts in life is to learn what to forget."<sup>386</sup>

"One of the most miserable men I ever met was a professed Christian who actually kept in a notebook a list of the wrongs he felt others had committed against him. Forgiveness means that we wipe the record clean and never hold things against people (Eph. 4:26, 32)."<sup>387</sup>

In the last two characteristics, Paul moved beyond what this letter reveals marked the Corinthians.

13:6 Love takes no delight in evil or the misfortunes of others ("does not rejoice in unrighteousness"), but it takes great pleasure in what is right ("rejoices with the truth").

"Love cannot share the glee of the successful transgressor."<sup>388</sup>

"Love absolutely rejects that most pernicious form of rejoicing over evil, gossiping about the misdeeds of others; it is not gladdened when someone else falls. Love stands on the side of the gospel and looks for mercy and justice for all, including those with whom one disagrees."<sup>389</sup>

"Christian love has no wish to veil the truth; it is brave enough to face the truth; it has nothing to conceal and so is glad when the truth prevails."<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>386</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 136.

<sup>387</sup>Wiersbe, 1:611.

<sup>388</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 294.

<sup>389</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 639.

<sup>390</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 137.

13:7 Love covers unworthy things, rather than bringing them to the light and magnifying them (cf. 1 Pet. 4:8). It puts up with everything ("bears all things"). It is always eager to believe the best ("believes all things") and to "put the most favorable construction on ambiguous actions."<sup>391</sup>

"This does not mean . . . that a Christian is to allow himself to be fooled by every rogue, or to pretend that he believes that white is black. But in doubtful cases he will prefer being too generous in his conclusions to suspecting another unjustly."<sup>392</sup>

Love is hopeful that those who have failed will not fail again ("hopes all things"), rather than concluding that failure is inevitable (cf. Matt. 18:22). It does not allow itself to become overwhelmed but perseveres steadfastly through difficult trials ("endures all things").

### The permanence of love 13:8-13

Paul moved on to point out that Christian love (*agape*) characterizes our existence now and forever, but gifts (*charismata*) are only for the present. The Corinthians were apparently viewing the gifts as one evidence that they were already in the eschatological stage of their salvation. Paul heightened appreciation for love by expounding on its permanence in this section.

13:8 "Love never fails" in the sense of falling away (dropping out) when the physical and temporal things on which affection rests pass away; it outlasts temporal things. Gifts of the Spirit will pass away ("be done away" or "cease") because they are temporary provisions, but the fruit of the Spirit will abide.

"Prophecies" are messages from God, but when we stand before Him and hear His voice, there will be no more need for prophets to relay His words to us. Likewise, when we stand before God, there will be no need to speak in other languages ("tongues"), since we will all understand God when He speaks. The knowledge that is so important to us now, will be irrelevant then, because when we are in God's presence we will know perfectly (v. 12; cf. 1:5; 8:1; 12:8). The knowledge in view seems to be knowledge of God's ways in the present age. As will become clearer in chapter 14, Paul's preference regarding the gifts was prophecy, but the Corinthians favored tongues and knowledge.

The verb Paul used to describe what will happen to "prophecy" and "knowledge" is in the passive voice in Greek, and means "shall be terminated" (from *katargeo*; cf. 2:6). The verb he used to describe what

<sup>391</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 127.

<sup>392</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 295.

will happen to "tongues" is in the middle voice, and means "automatically cease of themselves" (from *pauo*).<sup>393</sup> The passive voice points to God terminating prophecy and knowledge when we see Him. The middle voice suggests that tongues will peter out before we see God.<sup>394</sup> Church history testifies that this is what happened to the gift of tongues shortly after the apostolic age.<sup>395</sup> Paul dropped tongues from his discussion at this point, which supports the fact that the gift of tongues would not last as long as knowledge and prophecy. He continued to speak of knowledge and prophecy in the next verses.

- 13:9 In the meantime, before we see the Lord, our knowledge and prophecy are imperfect ("in part"), in contrast with what they will be when we see Him. Prophecy is *imperfect* in the sense that revelations and explanations of God's mind are only partial, or incomplete.
- 13:10 In the light of the context, what is "perfect" (Gr. *teleion*, mature, whole, complete) probably refers to the whole truth about God.<sup>396</sup> Another possibility is that it refers to our state when we stand in the Lord's presence.<sup>397</sup> When we reach that point in history, the Lord will remove (*katargeo*, cf. v. 8) what is "partial," doing away with the limits on our knowledge, as well as the other limitations we suffer in our present condition. Variations on this second view state that "the perfect" refers to the Rapture,<sup>398</sup> to the Lord's return,<sup>399</sup> or to the maturing of Christ's body through the course of the Church Age.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>393</sup>Robertson, 4:179.

<sup>394</sup>See Stanley D. Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and The Tongues Question," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):311-16.

<sup>395</sup>Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254 A.D.), "Against Celsus," 7:8 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:614; Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), "Homily 12 on Matthew," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 10:77; idem, "Homily 14 on Romans," *ibid.*, 11:447; idem, "Homily 29 on 1 Corinthians," *ibid.*, 12:168; idem, "Homily 6 on 1 Corinthians," *ibid.*, 12:31; Augustine (354-430 A.D.), "On Baptism, Against the Donatists," 3:16:21, *ibid.*, 4:443; idem, "The Epistle of St. John," 6:10, *ibid.*, 7:497-98; idem, "The Epistle of 1 John. Homily," 6:10, *ibid.*, 7:497-98; idem, "The Answer to the Letters of Petition, to Donatist," 2:32:74, *ibid.*, 4:548; and idem, "On the Gospel of St. John, Tractate," 32:7, *ibid.*, 7:195. See also Calvin, 4:19:6, 19; Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues*, pp. 147-64; and Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 1:236-37; for further information about the historical cessation of the gift of tongues. See also George W. Dollar, "Church History and the Tongues Movement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):316-21; and the series of four articles by F. David Farnell, "Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (July-September 1992):277-303; 596 (October-December 1992):387-410; 150:597 (January-March 1993):62-88; and 598 (April-June 1993):171-202.

<sup>396</sup>Barrett, p. 306.

<sup>397</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 645; Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 536; Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* pp. 333-34; Keener, p. 109.

<sup>398</sup>Toussaint, "First Corinthians . . .," pp. 312-14.

<sup>399</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1744; Robertson and Plummer, p. 297.

<sup>400</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: An exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, pp. 106-13; idem, "Tongues . . . Will Cease," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17:2 (Spring 1974):81-89; and idem, "1 Cor 13:11 Revisited: an Exegetical Update," *Master's Seminary Journal* 4:2 (Fall 1993):187-201. See also Farnell, 150:598:191-93.

Another view is that "the perfect" refers to the completion of the New Testament canon, and "the partial" to the incomplete canon and the Corinthians' partial knowledge.<sup>401</sup> They were both incomplete because God had not yet given all the prophecy He would eventually give to complete the New Testament. However, this view puts too much weight on prophecy and knowledge, and not enough on our other temporary limitations, to which Paul also referred (v. 12).

A third possibility is that "the perfect" refers to the new heavens and new earth.<sup>402</sup> However, the New Testament does not reveal if God will remove Christians' limitations—to any greater extent—sometime *after* we see the Lord Jesus, than He will *when* we see Him (cf. Rom 8:32).

13:11 Paul compared our present phase of maturity to childhood ("when I was a child"), and that of our later phase, when we are with the Lord, to adulthood ("when I became a man"). It is characteristic of children to preoccupy themselves with things of very temporary value ("childish things"). Likewise, the Corinthians took great interest in the things that would soon pass away soon, namely: knowledge, tongues, and prophecy. A sign of spiritual maturity is occupation with things of eternal value such as love. Again, Paul was stressing the difference between the present and the future.

13:12 Another illustration of the difference between our present and future states as Christians is the mirror. In Paul's day, craftsmen made mirrors out of metal.

". . . Corinth was famous as the producer of some of the finest bronze mirrors in antiquity."<sup>403</sup>

Consequently the apostle's point was not that our present perception of reality is somewhat distorted, but in the future it will be completely realistic.<sup>404</sup> Rather, it was that now we see indirectly ("in a mirror dimly"), but then we shall see *directly*, "face to face." Today we might say that we presently look at a photograph, but in the future we will see what the photograph pictures, but in full color, motion video, and surround sound.

Now we know (Gr. *ginosko*) only partially. When the Lord has resurrected or "raptured" us, and we stand in His presence, we "will know fully" (Gr. *epignosko*), as fully as God now knows us ("as [we] have been fully

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<sup>401</sup>Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues*, p. 95; Myron J. Houghton, "A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):344-56.

<sup>402</sup>John F. MacArthur Jr., *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 231.

<sup>403</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 647-48. Cf. Robertson and Plummer, p. 298.

<sup>404</sup>See Michael Fishbane, "Through the Looking Glass: Reflections on Ezek 43:3, Num 12:8 and 1 Cor 13:8," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986):63-74.



known"). I do not mean that we will be omniscient; we will not be. We will be fully aware. Now He knows us directly, but then we will also know Him directly.

13:13 "Now" resumes Paul's original thought about the supremacy of love. It does not carry on the contrast between what is now and what will be later. In contrast to what will pass away—namely, knowledge, tongues, and prophecy—"faith," "hope," and "love" will "abide" or endure (cf. Rom 5:1-5; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:2-5; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3-8, 21-22). Faith here is not the gift of faith (v. 2; cf. 12:9) but the trust in God that characterizes all His children.

Among the enduring virtues, "love" is the "greatest"—because it will only increase when we see the Lord, rather than decreasing in us, as faith and hope will. In the future, we will continue to trust God and hope in Him, but the reality of His presence will make it easier for us to do so then than it is now.

Apparently Paul introduced "faith" and "hope," at this point, to show that "love" is not only superior to the gifts, but it is superior even to other great virtues. Faith and hope are gifts, and they are also Christian virtues of the same type as love. Yet love even outstrips the other major Christian virtues because it will outlast them.

"Love is a property of God himself. . . . But God does not himself trust (in the sense of placing his whole confidence in and committing himself to some other being); if he did, he would not be God. . . . If God hoped he would not be God. But if God did not love he would not be God. Love is an activity, the essential activity, of God himself, and when men love either him or their fellow-men they are doing (however imperfectly) what God does."<sup>405</sup>

The point of this beautiful classic exposition of love is this: We should value and give attention to the cultivation and practice of love, even more than to that of even the so-called "greatest" spiritual gifts (cf. 12:31). The other gifts, as important as they are, are only partial and temporary. As love is the greatest of the virtues that will endure forever, so the gift of tongues is the least of all the gifts. It will last only a short time.

#### **4. The need for intelligibility 14:1-25**

"Paul had discussed the gift of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and the graces of the Spirit; and now he concluded this section by explaining the government of the Spirit in the public worship services of the church. Apparently there was a tendency for some of the Corinthians to lose control of themselves as they exercised their gifts, and Paul had to remind

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<sup>405</sup>Barrett, p. 311.

them of the fundamental principles that ought to govern the public meetings of the church. There are three principles: edification, understanding, and order."<sup>406</sup>

Paul went on to elaborate on the inferiority of the gift of tongues, that the Corinthians elevated, to convince them to pursue the more important gifts. His point was that *intelligible* speech (i.e., prophecy) is superior to *unintelligible* speech (i.e., tongues) in the assembly. He argued first for intelligible speech, which benefits the believers gathered to worship (vv. 1-25). In this whole comparison, Paul was dealing with the gift of tongues unaccompanied by the gift of interpretation.

### **The superiority of prophecy to tongues 14:1-5**

The apostle began this discussion of tongues by comparing it to the gift of prophecy, that the Corinthians also appreciated (cf. 12:10, 28; 13:8). He urged the Corinthians to value prophecy above tongues, because prophecy can edify believers, and or lead to unbelievers' conversion—since it involves *intelligible* "inspired" speech.

14:1 This verse sums up what Paul had just written about love, and it resumes the thought in 12:31 by restating that exhortation. In contrast to some of the milder advice he gave in this epistle, Paul strongly urged his readers to follow the way of "love." This imperative advances the thought by urging the readers to seek the gift of prophesying in particular ("desire . . . that you may prophesy"). This indicates that, while spiritual gifts are sovereignly bestowed, God does not necessarily grant them all at conversion. One may strongly ("earnestly") "desire" a gift.

"At the end of chap. 12, where he had been speaking specifically of the *gifts* themselves as gracious endowments, he told them, 'eagerly desire the greater *charismata*.' Now in a context where the emphasis will be on the activity of the Spirit in the community at worship, he says, 'eagerly desire the things of the Spirit [*ta pneumatika*].'"<sup>407</sup>

14:2 *Glossolalia* (speaking in "tongues") by itself is not edifying to other people, but prophecy is. This statement again raises a question about what speaking in tongues involved.

On the day of Pentecost, some people spoke in tongues and other people, who knew the languages spoken, received edification, because they heard of God's mighty deeds in their native languages (Acts 2:1-11). Interpreters were unnecessary on that occasion (cf. Acts 10:46; 19:6). Evidently what was taking place in the Corinthian church was different from what took place on the day of Pentecost. In Corinth, and perhaps in other early churches, people spoke in tongues among people who did not understand

<sup>406</sup>Wiersbe, 1:612.

<sup>407</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 655.

the languages. An interpreter was necessary to enable those present to understand and benefit from what the tongues-speaker was saying in a strange language (vv. 5, 13). Paul used "tongues" and "languages" interchangeably in this passage (cf. vv. 2, 10, 11, 13, et al.). Two different Greek words appear (*glossa* and *phone*), but they both refer to languages. This is an important proof that tongues were languages.

Some Christians have suggested another distinction. They have claimed that the tongues in Acts were foreign languages, but that the tongues in Corinthians were ecstatic utterances—not languages—but unintelligible speech.<sup>408</sup> There is no basis for this distinction in the Greek text, however. The terminology used is the same, and the passages make good sense if we take tongues as languages wherever they occur. In 13:1, Paul wrote "of the tongues of men and of angels," evidently two types of languages.<sup>409</sup>

If someone spoke in an unknown language, and no one could interpret what he was saying, the person speaking was not speaking to men. God knew what he was saying, even if no one else did, including the person doing the speaking. "In *his*" human "spirit," the speaker was uttering "mysteries" (Gr. *mysteria*, things hidden or secret from the understanding of those in the church who were listening). Obviously Paul's concern was the edification of the church. He did not disparage the gift of tongues itself, but he put it in its rightful place.

Paul described the spirit as distinct from the mind (cf. vv. 14-19).

"Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain. Paul believed in an immediate communing with God by means of the S/spirit that sometimes bypassed the mind; and in vv. 14-15 he argues that for his own edification he will have both. But *in church* he will have only what can also communicate to other believers through their minds."<sup>410</sup>

- 14:3 In contrast to the foreign speech uttered by tongues-speakers, those present could understand what a prophet ("one who prophesies") spoke because it was in the language of his audience. The words benefited the hearers by building them up, encouraging them, and consoling them. "Edification," "exhortation," and "consolation" set forth the primary ways in which prophecy (preaching) builds up the church. Its main purpose as a gift was not to predict events in the future, but to build up believers in the present.

<sup>408</sup>E.g., Robertson and Plummer, pp. 301, 306.

<sup>409</sup>See Keener, pp. 112-13, and S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Gift of Tongues and the Book of Acts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:480 (October-December 1963):310-11.

<sup>410</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 657.

Official Apostles	The Twelve and the Apostle Paul
Functional (unofficial) apostles	Church planters and missionaries
Official Prophets	Communicated new revelation
Functional (unofficial) prophets	Communicated edification, exhortation, and consolation

14:4 The person who spoke in tongues in church edified ("edifies") *only* "himself" or herself. He or she praised God and prayed to God while speaking in a tongue. He or she also benefited from realizing that the Holy Spirit was enabling him or her to speak a language that he or she had not studied. This would have encouraged the tongues-speaker, but this speaker did not edify himself or herself in the sense of profiting *from the message* the Holy Spirit had given. He did not know what his own words meant, unless he also had the gift of interpretation, but in this discussion Paul left that gift out of the picture almost entirely (cf. v. 5). Had he understood what he himself was saying, the tongues-speaker could have communicated this to those present in their language. That is what a prophet did. Prophets did not just foretell the future or announce new special revelation from God. They also delivered statements or messages in praise of God, or a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others.<sup>411</sup> Paul's point was that edifying the church is more important than edifying oneself. He did not deny that speaking in tongues does on some level edify the tongues-speaker (cf. vv. 14-15, 18-19).

"Though he himself would not comprehend the content of that praise, his feelings and emotions would be enlivened, leading to a general exhilaration and euphoria. This was not a bad thing. Paul certainly was no advocate of cold, dispassionate worship. The gifts were not given for personal enrichment, however, but for the benefit of others (12:7; cf. 10:24; 1 Peter 4:10). Personal edification and exhilaration were often natural by-products of the legitimate exercise of one's gift, but they were not the main reasons for its exercise."<sup>412</sup>

14:5 Paul acknowledged the value of the gift of tongues, even though it also required an interpreter. Nevertheless he made it clear that the ability to prophesy was more important ("greater is one who prophesies"). The issue, again, is private versus public benefit. Since Paul depreciated speaking in tongues without interpretation ("unless he interprets") so strongly, it seems very likely that this is what the Corinthians were doing in their meetings. The real issue was not a conflict between tongues and prophecy, however, but between unintelligible and intelligible speech.

<sup>411</sup>See my note on 11:4.

<sup>412</sup>Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 538.

In this whole discussion, "prophecy" evidently refers primarily to an impromptu word that someone would share in a service—in which congregational participation was possible—more than to a prepared sermon.

### Supporting analogies 14:6-12

Paul illustrated his point that hearers do not benefit at all from what they do not understand. He used musical instruments as examples and clarified more about foreign languages.

14:6 This verse sets the scene for what follows in this pericope. "Revelation," "knowledge," "prophecy," and "teaching" are all intelligible utterances. These four words, respectively, probably refer to: a new revelation (cf. 12:8); an insight into truth; a word of edification, exhortation, or consolation from the Lord (v. 3); an instruction in the faith.

14:7-8 Even the sounds people make using inanimate musical instruments need to be intelligible to profit anyone. This is especially obvious in the case of a call to "battle": If the bugler blows a confused tune, the army will not know whether to attack or retreat. The "harp" and the "flute," as well as the bugle, were commonplace in the Greco-Roman world.

14:9 Incomprehensible speech may be personally satisfying to the one talking, but it profits only a little those who are listening. The only profit would be entertainment. For example, when a foreigner sings a solo in a church service, in his or her native language, almost everyone enjoys the song because of its beauty. Yet we do not receive edification from it, since the words are unintelligible to us.

14:10-11 Clearly Paul was speaking about languages, not gibberish, even though the Greek word translated "languages" (*phone*) means "sounds" or "voices." The context shows he had languages in mind. A non-Greek was a foreigner (Gr. *barbaros*, "barbarian") to a Greek. The word *barbaros* is onomatopoeic, meaning the foreigner's language sounded like so much "bar bar bar" to the Greek. Paul's point was that, for communicating, the tongues-speaker who did not have an interpreter was no better than an incomprehensible barbarian. Even though his speech may have had meaning to the speaker, it had none to the hearers.

Someone may enjoy watching and listening to an Italian or other foreign language opera occasionally. He or she may like to listen to the music for its own beauty, even if he or she may not be able to understand the words. However, when the foreign words being sung are translated into English, with captions above the stage or on the screen, the listener can enjoy it even more. Then one can profit from following the story, which he or she cannot do otherwise, if all that one takes away from the performance is the memory of beautiful sounds.

14:12 In view of this, the Corinthians who were "zealous" for "spiritual gifts" would be better off pursuing the gifts that would enable them to build up "the church." They should value these, rather than the gifts that gave them some personal satisfaction when they exercised them without edifying others. The Corinthians were zealots when it came to spirits ("spirituals"; Gr. *pneumatōn*). The English translators often interpreted this word as synonymous with *pneumatikon* (spiritual gifts, v. 1), but it is different. Probably Paul meant that they were zealous over a particular manifestation of the Spirit, what they considered the mark of a truly "spiritual" Christian, namely, the gift of tongues (cf. vv. 14-15, 32).

"Utterances that are not understood, even if they come from the Spirit, are of no benefit, that is, edification, to the hearer. Thus, since they have such zeal for the manifestation of the Spirit, they should direct that zeal in corporate worship away from being 'foreigners' to one another toward the edification of one another in Christ."<sup>413</sup>

#### **Application in view of believers 14:13-19**

Paul continued his argument by clarifying the effect that unintelligible speech has on believers gathered for worship.

14:13 The Corinthian who already had the gift of tongues should ask the Lord for the ability to ("pray that he may") "interpret" his or her utterances, so that the whole church could benefit from them (cf. v. 5). Note that Paul did not say tongues-speakers should abandon this gift, but that their practice of it needed correcting.

14:14 Public prayer is in view here, as it is in this whole chapter (v. 16), but some may have been praying in tongues privately as well. While praying in a tongue might give the person doing so a certain sense of exultation in his "spirit," his "mind" would not benefit ("is unfruitful"). He would not know what he was saying without interpretation. The "spirit" (Gr. *pneuma*) seems to refer to that part of the person that exercises this spiritual gift. It is separate from the mind obviously (cf. v. 4). The person's spirit prays as the Holy Spirit gives him or her utterance.

14:15 Paul advocated praising and praying to God with both the spirit (emotions) and the mind (understanding). The spirit and the mind are both receptors as well as expressers of impressions. Music without words can make a real *impression* on us, but that impression is not intellectual. One reason tongues is an inferior gift is that in its expression, the speaker's reason has no control.

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<sup>413</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 666.

Sometimes modern Christians who believe they have the gift of tongues wonder if they should speak in tongues in private, since they do not know what they are saying. Some of them claim that doing so edifies them (v. 4). Let us assume they are speaking some language that they have not studied, which is what the tongues-speakers in the early church were speaking. This, by the way, eliminates most modern tongues-speakers, since most modern tongues-speakers simply repeat gibberish. A pastor friend of mine, who used to "speak in tongues" (gibberish), said he had taught many Christians to "speak in tongues," and he could teach anyone to do so. According to him, it just requires learning a few phrases, getting oneself into the proper emotional state, and releasing one's inhibitions. Paul did not discourage speaking unknown languages in private. Nonetheless, the relative value and profitability of such an experience are so minimal, that its practice seems almost foolish, in view of the more edifying options that are open to Christians. Perhaps the current preoccupation with *feeling good*, in contrast to having to work hard with one's mind to edify the church, is what makes this practice so attractive to many today.

"It is, of course, impossible for anyone to prove experimentally that speaking in tongues cannot occur today. It may be demonstrated, however, that speaking in tongues is not essential to God's purpose now, and that there are good reasons to believe that most if not all the phenomena which are advanced as proof of modern speaking in tongues is either psychological or demonic activity."<sup>414</sup>

If the New Testament gift of tongues were still in the church today, we would expect that missionaries with this gift would not have to go to language school to learn the language of the people they were preparing to minister to. But this is not the case.

14:16-17 Paul substituted the word "bless" for "pray" here. When we praise God in prayer, we say a benediction on Him, a word of blessing. Those believers (Gr. *idiotes*), who do not understand what the person praying in tongues is saying ("who fills the place of the ungifted"), are unable to add their affirmation at the end of the prayer. "Amen" means "So be it." Whenever we lead in public prayer, we should do it so the other people praying can join us and affirm our words (cf. 1 Chron. 16:36; Neh. 5:13; 8:6; Ps. 106:48). It is clear in verse 16 that Paul was speaking about a public worship situation. Giving "thanks" in public worship is important, even if no one else joins in, but it is even more important that other believers be allowed to join in.

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<sup>414</sup>John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 185-86.

14:18-19 Corinthian tongues-enthusiasts could not reject Paul's instruction because he did not have the gift himself and so failed to appreciate its value ("I speak in tongues more than you all"). He believed in the validity of the gift but did not value it highly.<sup>415</sup> He almost deprecated it. Edifying instruction was "10,000" times more important, than personal private exultation, for the building up of the church gathered for worship. This is another use of hyperbole, which was common in antiquity.<sup>416</sup> The edification (building up) of the body is, of course, God's great purpose for Christians today (Matt. 16:18).

Paul affirmed the gift that the Corinthians apparently regarded as the sign of genuine spirituality, but he did so by correcting their thinking about what was really important in their meetings. Worship should never be selfish, and it should always be intelligible.<sup>417</sup>

### **Application in view of unbelievers 14:20-25**

Uninterpreted tongues did not benefit visiting unbelievers any more than they edified the believers in church meetings. Prophecy, on the other hand, benefited both groups.

14:20 "Thinking" that tongues-speaking demonstrates spirituality evidences immaturity ("do not be children in your thinking").

"Children prefer what glitters and makes a show to what is much more valuable; and it was childish to prefer ecstatic utterance to other and far more useful gifts."<sup>418</sup>

"Some people have the idea that speaking in a tongue is an evidence of spiritual maturity, but Paul taught that it is possible to exercise the gift in an unspiritual and immature manner."<sup>419</sup>

There is a sense in which it is good for Christians to be childlike, namely, in our innocence regarding "evil" ("in evil be infants"). Still, in understanding ("thinking"), we need to "be mature" (cf. 3:1-2). The Corinthians were not innocent in their behavior, any more than they were mature in their thinking.

14:21 The "Law" refers to the Old Testament here, since the passage Paul cited is Isaiah 28:11-12 (cf. Deut. 28:49; Isa. 29:10-12; 30:9-11; 33:19). The context of this passage was the Israelites' refusal to accept Isaiah's warnings concerning the coming Assyrian invasion. God told them that because they refused to listen to the prophet's words, He would "teach" them by using their foreign-speaking invading enemy. Nevertheless even

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<sup>415</sup>See Chadwick, p. 269.

<sup>416</sup>Keener, p. 114.

<sup>417</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 145.

<sup>418</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 315.

<sup>419</sup>Wiersbe, 1:614.



then, God said, they would not repent. Isaiah preached repentance to the Israelites in their own language, but they did not repent. Then God brought the invading Assyrians into Israel. Even then His people did not repent, though God "spoke" to them again of their need to repent, reminding them by allowing them to hear the foreign language of this enemy.

14:22 The "then" in this verse anticipates what was to come, rather than drawing a conclusion from what had preceded. Tongues-speaking in the church signified to visiting unbelievers that the Christians were "mad" (v. 23).<sup>420</sup> "Prophecy" signified (was a "sign") to the believers that God was present and speaking.

14:23 Paul painted a picture of the Corinthian church: assembled and engaged in a frenzy of unintelligible tongues-speaking ("all [are speaking] in tongues"). Two types of individuals walk in: one is a believer untaught in the matter of spiritual gifts, and the other is an unbeliever. To both of them the worshippers appear to be *insane* ("mad"), rather than soberly engaged in worship and instruction. The church meeting would resemble the meetings of a mystery cult, in which such "mania" was common.

"It was strange that what the Corinthians specially prided themselves on was a gift which, if exercised in public, would excite the derision of unbelievers."<sup>421</sup>

14:24-25 If, on the other hand, someone in the church was prophesying, and the congregation was receiving instruction, both visitors would gain a positive impression from the conduct of the believers. More importantly, what the prophet said would also convict them (cf. 2:14-15). Paul's description of the visitors' response came from Isaiah 45:14 (cf. Zech. 8:23), and contrasts with the unresponsiveness of the Israelites to the messages God had sent them in foreign languages. Prophecy would result in the repentance of visiting unbelievers ("he will fall on his face"), but tongues-speaking would not. These verses summarize the effects of good Christian preaching on unbelievers.

"The gift of prophesying, however successful, is no glory to the possessor of it. It is the Spirit of God, not the preacher's own power, that works the wonderful effect."<sup>422</sup>

Paul did not mean that every individual in the church ("all speak in tongues . . . all prophesy") would either speak in tongues or prophesy (cf.

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<sup>420</sup>See Zane C. Hodges, "The Purpose of Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120:479 (July-September 1963):226-33; J. Lanier Burns, "A Reemphasis on the Purpose of Tongues," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:527 (July-September 1975):242-49; and Harold W. Hoehner, "The Purpose of Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:20-25," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 53-66.

<sup>421</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 317.

<sup>422</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 318.

v. 23). He meant that, if one of those gifts dominated to the exclusion of the other, the stated results would normally follow.

"The Corinthians tend to shut their ears to prophecy because they gain more satisfaction from listening to tongues than from hearing their faults exposed and their duties pointed out in plain rational language."<sup>423</sup>

To summarize, Paul permitted only intelligible utterances when the church gathered for worship, because they edify believers and bring the lost to conviction of their need for salvation. As inferior as the gift of tongues was, it did have a legitimate purpose, namely: to impress unbelievers, especially Jews, with the gospel. Speaking in tongues was a feature of some of the pagan Greek mystery religions, so it would not have made as big of an impression on Greeks as it did on Jews.

### **5. The need for order 14:26-40**

The Corinthians' public worship practices not only failed to be edifying and convicting, but they also involved disorderly conduct. Paul proceeded to deal with this additional need to help his readers value these qualities over the pseudo-spirituality that they associated with sensational *glossolalia*.

#### **The ordering of these gifts 14:26-33**

The apostle now began to regulate the use of tongues with interpretation, and he urged the use of discernment with prophecy.

"St Paul has here completed his treatment (xii.—xiv.) of *pneumatika*. He now gives detailed directions as to their use."<sup>424</sup>

14:26 The apostle did not want any one gift to dominate the meetings of this richly gifted church. Again, his list of utterance gifts was limited and selective: "a psalm," "a teaching," "a revelation," "a tongue," "an interpretation." Many Christians could make a variety of contributions to the general spiritual welfare of the congregation. He permitted the use of tongues, but not their exclusive use, and only if someone provided "an interpretation" (v. 27).

"That many in Corinth exercised their gifts in the interests of self-development and even of self-display can hardly be doubted; this was contrary to the law of love which regulates all Christian behaviour."<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>423</sup>Barrett, p. 324.

<sup>424</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 319.

<sup>425</sup>Barrett, p. 327.

14:27-28 Paul laid down three guidelines for the use of tongues in public worship: First, the believers should permit only "two or at the most three" interpreted tongues messages. This is in harmony with the inferior contribution that tongues make compared with prophecy. Second, the speakers should give them consecutively ("each in turn"), rather than concurrently, to minimize confusion. The Spirit does not *overpower* the speaker, but is subject to the speaker, and the Spirit leads speakers to contribute in appropriate times and ways. The Spirit's leading of the Old Testament prophets to speak at appropriate times and settings illustrates this. Third, the Christians should not allow tongues without interpretation in the church services, though Paul did permit private tongues-speaking (vv. 2, 4, 27). However, remember that tongues were languages, and Paul valued private tongues-speaking quite low (vv. 2, 10, 11, 13, 14, et al.).

14:29 Likewise, the "prophets" should minister in an orderly fashion, and limit themselves to "two or three" messages at a service. The others in the congregation (not just other prophets) should pay attention to what they said. The Greek word *diakrino* means "pass judgment" (NASB) or "weigh carefully" (NIV). In 12:10 it reads "distinguish." Here it probably means to evaluate it carefully and, if need be, to reject it if the ministry was not in harmony with Scripture.

"The apostle does *not* instruct the churches to sort out the true and false *elements in any particular prophecy*. Rather, he instructs them to sort out the true and false *prophecies among the many they would hear*."<sup>426</sup>

14:30-31 Here we seem to have an example of two of the different kinds of prophesying, that took place in the early church, conflicting with each other. What Paul seems to have envisioned was one person—both men and women could prophesy in this sense (11:4-5)—"sharing a word" from the Lord. This type of prophesying was open to almost anyone in the church. While this person was still speaking, "another" prophet ("who [was] seated") received "a revelation" from the Lord. This second instance appears to be a more direct revelation, than just a casual desire to address the congregation, that had moved the first speaker to minister. In such a case, the first speaker was to give preference to the person making the new revelation. Presumably the first speaker could finish what he was saying—later—if he or she desired to do so. An example of this happening took place in Acts 11:28 and 21:10-11, when the prophet Agabus made revelations to the Christians in Antioch and Caesarea, respectively.

"There was obviously a flexibility about the order of service in the early Church which is now totally

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<sup>426</sup>R. Fowler White, "Does God Speak Today Apart from the Bible?" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, p. 84. This essay is a rebuttal of the teaching of Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, pp. 133-43, 209-15; and Grudem, *The Gift . . .*; idem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 1049-61, on this subject.

lacking. . . . Everything was informal enough to allow any man who felt that he had a message to give to give it."<sup>427</sup>

14:32-33 Prophets were to control themselves when speaking ("the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets"), even when giving new revelation (cf. vv. 27-28). The nature of this gift was that it did not sweep the prophet into a mindless frenzy. Pagans, on the other hand, who received demonic revelations, frequently lost control of themselves. Inability to control oneself was no evidence that the prophet spoke from God. On the contrary, it indicated that he was not submitting to God's control, because "God" produces "peace," not "confusion."

"The theological point is crucial: the character of one's deity is reflected in the character of one's worship. The Corinthians must therefore cease worship that reflects the pagan deities more than the God whom they have come to know through the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 12:2-3). God is neither characterized by disorder nor the cause of it in the assembly."<sup>428</sup>

Again the apostle reminded his readers that what he was commanding was standard policy in the other churches ("as in all the churches of the saints"; cf. 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:36). This reminds us again that this church had some serious underlying problems.

Confusion and disorder in church services are not in keeping with the character of God, and such conditions dishonor Him.

### **The ordering of the women 14:34-35**

Paul had formerly acknowledged that women could share a word from the Lord in the church meetings (11:4-16). Now he clarified one point about their participation in this context of prophesying.

14:34 The word translated "silent" (Gr. *sige*) means just that, namely, "to keep silent" or to hold one's tongue. However, in 11:5, Paul spoke as though women prophesying in the church was a common and acceptable practice. I think the best explanation of this apparent contradiction comes out of the context, as is usually true. Paul had just permitted others in the congregation to evaluate the comments that a prophet made (v. 29). Now he qualified this by saying the women should not do so vocally in the church meetings, as the men could. The teaching of the Law on this subject appears to be a reference ("as the Law also says") to woman's subordination to the authoritative man in her family (Gen. 3:16). The "Law" then would refer to the Old Testament, as in verse 21.

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<sup>427</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 150.

<sup>428</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 697.

"Although some philosophic schools included women disciples (and Jesus seems to have allowed them, Mk 15:40-41; Lk 8:1-3; 10:38-42), most schools, whether Jewish or Gentile, did not, and society expected men rather than women to absorb and question public lectures."<sup>429</sup>

". . . ancient society rarely allowed teaching roles to women."<sup>430</sup>

14:35 Rather than calling out a question in the middle of some male or female prophet's message, the women were to wait and "ask their own husbands" about it "at home" after the service. Presumably, unmarried women would ask their father, or some other man in the church, after the service. Men could raise questions or make comments, but too much of this could ruin the order of the service and the edifying value of the message. Consequently Paul instructed the women, evidently in harmony with their position of subordination, to refrain. It is improper for a woman to speak in church meetings *in the situation Paul addressed in the context*. That situation is: the questioning and or perhaps challenging of what a prophet said, who was sharing something he or she believed God had given him or her to pass on to the church.<sup>431</sup>

"To suggest that the women should learn by asking their husbands at home (14:35) would sound repressive to most of us today (at least where questions can be asked in public meetings), but probably seemed comparatively progressive in Paul's environment (and in some traditional cultures today)."<sup>432</sup>

There have been many other explanations of this apparent contradiction. The view that women should not speak at all in the church, under any circumstances, has a long history.<sup>433</sup> But it does not resolve the apparent contradiction. Richard Lenski assumed that all of what Paul said in 14:26-32 applies only to men, and that he added verses 33-36 as an appendix to deal with women's participation.<sup>434</sup> However, this does not harmonize with 11:4-5. William Barclay believed that at that point in history, Paul was not able to rise above the spirit of his age, that said women should not participate in intellectual activities on a par with men.<sup>435</sup> This view fails to

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<sup>429</sup>Keener, p. 119.

<sup>430</sup>Idem, "Women's Education and Public Speech in Antiquity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:4 (December 2007):759.

<sup>431</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 136-37; Morris, pp. 201-2; Robertson and Plummer, p. 325; James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman In Biblical Perspective*, pp. 188, 190; the NET Bible; et al.

<sup>432</sup>Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 119.

<sup>433</sup>One fairly recent advocate was James Greenbury, "1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Evaluation of Prophecy Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):721-31.

<sup>434</sup>Lenski, p. 614.

<sup>435</sup>Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 151.

appreciate the implications of Paul's inspiration by the Spirit as he wrote, as well as his high regard for women that he expressed elsewhere in his writings. G. Campbell Morgan seems to have regarded Paul's prohibition as necessary, in view of conditions unique in Corinth.<sup>436</sup> C. K. Barrett believed Paul did not write verses 34-35. He presumed that some other person added them to the text, later, when Christians thought good order was more important than the freedom of the Spirit.<sup>437</sup> Gordon Fee also argued that these verses are inauthentic.<sup>438</sup> Harry Ironside believed the occasions at which women could speak were different than the official meetings of the church, at which they were to be silent.<sup>439</sup> David Lowery wrote that Paul wanted only the married women whose husbands were present in the meeting to be silent, but that other women could speak if properly covered.<sup>440</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., seems to have felt that women were not permitted to speak in the church meetings, except when they prayed or prophesied.<sup>441</sup> H. Wayne House concluded that women could not speak if others considered that what they said was authoritative.<sup>442</sup> Anne Blampied said Paul told the women to keep silent because they were violating the principle of order in the church, not because they were women.<sup>443</sup> Andrew Spurgeon interpreted the imperatives as permissive; he believed that they expressed Paul's approval of what the Corinthian women were doing.<sup>444</sup>

The most common view is that Paul forbade some form of inappropriate speech, not all speech.<sup>445</sup> The second most popular interpretation is that Paul forbade some form of "inspired" speech other than prophecy, perhaps speech contradicting the prophets, or speaking in tongues.

"Paul's long response to the Corinthians' enthusiasm for tongues is now finished. The basic issue is over what it means to be *pneumatikos* ('spiritual'); and on this issue Paul and they are deeply divided. They think it has to do with speaking in tongues, the language(s) of the angels, the sure evidence that they are already living in the pneumatic existence of the future. For this reason they have great zeal for this gift (cf. v. 12), including an insistence on its practice in the gathered assembly. Apparently in their letter they have not only defended this practice, but by

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<sup>436</sup>Morgan, *The Corinthians*, pp. 180-81.

<sup>437</sup>Barrett, pp. 332-33.

<sup>438</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, pp. 699-702.

<sup>439</sup>Harry A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 454-55. Cf. Wiersbe, 1:616.

<sup>440</sup>Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 541.

<sup>441</sup>S. L. Johnson Jr., "The First . . .," p. 1255.

<sup>442</sup>H. Wayne House, "Caught in the Middle," *Kindred Spirit* 13:2 (Summer 1989):14; idem, "The Speaking of Women and the Prohibition of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:579 (July-September 1988):301-18.

<sup>443</sup>Anne B. Blampied, "Paul and Silence for 'The Women' in I Corinthians 14:34-35," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 18:2 (October 1983):143-65.

<sup>444</sup>Andrew B. Spurgeon, "Pauline Commands and Women in 1 Corinthians 14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:671 (July-September 2011):317-33.

<sup>445</sup>E.g., Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 135.

the same criterion have called Paul into question for his lack of 'spirituality.' Hence the undercurrent of apologetic for his own speaking in tongues in vv. 6, 15, and 18.

"Paul's response to all this has been twofold. First, they are to broaden their perspective to recognize that being Spirit people by its very nature means a great variety of gifts and ministries in the church (chap. 12). Second, the whole point of the gathered people of God is edification, the true expression of love for the saints. Whatever they do in the assembly must be both intelligible and orderly so that the whole community may be edified; thus it must reflect the character of God, which is how it is (or is to be) in all the churches of the saints (v. 33)."<sup>446</sup>

### Concluding confrontation 14:36-40

Paul concluded his answer to the Corinthians' question concerning spiritual gifts (chs. 12—14), and his teaching on tongues (ch. 14), with a strong call to cooperation. He zeroed in on their individualism (v. 36; cf. v. 33), and confronted them on the issue of who indeed was "spiritual" (v. 37). Like the prophets of old, he warned anyone who disagreed with his instructions (v. 38), and finally summarized his argument (vv. 39-40; cf. 4:18-21).

- 14:36 In this verse, Paul reminded the Corinthians that *they* did not set the standard for how the church meetings should proceed! Their arrogance evidently drew this warning. The Corinthian church was not the mother church, nor was it the only church to which the gospel had come (cf. 11:16; 14:33b). Therefore the Corinthian readers should submit to the apostle's direction (cf. 9:1-23).
- 14:37 Anyone could easily validate a Corinthian's claim to being "a prophet or spiritual." He could do so by checking to see if he or she acknowledged that what Paul had written was authoritative because he was an apostle of the Lord ("the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment"). Submission to apostolic authority was the test, not speaking in tongues. Submissiveness to the apostles and their teaching was an expression of submission to the Lord Himself (cf. 7:10, 25). It still is.
- 14:38 The Corinthians should not recognize as a prophet, or as a person under the control of the Holy Spirit ("he is not recognized"), anyone who refused to acknowledge the apostle's authority ("if he does not recognize this"). Failure to recognize *the Lord* as the source of Paul's teaching would lead to that person's failure to "be recognized" (i.e., acknowledged with approval) by the Lord (cf. 8:2-3)
- 14:39 "Therefore" signals a summation of the entire argument on spiritual gifts. "My brethren" sounds a loving note at the end of this very stern discussion (cf. 1:10). "Desire earnestly to prophesy" repeats the imperative with

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<sup>446</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 709.

which Paul began (v. 1). "Do not forbid to speak in tongues" concedes the legitimacy of their favorite gift. Paul heartily encouraged the exercise of the gift of prophecy, but he only permitted the gift of speaking in tongues with certain qualifiers.

As time passed, God no longer gave prophets revelations concerning the future. The Apostle John was evidently the last person to function as a prophet in this sense (cf. Rev. 22:18). Prophets after John no longer received new revelation directly from the Lord, either. We can see that this was beginning to pass away, even during the history of the church that Luke recorded in Acts. Much of the revelation contained in the books of the New Testament was of this type. In this sense, the gift of prophecy was foundational to the establishment of the church—and has ceased (Eph. 2:20). Nevertheless people continued to speak forth messages from the Lord, the basic meaning of the Greek word *propheteuo* (to prophesy). In the more general sense, this gift is still with us today (cf. v. 3).

Paul said his readers were not to forbid speaking in tongues. He meant they were not to do so, provided they followed the rules he had just explained for the exercise of the gift. Certainly if someone has the New Testament gift of tongues, he or she should observe these rules today as well. However, many Christians seriously doubt that anyone has this gift today. Christians involved in the charismatic movement believe the gift does exist today. Nevertheless the differences between tongues-speaking as practiced today, and what took place in first-century churches, has led many believers to conclude that these are very different experiences.

14:40        The foundational principles that should underlie what takes place in church meetings are these: Christians should do everything "properly," in a decent and "orderly manner," and everything should be edifying (v. 26), and a spirit of peace should prevail (v. 33).

This chapter on speaking in tongues is extremely relevant because of current interest in the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. If believers followed the teaching in this chapter alone, even in charismatic churches, there would be far less confusion in the church over this subject.

"In these three chapters (xii.—xiv.) the Apostle has been contending with the danger of *spiritual anarchy*, which would be the result if every Christian who believed that he had a charisma were allowed to exercise it without consideration for others."<sup>447</sup>

Some members of the Corinthian church continued to resist Paul's apostolic authority, as 2 Corinthians makes clear.

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<sup>447</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 328.



What about "tongues" that are not languages? They are not what the New Testament deals with. But how should *we* deal with them? I suggest five things: First, recognize that "forbid not to speak in tongues" (v. 39) does not refer to this type of tongues but to *languages*. Church leaders can forbid speaking in the "non-language" type of tongues. Second, recognize that interpreting the "non-language" type of tongues is not what the New Testament is talking about. Third, since this type of tongues does not edify the church, and often disrupts the church, church leaders can disallow it in church meetings. Fourth, if someone wants to practice this type of tongues in private, it will only make him or her feel good. It will not help others. Fifth, this type of tongues can be learned by almost anyone, including unbelievers. It is not a supernatural ability that God gives to only some Christians, as many advocates of non-language "tongues" claim.<sup>448</sup>

### **F. THE RESURRECTION OF BELIEVERS CH. 15**

The Apostle Paul did not introduce the instruction on the resurrection, that follows, with the formula that identifies it as a response to a specific question from the Corinthians (i.e., *peri de*). From what he said in this chapter, he apparently knew that some in the church had adopted a belief concerning the resurrection, that was contrary to apostolic teaching. They believed that there is no resurrection of the dead (cf. vv. 12, 16, 29, 32; Acts 17:32).

"Educated, elite Corinthians probably followed views held by many philosophers, such as immortality of the soul after the body's death. . . .

"Some Greeks (like Epicureans and popular doubts on tombstones) denied even an afterlife. Yet even Greeks who expected an afterlife for the soul could not conceive of bodily resurrection (which they would view as the reanimation of corpses) or glorified bodies."<sup>449</sup>

Apparently Paul included this teaching to correct this error, and to reaffirm the central importance of the doctrine of the resurrection in the Christian faith.

". . . the letter itself is not finished. Lying behind their view of spirituality is not simply a false view of spiritual gifts, but a false theology of spiritual existence as such. Since their view of 'spirituality' had also brought them to deny a future resurrection of the body, it is fitting that this matter be taken up next. The result is the grand climax of the letter as a whole, at least in terms of its argument."<sup>450</sup>

"This chapter has been called 'the earliest Christian doctrinal essay,' and it is the only part of the letter which deals directly with doctrine."<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>448</sup>See Appendix 2 "Summary of my understanding of spiritual gifts" at the end of these notes.

<sup>449</sup>Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 122.

<sup>450</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 713.

<sup>451</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 329.

Evidently most of the Corinthian church believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (15:3-4), but belief in *His* resurrection did not necessarily involve believing that God would raise *all believers* in Christ. Christ's resurrection gave hope to believers about the future, but that hope did not necessarily involve the believer's resurrection. This seems to have been the viewpoint of the early Christians—until Paul taught them that their bodily resurrection was part of their hope, which he did here. Thus this chapter has great theological value for the church.

". . . apparently soon after Paul's departure from Corinth [after his 18 months of ministry there] things took a turn for the worse in this church. A false theology began to gain ground, rooted in a radical pneumatism that denied the value/significance of the body and expressed in a somewhat 'overrealized,' or 'spiritualized,' eschatology. Along with this there arose a decided movement against Paul. These two matters climax in this letter in their pneumatic behavior (chaps. 12—14) and their denial of a resurrection of the dead (chap. 15), which included their questioning of his status as *pneumatikos* ([spiritual] 14:36-38) and perhaps their calling him an 'abortion' or a 'freak' (15:8). Thus, as elsewhere, Paul sets out not only to correct some bad theology but at the same time to remind them of his right to do so."<sup>452</sup>

### **I. The resurrection of Jesus Christ 15:1-11**

Paul began by reaffirming their commonly held belief: Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. In this section, the apostle stressed the objective reality of both Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

- 15:1           The Corinthians and all Christians have their standing in Christ as a result of "the gospel" message ("gospel . . . in which also you stand").
- 15:2           Paul did not entertain the possibility that his readers could lose their salvation by abandoning the gospel he had preached to them. The NIV translation captures his thought well. If they "held (hold) fast" to the gospel that they had received ("the word which I preached to you"), they would continue to experience God's deliverance as they lived day by day. Their denial of the Resurrection, a major aspect of the gospel message they had heard, might indicate that some of them had not really believed the gospel.
- 15:3           As with the events of the Lord's Supper (11:23), Paul had heard of the Lord Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances, and had then passed this information along to others. Elsewhere he wrote that he had not received the gospel from other people, but directly from the Lord (Gal. 1:11). Probably some aspects of it came to him one way, and others in other ways. He apparently received the essence of the gospel on the Damascus Road, and later learned more details from other sources.

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<sup>452</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 716.

"He received the facts from the Apostles and others; the import of the facts was made known to him by Christ (Gal. i. 12)."<sup>453</sup>

Three facts are primary concerning Jesus' death: He "died," He "died for people's (our) sins," and He died as the Scriptures revealed He would ("according to the Scriptures"). These facts received constant reaffirmation in the early preaching of the church (cf. Acts 3:13-18; 8:32-35).

"People are wicked and sinful; they do not know God. But Christ died 'for our sins,' not only to forgive but also *to free people from their sins*. Hence Paul's extreme agitation at the Corinthians' sinfulness, because they are thereby persisting in the very sins from which God in Christ has saved them. This, after all, is what most of the letter is about."<sup>454</sup>

"The language 'for our sins' is a direct reflection of the LXX of Isa. 53. Since Judaism did *not* interpret this passage messianically, at least not in terms of a personal Messiah,<sup>455</sup> and since there is no immediate connection between the death of Jesus and the idea that his death was 'for our sins,' it is fair to say that whoever made that connection is the 'founder of Christianity.' All the evidence points to Jesus himself, especially at the Last Supper with his interpretation of his death in the language of Isa. 53 as 'for you' (see on 11:23-25)."<sup>456</sup>

15:4 Burial emphasizes the finality of the Messiah's death (cf. Acts 2:29), and serves as evidence of the reality of His resurrection (cf. Acts 13:29-30). He could not have truly arisen if He had not truly died.

The perfect tense and passive voice of the Greek verb translated—"was raised"—implies that since God raised Him, He is still alive. The "third day" was Sunday. Friday, the day of the crucifixion, was the first day, and Saturday was the second.<sup>457</sup> The phrase "according to the Scriptures" probably describes the Resurrection alone, in view of the structure of the sentence in Greek (cf. Lev. 23:10-14; Ps. 16:10-11; 17:15; Isa. 53:10b; Hos. 6:2; Matt. 12:38-41).

<sup>453</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 333.

<sup>454</sup>Fee, "Toward a . . .," p. 49.

<sup>455</sup>Footnote 56: See A. Neubauer, ed., *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah, According to [the] Jewish Interpreters*, 2 vols.

<sup>456</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 724.

<sup>457</sup>See Martin Pickup, "'On the Third Day': The Time Frame of Jesus' Death and Resurrection," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:3 (September 2013):511-42.

"Though the resurrection is part of the gospel message, it is not part of the saving work of Christ on the cross. The resurrection is stated as proof of the efficacy of Christ's death. Having accomplished redemption by His death, Jesus Christ was 'raised because of our justification' (Rom. 4:25). The fact that Jesus Christ is alive is part of the Christian's good news, but individuals are saved by His death, not by His resurrection."<sup>458</sup>

- 15:5 Peter ("Cephas") was, of course, the leader of the disciples. Perhaps Paul referred to the Lord's special appearance to Peter (Luke 24:34), because some individuals in the Corinthian church revered Peter (1:12), as well as because he was the key disciple. "The twelve" refers to the 12 disciples, even though only 11 of them were alive when the Lord appeared to them. This was a way of referring to that particular group of Jesus' followers during His earthly ministry (Matt. 10:1).
- 15:6 This is the only record of this particular appearance in the New Testament. That Jesus appeared to so many people ("more than five hundred") "at one time," is evidence that His resurrection body was not a spirit. Many people testified that they had seen Him on this single occasion. Since the Resurrection took place about 23 years before Paul wrote this epistle, it is reasonable that the majority of this group of witnesses was still alive ("most of whom remain until now"). Any skeptical Corinthians could check with them.
- 15:7 This "James" was most likely the half-brother of Jesus. He became the leader of the Jerusalem church (cf. Acts 15:13-21). The apostles as a group included Matthias, who was not one of the 12 original disciples. "All the apostles" probably refers to a collective appearance to literally "all" the apostles (except Judas).
- 15:8 Paul regarded the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus Road as an equivalent post-resurrection appearance—and the Lord's "last" one.

"Paul thinks of himself here as an Israelite whose time to be born again had not come nationally (cp. Mt. 23:39), so that his conversion by the appearing of the Lord in glory (Acts 9:3-6) was an illustration, or instance, before the time of the future national conversion of Israel. See Ezek. 20:35-38; Hos. 2:14-17; Zech. 12:10—13:6; Rom. 11:25-27; 1 Tim. 1:16)."<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup>Thomas L. Constable, "The Gospel Message," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 203. See also John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 232; and Gavin Ortlund, "Resurrected as Messiah: The Risen Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:4 (December 2011):749-66.

<sup>459</sup>The New Scofield . . . , p. 1247.

Another view, I think a better one, is that Paul meant by "one untimely born" that he had become an apostle *after* the Twelve had become apostles.

Paul may have referred to himself as he did (lit. "an abortion") not because his apostleship came to him *prematurely*. The Lord appointed him some time after the others. He may have done so because, compared with the backgrounds and appointments of the other apostles, Paul's background and appointment were unusual. He lacked the normal "gestation period" of having accompanied the Lord during His earthly ministry (cf. Acts 1:21-22).

"Since this is such an unusual term of deprecation, and since it occurs with the article, *the* 'abortion,' it has often been suggested that the Corinthians themselves have used the term to describe Paul, as one who because of his personal weaknesses is something of a 'freak' in comparison with other apostles, especially Apollos and Peter. Others have suggested that the term is a play on Paul's name—*Paulus*, 'the little one.' Hence they dismissed him as a 'dwarf.' This has the advantage of helping to explain the unusual 'digression' in vv. 9-10, where he in fact allows that he is 'least' of all the apostles; nonetheless God's grace worked the more abundantly in his behalf.

"In any case, whether it originated with them, which seems altogether likely, or with Paul himself in a sudden outburst of self-disparagement, it seems hardly possible to understand this usage except as a term that describes him vis-à-vis the Corinthians' own view of apostleship."<sup>460</sup>

Paul stressed the appearances of the risen Christ (vv. 5-9) because they prove that His resurrection was not to a form of "spiritual" (i.e., non-corporeal, not physical or material) existence. Just as His body died and was buried, so also *His body* was raised—and many witnesses saw it (Jesus' raised body), often many witnesses at one time.

15:9 The apostle probably used their view of him as a "freak" to comment on his view of himself, in this verse and the next one. Evidently Paul truly felt himself "the least" worthy to be ("not fit to be called") an "apostle." He did not regard his apostleship as inferior to that of the other apostles, however (cf. 2 Cor. 10:1—13:10; Gal. 1:11—2:21). The reason he felt so unworthy was because, while the other apostles were building up the church, he was tearing it down ("I persecuted the church of God").

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<sup>460</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 733.

- 15:10 Paul's apostolic calling was a gracious gift from God ("by the grace of God I am what I am"). The giving of God's grace proves "vain" when it does not elicit the appropriate response of loving service. Paul responded to God's unusually great grace to him by offering back unusually great service to God ("I labored even more than all of them"). However, he did not view his service as self-generated ("yet not I"), but as the product of God's continual supply of "grace" to him ("the grace of God with me"). God saved Paul by grace, and Paul served God by God's grace.
- 15:11 Paul and the other apostles all believed and preached the same gospel. Paul did not proclaim a different message from what Peter, James, and the others did (cf. Gal. 2:1-10). This commonly agreed on message is what the Corinthians had "believed" when those who had ministered in Corinth had "preached" to them. By denying the Resurrection, the Corinthians were following neither Apollos, nor Cephas, nor Christ. They were pursuing a theology of their own.

The point of this section of verses was to present the gospel message, including the account of Jesus Christ's *resurrection*, as what many reliable eyewitnesses saw—and all the apostles preached. Paul did this to stress that Jesus Christ's resurrection, which most of the Corinthian Christians accepted, had "objective reality," not to "prove" that He arose from the dead. Even though Paul had a different background from the other apostles, he heralded the same message they did. Consequently his original readers did not need to fear that what they had heard from him was some cultic perversion of the truth. It was the true gospel, and they should continue to believe it.

## **2. The certainty of resurrection 15:12-34**

In the preceding paragraph, Paul firmly established that the gospel the Corinthians had believed, contained the fact that God had raised Jesus Christ bodily, along with other equally crucial facts. Next he proceeded to show the consequences of rejecting belief in the resurrection of the body.

"Paul uses *reductio ad absurdum*: if there is no resurrection (i.e., of believers in the future), then Jesus did not rise (15:12-13), a point on which he dwells at length (15:12-19, where Paul provides rhetorical emphasis through a series of seven if-then statements)."<sup>461</sup>

### **The negative alternative 15:12-19**

Paul first appealed to the Corinthians' logic. In this form of logic, called *modus tollens*, Paul's argument was that since Christ was raised, there must also be a resurrection of believers. That Paul had believers in view, rather than all people, seems clear in that he was discussing the hope of believers. Other passages teach the resurrection of other groups of people, even all others (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4-5, 12; et al.). Here it

<sup>461</sup>Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, p. 126.

becomes clear, for the first time in the chapter, that some of the Corinthians were saying there is no resurrection of the dead. If they were correct, then Christ did not arise, and they had neither a past nor a future.

15:12 Belief in the "resurrection of the (dead) body" seems to have been difficult for Greeks to accept in other places as well, not just in Corinth (cf. Acts 17:32; 2 Tim. 2:17-18). Evidently some of the Corinthian Christians were having second thoughts about this doctrine.

"These deniers apparently believe that those who are truly 'spiritual' (in the Corinthians' sense) are already 'reigning with Christ' in glory (see 4:8)."<sup>462</sup>

"On the whole the Greek did believe in the immortality of the soul, but the Greek would never have dreamed of believing in the resurrection of the body."<sup>463</sup>

To most Greeks, the idea of the resurrection of the body was abhorrent, because they viewed the body as a hindrance to attaining the highest aspects of life. They had a proverb that said, "The body is a tomb," and one of the Greek writers wrote, "I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse."<sup>464</sup> So the idea of a resurrected Christ conflicted with their disbelief in bodily resurrection.

15:13-14 Belief in bodily resurrection is foundational to the Christian faith. If the resurrection of the body is impossible ("if there is no resurrection of the dead"), then the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fiction ("not even Christ has been raised"). If He did not rise, the apostles' preaching rested on a lie (was "vain"), and consequently the Corinthians' "faith" would have been valueless and misplaced ("vain").

This is the first in a series of conditional statements that run through verse 19. They are first class conditions in the Greek text, which express the assumption of reality for the sake of the argument. In verse 13, Paul did not express disbelief in the resurrection from the dead. He assumed there is none, in order to make a point. This was also his tactic in verses 14, 16, 17, and 19.

15:15 If there were no resurrection of the body, the apostles would not only be in error, they would also be "false witnesses . . . against God." They would have been preaching something untrue about God, namely, that He raised Jesus Christ—when He really had not. This would be a serious charge to be making against the man who had founded their church (Paul), who claimed to represent God. Really, by denying the Resurrection, the unbelieving Corinthians were the false witnesses.

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<sup>462</sup>Furnish, p. 74.

<sup>463</sup>Barclay, *The Letter . . .*, p. 156.

<sup>464</sup>Ibid.

15:16-18 Paul repeated his line of thought, contained in verses 12-14, using other terms to emphasize a different point. If Christ was still dead and in the grave, then confidence ("faith") in Him for salvation is futile ("worthless").<sup>465</sup> This means the believer is "still" *dead* "in his or her (your) sins." He or she is without any hope of forgiveness or eternal life. So Christians who had already died ("fallen asleep in Christ") would be lost forever ("have perished"), eternally separated from God.

"The denial of their future, that they are destined for resurrection on the basis of Christ's resurrection, has the net effect of a denial of their past, that they have received forgiveness of sins on the basis of Christ's death."<sup>466</sup>

Paul evidently meant that, given the Corinthians' position, the believer has no future of any kind. "Perished" probably has this meaning, since even though they denied the Resurrection, they were still *baptizing* "for the dead" (v. 29). It seems unlikely that they would have kept baptizing for dead people if they believed death ended everything.

15:19 If the Christian's hope in Christ is just for what he or she can expect this side of the grave ("in this life only"), then that one deserves pity. Of course there are some benefits to trusting Christ as we live here and now (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8). However, we have to place these things in the balance with what we lose in this life for taking a stand for Him (cf. Phil. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:4-5; 9:25). If we have nothing to hope for on the other side of the grave, the Christian life would not be worth living ("we are of all men most to be pitied").

To summarize his argument, Paul claimed that if believers have no future, specifically resurrected bodies like Christ's, we have no past or present to speak of, either. That is, we have no forgiveness of our sins in the past, and we have no advantage over unbelievers in the present.

"It is a point of very great importance to remember that the Corinthians were not denying the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; what they were denying is the resurrection of the body; and what Paul is insistent upon is that if a man denies the possibility of the resurrection of the body he has thereby denied the possibility of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and has therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality."<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup>See Norman L. Geisler, "The Significance of Christ's Physical Resurrection," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:582 (April-June 1989):148-70.

<sup>466</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 743.

<sup>467</sup>Barclay, *The Letter . . .*, p. 153.



### The positive reality 15:20-28

Paul turned next to show that the resurrection of Christ makes the resurrection of believers both necessary and inevitable. The consequences of this fact are as glorious as the effects of His not being raised are dismal. Those "in Christ" must arise, since Christ Himself arose. His resurrection was in the past, but ours will be in the future. Christ's resurrection set in motion the defeat of all God's enemies, including death. His resurrection demands our resurrection, since otherwise death would remain undefeated.

15:20           The argument advances here by connecting the believer with Christ. Christ was the "first fruits" of the larger group of those whom God has chosen for salvation. This is the last mention of Christ's resurrection in the argument, but all that follows rests on this fact.

The Jews celebrated Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month on their sacred calendar. Jesus died on the day Jewish fathers slew the Passover lamb, which was a Friday that year. The Jews offered a sacrifice of first fruits the day after the Sabbath (Saturday) following the Passover (Lev. 23:10-11), namely, Sunday. This was the day Jesus arose. Fifty days later, on Pentecost, they presented another offering of new grain that they also called an offering of first fruits (Lev. 23:15-17). The first fruits they offered following the Passover were only the first of the crops that they offered later. Paul saw in this comparison the fact that other believers would rise from the dead just as Jesus Christ did. He used the "first fruits" metaphor to assert that the resurrection of believers is absolutely inevitable. God Himself has guaranteed it.

15:21-22       The apostle also drew a lesson from two uniquely representative men: "Adam" and "Christ." Adam derived life from another, God; but Christ is, Himself, the Fountain of Life. "Adam" was the *first man* in the old creation, and, like him, "all" of his sons (descendants) die physically. "Christ" is the *first man* in the new creation, and, like Him, "all" of His sons (descendants) will live physically (cf. Rom. 5:12-19). Obviously Paul was referring only to believers as sons (descendants) of Christ. Both Adam and Jesus were men. Therefore our resurrection will be a human resurrection, not some "spiritual" type of resurrection. Physical resurrection is as inevitable for the sons of Jesus Christ (believers) as physical death is for the sons of Adam (humans).

15:23           The word translated "order" or "turn" is a military one, used of ranks of soldiers (*tagma*). Paul's idea was that Christ was the "first" rank, and He experienced resurrection *first*. Christians are in a different rank, and will experience resurrection together as a group, and at a different time, namely: "at the Lord's (His) coming" (Gr. *parousia*, lit. "appearing," i.e., at the Rapture). The apostle did not go on to give a complete explanation of the various resurrections here. There will be other ranks of people who will rise at other times, including Tribulation saints, Old Testament believers, and the unsaved.

"Passages like John 5:25-29 and Revelation 20 indicate that there is no such thing taught in Scripture as a 'general resurrection.'"<sup>468</sup>

Paul's point here was that the resurrection of Christians is just as certain to take place as the fact that Christ's already took place. He did not mean that our resurrection will be of a different type than Christ's (i.e., "spiritual" rather than physical).

15:24-26 "The end" refers to the end of the present heavens and earth, in view of what Paul said about it here. This will come more than 1,000 years after the Rapture. Then Christ, who will have been reigning over His earthly millennial kingdom, will turn ("hands") over that reign ("the kingdom") to His "Father." Christ's abolition of all other "rule," "authority," and "power" will take place when He subdues the rebels that rise up against Him at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-10). He will also defeat "death," and from then on, no one will die. The saved will enter the new heavens and new earth to enjoy bliss with God forever, while the lost will suffer everlasting torment (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:11—21:1).

"Many see evidence of the millennium in Paul's discourse on resurrection (1 Co 15, esp. vv. 20-28)."<sup>469</sup>

". . . it is not only possible but probable that Paul understood this final triumph to take place during the millennial reign of Christ. To sum up the principal evidence, Paul's use of *epeita* ('after that') and *eita* ('then') in 1 Corinthians 15:23-24, the syntax of 15:24-25, and the parallel use of Psalms 8 and 110 in 1 Corinthians 15 and Hebrews 1 and 2 all point to the understanding that when Paul mentioned a kingdom and reign in 15:24-25, he referred to the reign of Christ on this earth following His return and prior to the eternal state, a time that Revelation 20:4-6 calls 'the thousand years.'"<sup>470</sup>

Even though Jesus triumphed over "death" in His resurrection, believers still die. Therefore we *must* experience resurrection at some point, because we are "in Christ," and because only then (after all believers have been raised) will the final enemy, Death, be subdued. Only then will God become all in all (i.e., everything that matters; cf. Col. 3:11).

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<sup>468</sup>Wiersbe, 1:618.

<sup>469</sup>Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 280.

<sup>470</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "Evidence from 1 Corinthians 15," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 234.

- 15:27 Paul saw Jesus Christ as the person who fulfilled the prophecy recorded in Psalm 8:7.<sup>471</sup> In the psalm, the ruler in view is man, but Christ will be the Man who will have regained for humanity all that Adam lost (cf. Ps. 110:1). Of course, God Himself "is excepted," and will not be under the rule of the Son of God. The Father is "the One" who will finally bring "all things" into subjection to Christ.
- 15:28 Finally, God will be the head of everything (cf. Rom. 11:36): "all in all." The earthly millennial kingdom will end, and everything will merge into the eternal kingdom of God (cf. Isa. 9:7; Luke 1:33).<sup>472</sup> Some interpreters believe that the "kingdom" Paul referred to is Christ's present cosmic Lordship that He exercises from heaven.<sup>473</sup> But this view does not harmonize well with biblical eschatology. Christ will be submissive to His Father forever. This is the central passage that affirms the eternal functional (not ontological) subordination of the Son to the Father (cf. 3:22-23; 8:6; 11:3; Mark 13:32; 14:62; John 1:1; 14:28; 17:24; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 2:9-11; 4:19-20).<sup>474</sup> The Resurrection set in motion a chain of events that will ultimately culminate in the death of Death. Then God will continue being what He has always been: "all in all."

"The meaning seems to be that there will no longer be need of a Mediator: all relations between Creator and creatures, between Father and offspring, will be direct."<sup>475</sup>

In this pericope, Paul traced the stations of Christ from His resurrection to His final exaltation, which will occur at the end of the present heavens and earth. Undoubtedly he intended his readers to identify with the Savior, since he had taught them that believers reproduce the experiences of their Lord when they reproduce His attitudes and actions. In view of what lies ahead, how foolish it would be to deny the resurrection of the body. This passage clarifies the true significance of Easter.

### **Other arguments for resurrection 15:29-34**

Paul turned from Christ's stations to the Christian's experience, to argue *ad hominem* for the resurrection. An *ad hominem* argument is one that appeals to self-interest rather than to logic. The Corinthians' actions, and his, bordered on absurdity if the dead will not rise. This paragraph is something of a digression, and the main argument resumes in verse 35.

<sup>471</sup>See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, pp. 44-45; and Martin Pickup, "New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament: The Theological Rationale of Midrashic Exegesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:2 (June 2008):353-81.

<sup>472</sup>Cf. Saucy, *The Case . . .*, pp. 321-22.

<sup>473</sup>E.g., C. E. Hill, "Paul's Understanding of Christ's Kingdom in I Corinthians 15:20-28," *Novum Testamentum* 30:4 (October 1988):297-320.

<sup>474</sup>John V. Dahms, "The Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):351-64.

<sup>475</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 358.

15:29 This verse probably refers to proxy baptism, the custom of undergoing baptism for someone who died before he or she could experience baptism. Morris wrote that there have been 30 to 40 interpretations of this verse.<sup>476</sup> Baptism "for the dead" was a custom in at least one of the mystery religions, one based close to Corinth in the neighboring town of Eleusis: the Eleusian mystery religion.<sup>477</sup> Perhaps the Corinthians were practicing baptism for the dead, for people who became Christians, either on their deathbeds, or under other conditions that made it difficult or impossible for them to undergo baptism in water. However, Paul did not say they were doing this, only that some people did this. Paul's mention of the custom is not necessarily an endorsement of it, but, on the other hand, he did not specifically condemn it either.

Whether he approved of it or not, the Corinthian believers were evidently influenced by it. It appears again that the spirit of the city of Corinth had invaded the church. Paul used this practice to argue for the reality of resurrection. His point was that if there is no physical resurrection, it is foolish to undergo baptism for someone who had died, because in that case they are dead and gone forever.<sup>478</sup> Suppose, on the other hand, there is a resurrection. When God raises those baptized by proxy, *they* would not be the ones to suffer shame, for failure to undergo baptism while they were alive. But those who had not benefited from performing proxy baptism for the dead would suffer embarrassment.

The Corinthians may have carried proxy baptism over into the church from pagan religions. That is a distinct possibility, since we have seen that they had done this with other pagan practices. There is nothing in Scripture that encourages this practice, though some have interpreted this verse as an encouragement. Some Christian groups that believe water baptism contributes to a person's salvation advocate it. Today Mormons do. However, the mention of a practice in Scripture does not always constitute endorsement of it. We have seen this in chapters 8—11 especially.

One writer believed the first reference to "the dead" in this verse refers metaphorically to the apostles who had died (cf. v. 31).<sup>479</sup> This seems unlikely to me, in view of the prevalence of this custom in and around Corinth.

15:30 If there is no resurrection, why did Paul endure so many hardships and dangers in his ministry? The apostle's sacrifices do not prove there will be a resurrection, but they do show that he believed there would be one. He

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<sup>476</sup>Morris, p. 219. See the commentaries for other views and John D. Reaume, "Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29, 'Baptized for the Dead,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):457-75.

<sup>477</sup>Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 544.

<sup>478</sup>See Barrett, pp. 362-63; and Robertson and Plummer, p. 360.

<sup>479</sup>Joel R. White, "Baptized on Account of the Dead": The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in its Context," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116:3 (1997):487-99.

willingly faced death daily (was "in danger every hour"), because he believed God would raise him, and that his resurrected body would continue beyond the grave.

15:31 Paul backed up this assertion with a kind of oath. He said he faced death daily ("I die daily"), just as surely as he boasted about the Corinthians. In this epistle Paul was quite critical of his readers. Probably he meant that he was "boasting" in their very existence as Christians, rather than that he was boasting to other churches about their behavior.

15:32 One example of facing death occurred in Ephesus, where Paul was when he wrote this epistle. His fight with "wild beasts" was not with wild animals. This expression describes his conflict with very hostile human adversaries. The phrase *kata anthropon* ("from human motives" or "for . . . human reasons," lit. "according to man") identifies Paul's words as figurative language. Furthermore, Roman citizens did not participate in hand-to-hand combat with animals in the arenas.<sup>480</sup> Perhaps Demetrius and or Alexander were Paul's antagonists (Acts 19:24-41; 2 Tim. 4:14).

Paul quoted Isaiah 22:13 to prove his point (cf. Eccles. 2:24; 9:7-10). If there is no resurrection, we may as well live only for the present.

15:33 This quotation, contained in a comedy by Menander titled *Thais*, but perhaps dating back to Euripides,<sup>481</sup> had become proverbial. The Greeks generally recognized this saying like a proverb encapsulating a wise thought. Therefore Paul used it to warn his readers, that if they kept "company" with people who denied the resurrection, their character would eventually suffer: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

15:34 The Corinthians needed to think correctly. Rather than living for the present, as their pagan neighbors were undoubtedly encouraging them to do, they needed to "stop sinning" and fulfill their present purpose, namely: to propagate the gospel. It was a shame that they had neighbors who still had "no knowledge of God," since they had much knowledge of God (1:5; 8:1).

"Since salvation finally has to do with being known by and knowing God (13:12), what makes the Corinthians' persisting in sin so culpable is that it keeps others from the knowledge of God (15:34).<sup>482</sup>

It may be that Paul was also using irony to refer to the "spiritual" viewpoint of the Corinthians. The appearance of "knowledge" here again raises that possibility since, as we have seen, "knowledge" fascinated the Corinthians. Paul had also spoken something to their "shame" earlier (cf.

<sup>480</sup>Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 149; Robertson and Plummer, p. 362.

<sup>481</sup>Morris, p. 221.

<sup>482</sup>Fee, "Toward a . . .," p. 40.

6:5). If he was intending to be ironic, the apostle was probably putting down those responsible for taking the church in the dangerous direction that it had gone. If so, he meant that his readers should sober up ("become sober-minded") and "stop sinning," because some of them did not have the truth (*true* "knowledge"), which was "to [their] shame."

These *ad hominem* (experiential) arguments do not prove beyond doubt that God will raise the bodies of people from the dead, but they support Paul's stronger historical (vv. 1-11), logical (vv. 12-19), and theological (vv. 20-28) arguments in the preceding sections. They show that Christians generally, and the apostle in particular, believed in the Resurrection deeply. It affected the way they lived, as it should.<sup>483</sup>

### **3. The resurrection body 15:35-49**

Paul next addressed the objection that: the resurrection of the body is impossible, because when a person dies, his or her body decomposes and no one can reassemble it. The Corinthians seem to have wanted to avoid thinking that the material body was essentially good. Hellenistic dualism seems to have influenced their thinking about the human body and, therefore, the resurrection. Dualism is the philosophy, so common in pagan Greek thought, that the body is only the husk of the real "person" who dwells within. The more that one can live without the constraints that the body imposes, the better. The biblical view, on the other hand, is that the body is essentially good, and just as much a part of the real "person" as the immaterial part (cf. Gen. 2:7). The original readers did not, and most people do not, view very positively a resurrection that involves simply resuscitating human corpses. Paul proceeded to show that the resurrection of believers was not simply a resuscitation of dead bodies, but instead a powerful re-creation of *new, glorified, Christ-resembling bodies*. Paul taught a more glorious future for believers than the present "spiritual" existence that some in Corinth lauded.

"The Corinthians are convinced that by the gift of the Spirit, and especially the manifestation of tongues, they have already entered into the spiritual, 'heavenly' existence that is to be. Only the body, to be sloughed off at death, lies between them and their ultimate spirituality. Thus they have denied the body in the present, and have no use for it in the future."<sup>484</sup>

"Dead" (Gr. *nekros*) appears 11 times in verses 1-34, but only three times after verse 34. This indicates a shift in Paul's argument.

### **Analogies from nature 15:35-44**

A key word in this section of Paul's argument is "body" (Gr. *soma*), which occurs 10 times, compared to zero times in the first 34 verses. The apostle proceeded to offer two sets of analogies (seeds, vv. 36-38; and types of bodies, vv. 39-41), which he then applied to the resurrection of the dead (vv. 42-44).

<sup>483</sup>For an introduction to reincarnation, which denies resurrection, see H. Wayne House, "Resurrection, Reincarnation, and Humanness," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):131-50.

<sup>484</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 778.

15:35 This objection to the resurrection has to do with the reconstruction of the body, after decomposition, out of the same physical elements that it formerly possessed. Obviously it would be impossible (from the human standpoint) to reassemble the original cells, and to reconstruct a person, after he or she had been dead for some time. This is the primary problem that Paul solved in the rest of this pericope.

For example, if someone died at sea and sailors buried him, a fish might eat his body. The atoms and molecules of his body would become part of the fish. If a fisherman caught and ate the fish, its body would become part of the fisherman's body. If the fisherman died, and an undertaker buried him in the ground, and someone eventually sowed wheat over his grave, the fisherman's atoms and molecules would go into the wheat. A third person might eat the wheat, and so on. How could the first person's body ever come together again?

Celsus, a critic of Christianity who lived about A.D. 220, ridiculed the Christians' belief in the resurrection of the body with these words:

"Really it is the hope of worms! For what soul of a man would any longer wish for a body that had rotted?"<sup>485</sup>

15:36-38 Such an objection sounds very reasonable on the surface, but it is really foolish, and it drew a sharp rebuke from Paul. The "wise" Corinthians were "fools"! The body that God resurrects will not be the same *type* of body that died, even though it is identified as the "body" of the same person. Paul proceeded to illustrate with a seed of grain. A new form of life springs forth from death. The body surrounding (that houses) the life is different before and after death (seed/grain). Likewise, human life exists in one form of body before death, but after death it exists in a different type of body. God does this with grain, so He can do it with humans, too. This is so obvious in nature that we can understand Paul's sharp retort in verse 36. A "fool" in biblical literature is someone who excludes God from consideration. That is exactly what the Corinthians were doing, when they failed to observe what God did to the seed that they sowed in their fields.

15:39-41 This passage begins and ends by stressing the differences within kinds of "bodies."

"(Pet lovers take note: Paul did not teach here that animals will be resurrected. He only used them as an example.)"<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>485</sup>Barclay, p. 157.

<sup>486</sup>Wiersbe, 1:620.

The second and fifth sentences stress the differences within genus (class or family of bodies), while contrasting the "earthly" with the "heavenly." The central elements state the realities of earthly and heavenly "bodies." Structurally the passage is a chiasm.<sup>487</sup>

- A** Not all *flesh* is the same (i.e., earthly bodies).  
**B** Examples of different kinds of flesh: people, animals, birds, fish  
**C** There are heavenly and earthly kinds of bodies.  
**C'** The splendor of heavenly bodies is of one kind and the splendor of earthly bodies is of another kind.  
**B'** Examples of different kinds of splendor: sun, moon, stars  
**A'** Not all stars (i.e., heavenly bodies) have the same *splendor*.

In verse 39, Paul used animal life to point out the different types (substance) of flesh: humans, land animals, birds, and fish. This anticipates what he said later about the earthly versus the heavenly existence of believers. A body can be genuinely fleshly, and still subsist in different forms for different environments. The fact that there are different kinds of bodies ("flesh") among the animals, should help us to understand (and believe) that there can also be different kinds of human bodies ("flesh"). Some human bodies are mortal and some are immortal. Some are corruptible and others incorruptible.

Likewise, the fact that celestial bodies differ in "glory" (brightness), should help us realize that human bodies can also differ in glory. The glory of a perishable, mortal human body, is much less than that of an imperishable, immortal human body. Also, the differing glory of the heavenly bodies argues for differences among glorified believers.

- 15:42-43 The human body goes into the ground "perishable," as a seed. However, God raises it "imperishable," as grain. It goes into the ground in a lowly condition (in "dishonor"), but it arises with honor ("glory"). It is weak ("in weakness") when it dies, but it is powerful when it arises ("raised in power").
- 15:44 It is "natural" (Gr. *psychikon*, soulish), belonging to the present age; but it becomes "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*, i.e., supernatural), belonging to the future age. The Corinthians had not entered into their eschatological states yet. This would come with their resurrections. Their *bodies* would become "spiritual," namely: fitted for their future existence. Thus "spiritual" here also refers to the body's use, not just its substance.<sup>488</sup>

<sup>487</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 783.

<sup>488</sup>See René A. López, "The Nature of the Resurrection Body of Jesus and Believers," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:678 (April-June 2013):143-53.



". . . for pagans in and outside the church, Paul seeks to show that the fundamental relation of creation to resurrection (and behind that the identification of the Creator as the Redeemer) is a non-negotiable of the metanarrative of the Christian gospel, an essential *sine qua non* of the Bible's world view, without which one is lost (1 Cor 15:17; cf. Acts 17:30-31)."<sup>489</sup>

The Corinthians believed that they were alive in a new kind of "spiritual" existence from the time they trusted Christ. This is the only type of resurrection they saw. They did not believe that human bodies had any future beyond the grave. Paul wrote to help them see that their physical bodies would be raised to continuing life, but that those bodies, while physical, would be of a different type than their present physical bodies. They would be spiritual, but of a different type than what they thought of as spiritual.

### **The analogy from Scripture 15:45-49**

Paul now returned to his analogy between Adam and Christ (cf. vv. 21-22) to reinforce his argument, which he had brought to a head in verse 44.

15:45        The natural body is physical, the product of "the first man, Adam," who received life ("a living soul") from God (Gen. 2:7). That life resides in a body characterized as "soulish" (i.e., alive with both material and immaterial components). It eventually dies. However, the resurrection body is spiritual, the product of Jesus Christ, "the second (last) Adam," who gives new "life." That life will inhabit a body that will never die. Paul called it "spiritual" because it is prepared for the *spiritual* rather than the physical realm. Moreover, it comes to us from a spirit-being ("a life-giving spirit")—Jesus Christ—rather than a physical being—Adam. One can assume (take on) full "spiritual" existence, including a spiritual body, only as Christ did, namely, by resurrection.<sup>490</sup>

15:46        Even though God breathed life into Adam at Creation, that gift constituted Adam a "natural" person, fitted only for the present order. The breathing of *new life* into believers at their resurrection, so to speak, will make them "spiritual" persons fitted for the eschaton (end times; the Millennium and the eternal state). We have the physical body until the eschaton, not before it begins.

Paul may have included this word of clarification to refute the Platonic idea that the ideal precedes the real. Plato taught that the ultimate realities are purely and simply spiritual, and physical things only represent them.

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<sup>489</sup>Peter Jones, "Paul Confronts Paganism in the Church: A Case Study of First Corinthians 15:45," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:4 (December 2006):736. See also René A. López, "Does *The Jesus Family Tomb* Disprove His Physical Resurrection?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:660 (October-December 2008):425-46.

<sup>490</sup>See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "'Life-Giving Spirit': Probing the Center of Paul's Pneumatology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:4 (December 1998):573-89.

This is probably a view that some in Corinth held. Paul said the physical ("natural") body comes "first," and precedes the "spiritual" body, which is the ultimate super-body—a body that is both super-physical and super-spiritual, and fitted for the eternal realm.

- 15:47-48 God formed Adam out of dust ("earthly") to live on this planet (Gen. 2:7). Jesus Christ had a "heavenly" origin. However, Paul seems to have meant more than this, since he compared two human beings: "the first Adam (man)" and "the last Adam (second man)." His emphasis seems to have been that the first Adam was fitted for life in this age, with natural life, whereas the second Adam was fitted for life in the age to come, with spiritual life. God equipped both to live in the realm that they would occupy. Similarly, the bodies we inherit from Adam are for earthly ("earthly") existence. The bodies we will receive from Christ at our resurrection will be for living in the spiritual ("heavenly") realm. Paul was not speaking of heavenly existence as distinct from life in hell, but of spiritual in contrast with earthly ("earthly," natural).

"Each race has the attributes of its Head. As a consequence of this law . . . we who once wore the likeness of the earthly Adam shall hereafter wear that of the glorified Christ. What Adam was, made of dust to be dissolved into dust again, such are all who share his life; and what Christ is, risen and eternally glorified, such will be all those who share His life."<sup>491</sup>

- 15:49 Those born *only* of the first Adam, whom God equipped to live in the natural world, likewise exist in that world. However, those born *also* of the last Adam ("born again" in Christ), whom God equipped to live in the supernatural world by resurrection, will also exist in that world. Paul concluded this pericope by reminding his readers that "bear[ing] the image of the heavenly" Adam (Christ) was still future, and it is certain: "Just as we have borne . . . earthly, we will also bear . . . heavenly."

God's intent to make man in His own image (Gen. 1:26) will finally reach fulfillment when believers finally receive their "heavenly" bodies that enable them to live in the spiritual sphere, the dimension in which He lives. God forming man out of the dust of the ground, and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, was only the first step toward His accomplishing of His goal. His creation of resurrection bodies for us will be the second and final step.

"The problem is that the Corinthians believed that they had already assumed the heavenly existence that was to be, an existence in the Spirit that discounted earthly existence both in its physical and in its behavioral expressions. What Paul appears to be doing once again is refuting both

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<sup>491</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 374.

notions. They have indeed borne—and still bear—the likeness of the man of earth. Because of that they are destined to die. But in Christ's resurrection and their being 'in him' they have also begun to bear the likeness of the man of heaven. The urgency is that they truly do so now as they await the consummation when they shall do so fully."<sup>492</sup>

#### **4. The assurance of victory over death 15:50-58**

Paul brought his revelation of the resurrection to a climax, in this paragraph, by clarifying what all this means for the believer in Christ. Here he also dealt with the exceptional case of living believers' transformation at the Rapture. Transformation of each believer's spirit, soul, and body is absolutely necessary for him or her to enter the spiritual mode of future existence. This transformation will happen when Christ comes.

15:50        The apostle's introductory words indicate a new departure in his thought. The phrase "flesh and blood" refers generally to the mortal body, and to living mortals in particular in this verse. This was a familiar idiom in Paul's world for humans and human bodies.<sup>493</sup> It is impossible for us, in our present physical forms, to enter into, as an inheritance, the heavenly glories in "the kingdom of God"—that Christ said He was going to prepare for us (i.e., the messianic kingdom on earth; John 14:2-3).<sup>494</sup> They are of the spiritual order. "The perishable" is another term that describes us now, but it highlights the destruction of our present bodies through death.

15:51        "Behold" or "Listen" grabs the reader's attention and announces something important. Paul was about to explain something never before revealed, "a mystery" (Gr. *mysterion*; cf. Matt. 13:11; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; et al.). He had previously written that at the Rapture, dead Christians will rise first, before God "catches (snatches) up" us living Christians to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-17). Paul had just previously revealed that resurrection bodies will be different from our present bodies: *spiritual* rather than natural (vv. 35-39). Now he revealed that living believers, "translated" at the Rapture, would not only be taken up, but also, simultaneously, receive spiritual bodies: "we will all be changed." Three key New Testament passages that deal with the Rapture are John 14:1-3, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Not every Christian will die before he or she receives a new body, but each and every one must experience this change, even the "spiritual" Corinthians. Whether we believers are alive or dead when the Rapture takes place, we will all receive spiritual bodies at that moment. "All"

<sup>492</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 795.

<sup>493</sup>Keener, *1–2 Corinthians*, p. 133.

<sup>494</sup>See René A. López, "A Study of Pauline Passages on Inheriting the Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 168:672 (October-December 2011):447-48.

negates the doctrine of the "partial rapture" of the church, the view that only *watchful* Christians will participate in the Rapture.

15:52 This transformation will not be a gradual process, but instantaneous. The Greek word translated "moment" or "flash" (*atomos*) refers to an indivisible fragment of time. "The blinking (twinkling) of an eye" takes only a fraction of a second.

A "trumpet" *blast* "sound" will summon Christians home to heaven (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). It is "the last trumpet" that connects with *our* destiny, the one that signals the end of our present existence and the beginning of our future existence.<sup>495</sup>

"We need not suppose that St Paul believed that an actual trumpet would awaken and summon the dead. The language is symbolical in accordance with the apocalyptic ideas of the time. The point is that the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of the living will be simultaneous, as of two companies obeying the same signal."<sup>496</sup>

Some posttribulationists equate this trumpet with the seventh or last trumpet of Revelation 11:15-18.<sup>497</sup> This does not seem to me to be valid. Other trumpets will "sound," announcing various other events in the future (cf. Matt. 24:31; Rev. 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14; et al.). However, Christians, believers living in the Church Age, will not be on the earth then, and those trumpets will not affect us. This "last trumpet" is not the very last one that the Bible speaks of.<sup>498</sup> The fact that Paul included himself, in the group living at the time of the Rapture, shows that he expected that event to take place imminently (i.e., "at any moment"; cf. 1 Thess. 4:15, 17). If he had believed the Tribulation precedes the Rapture, it would have been natural for him to mention that here.<sup>499</sup>

"Christ's return is always imminent; we must never cease to watch for it. The first Christians thought it so near that they faced the possibility of Jesus' return in their lifetime. Paul thinks he too may perhaps be alive when it happens."<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>495</sup>See Barnabas Lindars, "The Sound of the Trumpet: Paul and Eschatology," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67:2 (Spring 1985):766-82.

<sup>496</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 377.

<sup>497</sup>E.g., Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, p. 73.

<sup>498</sup>Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, pp. 259-69.

<sup>499</sup>For more evidence that the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 193-218; John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*; idem, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*; and Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 482-87.

<sup>500</sup>Gaston Deluz, *A Companion to 1 Corinthians*, p. 248. See also Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, ch. 6: "The Imminency of the Coming of Christ for the Church," pp. 108-37.

"The simple fact is that Paul did not know when Christ would return. He was in the exact position in which we are. All that he knew, and all that we know, is that Christ may come at any time."<sup>501</sup>

Paul did not answer the interesting questions of "Who will blow . . .?" or "Who will hear . . .?" this trumpet, probably because the trumpet appears to be a metaphor for God's summons. Throughout Israel's history, God announced His working for the nation, and He summoned His people to Himself, with the blowing of literal trumpets (Exod. 19:16, 19; 20:18; Lev. 25:9; Num. 10:2, 8-10; et al.). So He might use a literal trumpet for this purpose at the Rapture as well.

The Scriptures reveal at least four times in history when there will be a resurrection: Christ's resurrection was the first. People who were raised back to life in Old Testament times experienced resuscitation, and later died again. The bodies of the saints who were raised shortly after Christ arose (Matt. 27:52-53) also evidently experienced resuscitation—like Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus—and died again later. Second, Christians (believers in Christ alive during the Church Age) who have died will experience resurrection at the Rapture of the church (v. 52; 1 Thess. 4:16). Third, Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints will be resurrected shortly after Christ's Second Coming (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 20:4). Fourth, all unbelievers throughout history, and presumably believers who died during the Millennium, will be raised at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:13).<sup>502</sup>

Will believers have scars on their resurrection bodies, as Jesus' resurrected body did? Will we be overweight then, if we were overweight when we died? These and many similar questions are unanswerable at the present time. I tend to think that the bodies that we will have in the future will be those that glorify God the most, whatever that may involve.

People sometimes ask if their pets will go to heaven when they die. Heaven appears (from Scripture) to be a place reserved for human beings and spirit beings such as angels. A mother was trying to comfort her daughter after her pet cat had died. She said, "Don't worry, dear. Fluffy will be in heaven." Her pragmatic little daughter replied, "What would God want with a dead cat?" A little boy asked his father if his beloved dog would be in heaven. The father wisely answered, "If he has to be in heaven to make you happy, I'm sure he'll be there."

15:53      The dead will rise in bodies that are not subject to corruption, and the living will receive immortal bodies, too. Paul may have wanted to contrast the dead and the living, by the different terms he chose for each, in the

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<sup>501</sup>Lenski, p. 737.

<sup>502</sup>See Appendix 3 "What happens to a person after he dies?" at the end of these notes.

first and second parts of this verse respectively.<sup>503</sup> Still, the distinction is not strong enough to be significant. Both the dead and the living will receive "imperishable" (i.e., immortal) bodies.

- 15:54 This transformation will fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 25:8. What Paul had just revealed harmonizes with prophetic Scripture: God will overcome "death" (cf. vv. 23-28).
- 15:55 Paul modified, for his own purposes, Hosea's defiant challenge for "death" (personified) to do its worst (Hos. 13:14), and used the passage to taunt Death himself. "Death" is man's last enemy (cf. v. 25). God will defeat it when He raises His people to life.
- 15:56 The fatal "sting of death" touches humans through "sin" (Rom. 6:23). What makes "sin" *sinful* is the law of God (Rom. 7:7-11). Because Jesus Christ overcame sin, and fulfilled the law, death cannot hold its prey (Rom. 5:12-21). Death is still an enemy, in the sense that it robs us of mortal life. In spite of this, it is not a terror to the believer, because it is the doorway into an immortal life of glory.
- 15:57 The "victory" over the condemnation of the law, sin, and death, comes to us "through (our Lord) Jesus Christ" (cf. Rom. 8:2). For this, Paul was very grateful to God, as every believer should be (cf. Rom. 7:25): "Thanks be to God!"
- 15:58 Paul concluded his discussion of the resurrection with an exhortation to be faithful ("steadfast" and "immovable") in the present (cf. 4:16-17; 5:13; 6:20; 7:40; 10:31-33; 11:33-34; 12:31; 14:39-40).

"Despite the magnificent crescendo with which Paul brings the argument of chap. 15 to its climax, the last word is not the sure word of future hope and triumph of vv. 50-57; rather, in light of such realities, the last word is an exhortation to Christian living (v. 58). Thus, eschatological salvation, the great concern of the epistle, includes proper behavior or it simply is not the gospel Paul preaches."<sup>504</sup>

"Eschatology has moral implications (6:13-14; 15:30-32, 58)."<sup>505</sup>

Specifically, Paul's exhortation does not just call for ethical behavior (cf. vv. 33-34), but for continued involvement in fulfilling the Great Commission, which is the work of the gospel: "always abounding in the work of the Lord." Paul closed the chapter with an encouraging incentive

<sup>503</sup>Joachim Jeremias, "Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God," *New Testament Studies* 2 (1955-56):152.

<sup>504</sup>Fee, "Toward a . . .," p. 58.

<sup>505</sup>Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, p. 135.

to help the Corinthians focus on the goal, which would one day include rewards for faithful service: "knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

This chapter began with a review of the gospel message, from which some in the Corinthian church were in danger of departing by denying the resurrection. The charge to remain "steadfast" (v. 58), therefore, probably means to remain steadfast in "the gospel," as the Lord and the apostles had handed it down. Paul's readers should not move away from it, but should remain "immovable" in it. They should also increase their efforts to serve the Lord ("always abounding"), even as Paul had done (v. 10). Rather than living *for* the present (v. 32) only, believers should live *in* the present *with* the future clearly in view (cf. 1:9; 9:26). One day we will have to give an account of our stewardship (3:12-15).

No one, except Jesus Christ, has come back from the dead to tell us what is on the other side. However, His testimony through His apostles is sufficient to give us confidence that there is life and bodily resurrection after death. We will live that life in a changed body which will be incapable of perishing. It is therefore imperative that we make sure that we, and all around us, enter that phase of our existence with our sins covered by the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>506</sup>

### **G. THE COLLECTION FOR THE JERUSALEM BELIEVERS 16:1-12**

I have chosen to include this section with the others that deal with questions the Corinthians had asked Paul, rather than with Paul's concluding comments, because it begins with "*peri de*" (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:12; cf. 8:4). Probably they had asked about the collection Paul was assembling in a letter or through messengers. This is the least confrontational section in this epistle, though we can detect tension here too. Problems over this collection emerge clearly in 2 Corinthians.

"Most ancient letters were brief, and a large number were business-related. Whereas most of Paul's correspondence more closely resembles philosophers' letters discoursing on moral topics, he is ready to address business as well."<sup>507</sup>

"This chapter may seem unrelated to our needs today, but actually it deals in a very helpful way with three areas of stewardship: money (1 Cor. 16:1-4), opportunities (1 Cor. 16:5-9), and people (1 Cor. 16:10-24). These are probably the greatest resources the church has today, and they must not be wasted."<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>506</sup>See also Gary Habermas and Anthony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?*; John Wenham, *The Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?*; Josh McDowell, *More Than A Carpenter*; Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection*; and Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?*

<sup>507</sup>Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 136.

<sup>508</sup>Wiersbe, 1:621.

### **1. Arrangements for the collection 16:1-4**

16:1 It seems that the Corinthian Christians had heard about the "collection" (Gr. *logeias*, extra collection) Paul was getting together for the poor saints in Jerusalem (v. 3), and that they wanted to make a contribution. James, Peter, and John had encouraged Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor when they were in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10; cf. Acts 11:27-30). There is no record of the directions Paul gave the Galatian churches, to which he referred here, in any of his other surviving epistles. The "churches of Galatia" evidently were those in southern Galatia, including Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul had passed through this region as he moved toward Ephesus, from which he wrote this epistle (Acts 18:23).

16:2 From the earliest days of the church's existence, Christians assembled on Sundays to worship in commemoration of the Lord's resurrection. The Lord had not commanded this, but it quickly became customary. The unsaved Jews met on Saturdays.

"This is our earliest evidence respecting the early consecration of the first day of the week by the Apostolic Church. Apparently, the name 'Lord's Day' was not yet in use, and the first day of the week is never called 'the sabbath' in Scripture."<sup>509</sup>

Sunday would have been a natural occasion to put money aside for fellow believers, since it was particularly on this day that Christians reviewed their responsibilities. Paul did not specify whether the individual Christian should keep ("save") the money in his possession, or if a church official should. The former alternative seems more probable in view of the apostle's language.<sup>510</sup> Note also that he did not say how much to set aside, except that it was to be as the Lord had blessed them ("as he may prosper"). The amount was entirely up to the givers. Paul mentioned nothing specifically here about giving proportionately to one's income. We saw earlier that both rich and poor made up this church (11:21). Paul's counsel amounted to: Set aside a little regularly now, so that you will not need to make a major withdrawal from your funds later.

"The essential features of Christian giving are stated here: (1) the time of giving; (2) the regularity of giving; (3) the participants in giving; (4) the basis of giving; and (5) the manner of giving."<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>509</sup>Robertson and Plummer, p. 384.

<sup>510</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 813.

<sup>511</sup>*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1250.



- 16:3 Paul planned to send a representative from each of the contributing churches, or possibly from each group of churches, "to Jerusalem" with the "gift." The "letters" he spoke of may have been letters of introduction from himself, since it appears that at this time, Paul did not plan to make this trip himself. Such a procedure would guarantee that the money would arrive safely, and that people would view the whole project as honest (cf. 2 Cor. 8:21).
- 16:4 The apostle was open to the possibility of going to Jerusalem—as part of the group ("they will go with me")—if this seemed best ("if it is fitting for me to go also"). After he wrote this letter, he decided to go (Rom. 15:25-26), and indeed went (Acts 20:16, 22; 21:17; 24:17).

These few verses, along with 2 Corinthians 8—9, as well as statements in Philippians 4:10-19 and Romans 12:8, provide guidelines for individual Christians and churches in giving. The principles Paul advocated were: saving up for giving should be regular, and giving should be in response to the Lord's material provision. The believers should manage their gifts with integrity. Everything they did should not only be above reproach, but other people should perceive it as such.

Notice that Paul made no mention of tithing—here or elsewhere. Tithing is a method of giving that God prescribed for the Israelites under the Mosaic Law. People commonly practiced tithing as an act of worship in the ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 28:22).<sup>512</sup> It was also a common tax.<sup>513</sup> This is still true in some modern countries. For example, in England a part of every person's taxes goes to maintain the Church of England. Some residents regard this part of their tax as their contribution to the church, or their tithe. The Mosaic Law actually required that the Israelites give back to God about one-third of their incomes. However, Christians are not under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 10:4; et al.). It is therefore understandable that neither Jesus Christ, nor the apostles, commanded tithing. Some Christians believe that, because Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), and Jacob tithed (Gen. 28:22), tithing thus antedates the Mosaic Law, and is therefore binding on Christians. Nevertheless a practice is not the same as a precept. Moreover, the absence of any reference to tithing in the New Testament, plus the teaching of other guidelines, strongly suggest that God wants us to follow a different method. The principles that should govern Christians in our giving appear throughout the New Testament but mainly in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8—9, and Philippians 4.

"No pressure, no gimmicks, no emotion. A need had to be met, and the Corinthians were capable of playing a role in it. In a day of highly visible campaigns for money on every side, there is something to be said for the more consistent, purposeful approach outlined here."<sup>514</sup>

"Many Christians today are more interested in competing with neighbors' status symbols than in caring for the poor."<sup>515</sup>

<sup>512</sup>See C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 1:207.

<sup>513</sup>W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, pp. 245-51.

<sup>514</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 817.

<sup>515</sup>Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 139.

## **2. The travel plans of Paul and his fellow apostles 16:5-12**

As the preceding verse revealed, Paul's plans were tentative to some extent. He wanted the Corinthians to know that he anticipated a return to Corinth, and hopefully a stay of several months. Timothy and Apollos might return as well.

- 16:5 At the time he wrote, Paul planned to head north from Ephesus and then west, and to spend some time in Macedonia. "Macedonia" was the Roman province north of Corinth, where Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea stood. His plan was to then to travel south to Corinth. Paul later changed this plan, and instead traveled directly from Ephesus to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2), then returning to Ephesus (cf. 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 7:12). Later he did visit Macedonia and then Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:6-16).<sup>516</sup>
- 16:6-7 Paul did "spend the winter" in Corinth, but it was the winter after the one when he expected to be there, the winter of A.D. 57-58 rather than 56-57 (cf. Acts 20:2-3; Rom. 16:1, 23). He sensed the need to spend a good long visit in Corinth ("I hope to remain with you for some time"), and in view of the problems in the church that he mentioned in this letter, we can understand why.
- 16:8 The Jews celebrated "Pentecost" in late May or early June, so Paul probably wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring of the year (cf. 5:7; 15:20). It is not unusual that, since he was a Jewish believer with the evangelization of Jews on his heart, he would refer to important events in the Jewish calendar such as Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-21). Perhaps the early Christians paid more attention to the significant events in the life of the church than many churches do today. Churches that observe "the Christian year" tend to make more of these observances. The Feast of Pentecost, of course, also marked the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).
- 16:9 Paul occasionally used the "door" as a metaphor for opportunity (cf. 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). He stayed in Ephesus three years to take advantage of his opportunities ("for effective service") there. He did not regard "adversaries" there as an indication of a closed door, or as a sign that God wanted him to move on to a more comfortable ministry. He followed his own advice, and remained "immovable" and "abounding in the work of the Lord" in Ephesus (15:58).
- 16:10-11 Timothy's visit to Corinth from Ephesus was not very tentative. Paul had already sent him (and Erastus; Acts 19:22), or was about to send him, when he penned this epistle (4:17). Evidently Timothy's relative youth tended to make some people look down on ("despise") him, and he tended to be fearful (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12). Paul advised the Corinthians, who judged by external appearances, to give Timothy the respect he deserved, for doing "the Lord's work," as Paul was also doing—not just for Timothy's own sake.

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<sup>516</sup>See Richard Batey, "Paul's Interaction with the Corinthians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1985):139-43.

It may have been Timothy's report of conditions in Corinth, when he returned to Ephesus, that moved Paul to go directly to Corinth himself, rather than waiting until he had visited Macedonia. Paul later referred to this visit as "painful," because while in Corinth he encountered strong opposition (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1-8; 7:12; 12:14; 13:1-2).

- 16:12 This verse may contain Paul's final response to the questions the Corinthians had asked him. It is the sixth instance of that key phrase *peride* ("Now concerning"). Paul's relations with eloquent "Apollos" were perfectly friendly ("our brother"; "I encouraged him greatly"), as this verse reveals (cf. 1:12). We do not know why Apollos did not want to revisit Corinth with Timothy, or whether he ever did visit that city again.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION 16:13-24**

The Apostle Paul concluded this epistle with a series of imperatives, exhortations, and news items.

##### **A. FINAL EXHORTATIONS 16:13-18**

Each section in this epistle concludes with some practical admonition. These verses constitute a summary exhortation for the whole letter.

- 16:13-14 Paul urged his somewhat unstable readers to be watchful regarding danger, from inside as well as from outside the church (cf. Acts 20:29-30). Most of the problems in this church evidently arose from within the congregation as a result of pagan influences. "Be on the alert" sometimes occurs with anticipation of the Lord's coming again, so that event (the Rapture) may have been in Paul's mind as well (e.g., Matt. 24:42). His readers should also "stand firm" in their trust ("faith") in God, and in their commitment to His Word and will (cf. 15:58). Rather than acting like immature children, they should behave as ("act like") mature "men" (cf. 1:12). They should "be strong" in the Lord, rather than weak in the faith (cf. Josh. 1:7-8). Above all, "love" should motivate and distinguish them (ch. 13): "Let all that you do be done in love." This was the greatest need of this church. These verses summarize what Paul expected of his readers in all that he wrote in this letter.
- 16:15-16 The Corinthians had a special problem with submission to authority, as we have seen. Many in the church wanted to do their own thing. Verses 16-18 would have encouraged them to appreciate some less flashy servants of the Lord.
- "Stephanas" and his family ("household") were Paul's first converts ("first fruits") in "Achaia," the province in which Corinth stood (1:16). They had given themselves unselfishly to serving the Corinthians. They were probably loyal to Paul, and may have been the source from which the apostle received some of his information about conditions in this church.

Paul urged his readers to appreciate Stephanas and his family for their "ministry," and not to ignore them, but to submit humbly to ("be in subjection to") them. They should treat others such as them with similar honor ("such men and to everyone who helps in the work and [who] labors"). Service, not status, should be the basis for honor in the church.

- 16:17-18 "Stephanas" had recently visited Paul in Ephesus with the two other Corinthian brothers the apostle named ("Fortunatus and Achaicus"). They may have carried the questions that Paul had answered in this letter, as well as information about conditions in the church. Travelers carried all the mail except government business in the ancient biblical world.<sup>517</sup> These people had all given refreshing ministry to Paul ("refreshed my spirit"), as they typically did in Corinth. Paul wanted the Corinthians to be sure to recognize ("acknowledge") them as well.

### **B. FINAL GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION 16:19-24**

"The letter now concludes with a series of standard (for Paul) greetings (vv. 19-22) and the grace-benediction (v. 23). But Paul cannot quite give up the urgency of the letter, so he interrupts these two rather constant elements of his conclusions with one final word of warning to those who have been causing him grief, this time in the form of an extraordinary curse formula (v. 22). The apparent harshness of this warning is matched by the equally unusual addition of a final word of affirmation of his love for them (v. 24), found only here in his extant letters. Thus even to the end the unique concerns that have forged this letter find their expression."<sup>518</sup>

- 16:19 Several "churches" in the Roman province of "Asia" had come into existence while Paul used its capital city, Ephesus, as his base of operations (Acts 19:10). References to "Asia" in the New Testament consistently refer to the Roman province of Asia, which lay in the west and southwest of the geographical region of Asia Minor.

The names of "Aquila" and "Prisca" (Priscilla) usually occur in reverse order in the New Testament. Evidently their friends, of which Paul was one, felt free to use both orders. This suggests that they served the Lord as a harmonious team with individual strengths and talents. They had lived in Corinth after leaving Rome (Acts 18:2), and it apparently was there that Paul first met them. Later they had left Corinth to travel to Ephesus with Paul, and had settled in that city (Acts 18:18-21). Their house in Corinth then became a meeting place for the church (cf. Rom. 16:5). Church buildings were unknown until the third century.<sup>519</sup>

<sup>517</sup>Keener, *1—2 Corinthians*, p. 140.

<sup>518</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 834.

<sup>519</sup>Barclay, *The Letter . . .*, p. 187

16:20 The "holy kiss," *holy* because saints (1:2) exchanged it, was a common practice among believers, and it still is today in some parts of the world.

"The holy kiss (cf. 2 Cor. 13:12; Rom. 16:16; 1 Thes. 5:25 [*sic*, 26]; 1 Peter 5:14) was primarily a symbolic expression of the love, forgiveness, and unity which should exist among Christians. As such, it became associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a prelude to its observance (cf. Justin *Apology* 1. 65. 2). It was a mark of the familial bond which united believers. There is no indication that it was restricted to one's own sex in the New Testament era (cf. Luke 7:37, 45). The suggestion to separate the sexes for the exchange of the kiss arose in the late second century due to concern about criticism from non-Christians and the danger of erotic abuse (cf. Athenagorus *Supplication* 32; Clement of Alexandria *Pedagogue* 3. 81. 2-4)."<sup>520</sup>

16:21 Paul customarily dictated his letters, and a secretary wrote them down (cf. Rom. 16:22). However, he usually added a word of greeting at the end, in his own hand, that authenticated his epistles as coming from him (cf. Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). All of what follows is probably what he added.

16:22 Normally Paul used the Greek word *agape* for "love" (except in Titus 3:15). Here he used *phileo*: "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed." Consequently this may have been a saying believers used in the congregational worship of the churches. "Maranatha" (NASB) is an Aramaic expression meaning "Our Lord, come." Probably Paul did not translate it into Greek, because believers commonly spoke it in Aramaic in the services of the early church (cf. Rev. 22:20). Since it was Aramaic, the word probably originated in Palestine where people spoke that language. They likely exported it to the Greek-speaking congregations that retained its form.

"It is strange to meet with an Aramaic phrase in a Greek letter to a Greek Church. The explanation is that that phrase had become a watchword and a password. It summed up the vital hope of the early Church, and Christians whispered it to each other, identified each other by it, in a language which the heathen could not understand."<sup>521</sup>

"It would appear, then, that the fixed usage of the term 'Maranatha' by the early Christians was a witness to their strong belief in the imminent return of Christ. If they knew that Christ could not return at any moment because of other

<sup>520</sup>Lowery, "1 Corinthians," p. 548.

<sup>521</sup>Barclay, *The Letter . . .*, p. 188.

events or a time period that had to transpire first [i.e., the Tribulation], why did they petition Him in a way that implied that He could come at any moment?"<sup>522</sup>

16:23-24 Paul concluded this strong, but loving epistle, with a prayerful benediction of God's "grace." Note that this letter also began, "Grace to you" (1:3).

"Grace is the beginning and the end of the Christian [*sic*] gospel; it is the single word that most fully expresses what God has done and will do for his people in Christ Jesus."<sup>523</sup>

Paul also added assurance of his own ("my") "love" for "all" the believers in Corinth ("you all"), not just those who supported him.

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<sup>522</sup>Showers, p. 131. Cf. Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20.

<sup>523</sup>Fee, *The First . . .*, p. 839.

## Appendix 1

### What ends a marriage in God's sight?

#### Jesus' teaching

##### **Matthew 5:27-32**

1. Adultery is a sin. v. 27 (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18)
2. Lusting after someone sexually is a form of adultery, so it's sin. v. 28
3. Therefore, Jesus' disciples need to deal with sexual temptations seriously. vv. 29-30
4. Moses allowed the Israelites to divorce. v. 31
5. People who divorce and then remarry someone else commit adultery. v. 32
6. But, remarriage by the innocent party in a divorce doesn't result in adultery if the guilty party was sexually unfaithful. v. 32
7. (Marital unfaithfulness, Gr. *pornea*, means having sexual intercourse with anyone other than one's spouse.)
8. Summary: Divorce is permissible, but it's never God's best (Mal. 2:16).

##### **Matthew 19:9**

(Same as points 5-7 above.)

##### **Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18**

(Same as point 5 above.)

#### Paul's teaching

##### **1 Cor. 7:11-16**

1. Christians who divorce have two options: remain unmarried or be reconciled. vv. 11-12
2. Christians who are married to non-Christians shouldn't initiate a divorce. v. 13
3. Christians who are married to non-Christians shouldn't refuse to grant a divorce if their mate insists on getting one. vv. 14-16

##### **1 Cor. 7:39-40**

1. Only death ends a marriage in God's sight (not adultery, marital unfaithfulness, or a divorce). v. 39
2. Widows and widowers are free to remarry other Christians. v. 39
3. But they may be happier if they remain unmarried. v. 40

## Appendix 2

### Summary of my understanding of spiritual gifts

It seems to me that the New Testament presents spiritual gifts as abilities that God gives Christians. Every ability that any human being has is God-given, so in one sense all human abilities are spiritual gifts in that they are gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, non-Christians as well as Christians have spiritual gifts. All that anyone has comes from God and is a gift of His grace. God gives people abilities at birth and at various times after birth.

But in the sense in which the New Testament uses the term “spirituals” (1 Cor. 12:1; Gr. *charismata*), it refers to gifts (abilities) that pertain particularly to spiritual life and ministry. Therefore, such natural abilities as manual dexterity, athletic prowess, intellectual quickness, etc., are not what is in view in the New Testament discussions of spiritual gifts. What is in view is abilities with which Christians can function in the spiritual realm of life, and in the church, serving Christ.

The lists of these gifts in the New Testament seem to allow for other gifts besides those listed. This seems clear since the gift of celibacy is called a *charisma* (1 Cor. 7:7), and yet it does not appear in any of the lists of spiritual gifts. Since "faith," "hope," and "love" are abilities with which Christians can function in the spiritual realm of life, and in the church, serving Christ, I consider them spiritual gifts, in addition to being fruits of the Spirit. Furthermore, they occur prominently in the heart of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12—14.

The gift of "apostle" and the gift of "prophet" are especially difficult to understand because they have both a technical meaning and a general meaning in the New Testament. There were official "Apostles" and "Prophets," but there were, and still are, unofficial "apostles" and "prophets." I am capitalizing the words or not capitalizing them *deliberately* in order to highlight the distinction between the two types of apostles and the two types of prophets.

Technically, the Apostles totaled 13, being the Twelve plus Paul: individuals who saw Christ, and whom Christ personally appointed to establish the church (1 Cor. 9:1). In the general sense, "apostles" are, by definition (Gr. *apostolos*), those sent out with a message. In this sense, there have been many apostles, not only in the first century, but throughout the history of the church. The New Testament refers to Barnabas, Timothy, and others, in this sense, as "apostles" (Acts 14:4; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). The function of all apostles, both official Apostles and functional apostles, was to plant and establish new churches.

Likewise, the New Testament also uses "prophets" in a technical sense and in a general sense. Technically, "Prophets" were individuals who received new authoritative revelation from the Lord and communicated it to God's people. This sometimes involved foretelling the future. In the general sense of the word, "prophets" spoke forth words from the Lord: words of exhortation, edification, and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3). In this sense,



"prophets" led in the worship of God (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1). This kind of prophesying was giving, not new revelation, but just a message that the Lord had laid on the prophet's heart to share. This is what Agabus did in Acts 21:11, and what Philip's daughters did (Acts 21:9). There are no "Prophets" in the church today, but there are many "prophets." Preachers typically do what prophets in the New Testament did when they exhort, encourage, and comfort Christians with their words. Old Testament prophets were of both types: official Prophets, and functional prophets.

Official Apostles	The Twelve and the Apostle Paul
Functional apostles	Church planters and missionaries
Official Prophets	Communicators of new revelation
Functional prophets	Communicators of exhortation, edification, and consolation

The list of gifted men that God gave the church in Ephesians 4 appears to be in the order of their importance to the church throughout its history. The Apostles and Prophets established the church, the body of Christ, and evangelists and pastor-teachers have built on that foundation. The list in 1 Corinthians 12 also appears to be in order of importance. This seems clear since, in the context, Paul is arguing that all gifts are important, not just the Apostles and Prophets, who were very prominent and highly regarded.

The difference between the gift of prophesying and the gift of teaching, in the early church, was that prophesying involved sharing a word that the Lord had laid on the heart of the prophet, but teaching involved the interpretation and explanation of the Scriptures. Paul allowed women to prophesy in the church meetings, but not to teach, because teaching was the more authoritative gift compared to unofficial prophesying (1 Cor. 11:5; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). "Teachers" occurs after "Prophets" in the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, because official Prophets are in view, not unofficial prophets. Official Prophets had more authority than teachers.

Regarding the cessation of the sign gifts, it seems to me that the best argument for their cessation is from church history. While Scripture states and implies that the gift of tongues, for example, would fade away (1 Cor. 13:8; Eph. 2:20; Heb. 2:3-4), it does not say when. Some of the church fathers who lived in the early generations following the Apostles, however, referred to the fading out of these phenomena. (See my note on Acts 19:6 in my Notes on Acts for some references in the Fathers.) So the conclusion that tongues, and the other sign gifts, have ceased is a deduction based on several Scriptures (like the doctrine of the Trinity), rather than the teaching of any one verse.<sup>524</sup>

The practice of speaking in tongues in private is something that Paul did not discuss, but it is something that some Christians advocate. Paul wrote that speaking in tongues in private edifies the one speaking in tongues, but it does not edify the church (1 Cor. 14:4). In the whole discussion of tongues in this passage, he was speaking about speaking in a foreign language. He was also speaking about the regular exercise of this ability. If the

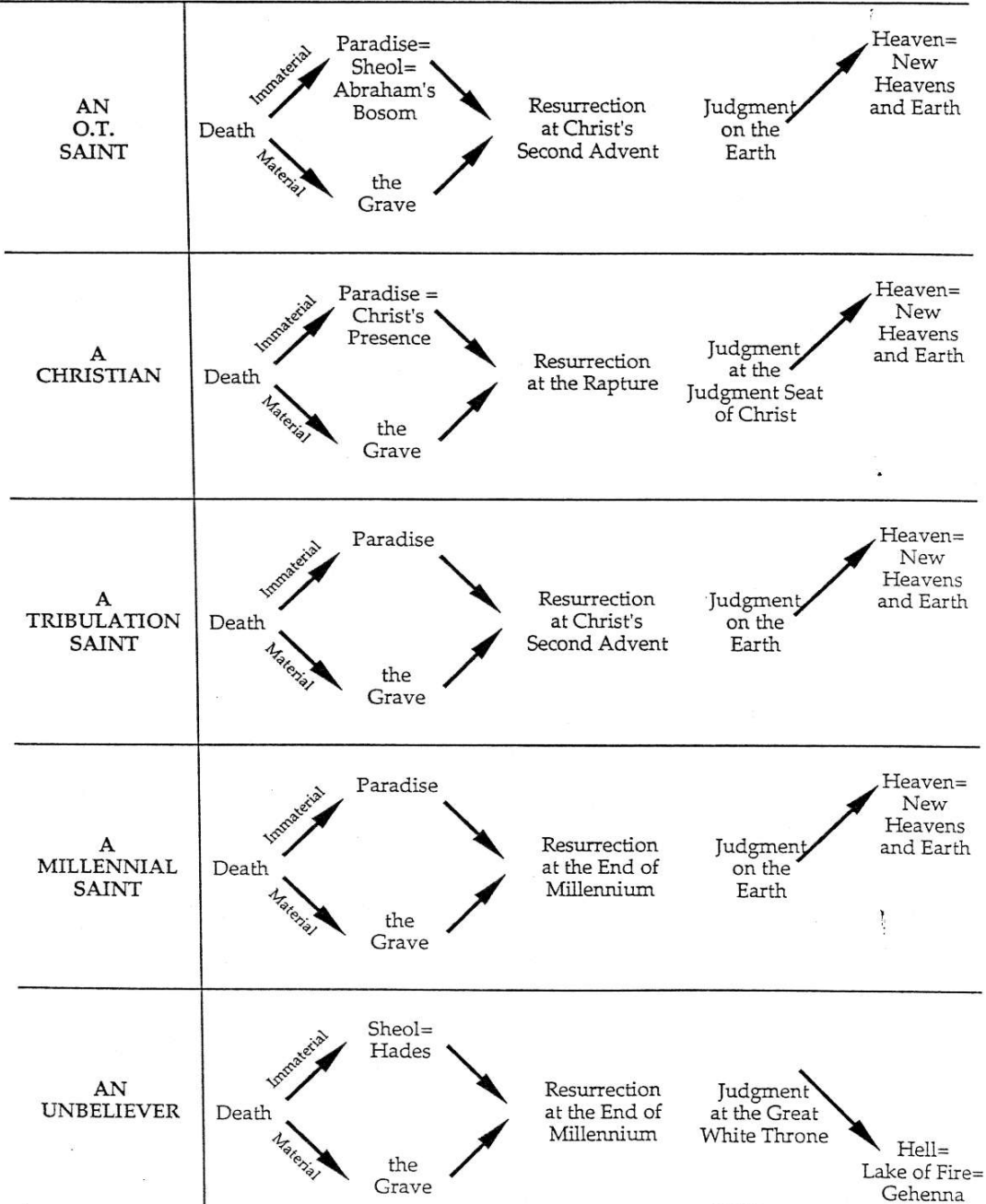
<sup>524</sup>See also Cliff Allcorn, "On the Futility of Accepting the Charismatic Sign Gifts for Current Use," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 16:49 (December 2012):61-79.

gift of tongues has ceased, and I believe it has, then the point is moot: we do not exercise an ability in public or in private that is no longer available to Christians. Nonetheless some claim that they have the ability to speak in foreign languages in private. If they cannot interpret their tongues, Paul's admonition to keep silent applies to the private use of "the gift" as well as to its public use, because it is not building up the speaker spiritually. What Paul meant when he wrote that the person speaking in a tongue in private edifies himself is, I believe, that he or she is encouraged that he or she has been given this ability, and that person feels a measure of euphoria as he or she does so.

I also make a distinction between the *phenomenon* of speaking in tongues (or healing, or performing miracles, etc.), and the *gift* of speaking in tongues (et al.). The *phenomenon* describes random instances in which people have spoken in tongues, often much to their own surprise. This typically happens only once or a few times in a person's life. The *gift* describes the ability to speak in tongues frequently and at will (subject to the Holy Spirit's control). Today, we describe a person as gifted if that one has a continuing ability to demonstrate proficiency in some practice, and I think this accurately reflects the gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament. The difference is not only in the duration, however. The phenomenon is something God initiates in a more direct way than is true in the exercise of the gift, in which the gifted person plays a more assertive part, though empowered by the Spirit. Whereas I do not believe the gift of tongues (or healing, or performing miracles) is in the church today, I do believe God enables a few individuals to speak a language that they have not studied (or to heal another person, etc.) on rare occasions. I regard these as divine *interventions* rather than examples of divine *giftedness*. Perhaps the tongues spoken on the Day of Pentecost illustrate divine intervention rather than gifted Christians using their gift. We do not have enough information about whether the Christians who spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost had the continuing ability to do this or not. I suspect that they did not, and that this was a case of divine intervention.

### Appendix 3

**WHAT HAPPENS TO A PERSON AFTER HE DIES**



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